

#FixTheCountry and Political Activism in Ghana: Inscriptions of A Priori Failure?**Charles Prempeh**

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Abstract

What explains the meteoric rise of the #FixTheCountry Movement, and why did it so abruptly descend into a comatose state? Existing scholarship has examined the emergence and decline of youth political activism in Ghana and across Africa. However, this article intervenes by asking a different set of questions: How do the complexity of the modern state, the dynamics of power and trust, and the human pursuit of pleasure help illuminate the collapse of the #FixTheCountry Movement? Drawing on these questions, and through an analysis of the Movement's inscriptions, this article argues that youth-led revolutionary movements in Ghana in particular, and Africa more broadly, have repeatedly faltered due to a failure to fully appreciate the intricate nexus between the modern state as a social construct and the anthropology of human beings as pleasure-seeking actors. The absence of a rigorously articulated ideology capable of sustaining passion, discipline, and enduring hope—beyond the immediate gratification of the self—constitutes a critical fault line in youth revolutionary politics in Ghana. Consequently, the article situates the #FixTheCountry Movement within the historical and philosophical traditions of the modern state and citizenship, demonstrating that the Movement's overwhelming emphasis on *how* resources are distributed, rather than *why* they are structured in particular ways, ultimately contributed to its collapse.

Keywords: #FixTheCountry; Ghana; Kwame Nkrumah; State; Political Activism

Introduction

The #FixTheCountry Movement emerged as a powerful expression of frustration among young men and women confronted with Ghana's deepening multidimensional crises.¹ The intensity of this collective outcry resonated widely, as young people harnessed the novelty of the internet alongside offline placards to mobilise street protests and picketing in Accra and other urban centres. In a context where suffering required little interpretation or social classification, calls for the recuperation of Ghana's post-COVID-19 economy found resonance not only among sections of the youth but also among some traditional authorities within Ghana and segments of the Ghanaian diaspora in several European countries, who lent their support to the cause. Concurrently, both at home and abroad, #FixTheCountry evolved into a movement that temporarily revitalised youth political activism around demands for economic and political reform. For a brief moment, the political class appeared to acquiesce—albeit superficially—to these

¹ FixTheCountry – Transparency, Accountability & Democracy, <https://fixthecountrygh.com>.

demands, issuing assurances that necessary steps would be taken to stabilise and revive the economy.

Yet the Movement proved short-lived. One of its lead activists, Oliver Barker Vormawor (Oliver), was arrested following his continued opposition to what he described as an oppressive electronic tax regime. In the aftermath of his arrest, Oliver was celebrated by supporters as *Osagyefo*—the “saviour”—a title evocative of Ghana’s first president and symbolically charged with expectations of national redemption. In keeping with this elevated status, Oliver was reported to have posted a provocative statement on social media that the political establishment interpreted as incendiary and treasonable, allegedly signalling pathways toward the reactivation of coups in Ghana. Against the backdrop of renewed political instability and military interventions across the West African sub-region,² this statement was leveraged as justification for his arrest, and he currently stands trial.

Following his detention, supporters sought to sacralise his struggle through the theophoric logic of his adopted title, *Osagyefo*, accompanied by the repeated invocation of the patriotic song, “*Arise Ghana youth for your country.*” However, as these symbolic gestures failed to secure his release or significantly alter the legal trajectory of his case, public enthusiasm steadily waned. Gradually, Oliver appeared to have been abandoned by much of his support base. Consequently, his court appearances attracted little public or media attention, and public awareness of his legal struggles now surfaces largely through his own complaints about perceived injustices within Ghana’s judicial system. These developments have culminated in his repositioning designation as the “former” convenor of the #FixTheCountry Movement.

Methodologically, this article draws on the fecundity of interdisciplinary scholarship and online data, particularly the inscriptions deployed by the #FixTheCountry Movement during street protests, and situates these within relevant extant literature. The study examines the structural challenges confronting Africa that animate youth revolutionary impulses, while interrogating how the configuration of the modern state and the anthropology of the human subject together constrain and frustrate such movements. Ultimately, the article argues that the persistent absence of a coherent, consistent, and critically grounded ideology remains central to the demise of youth-led revolutionary movements in Ghana.

Ghana as a Modern State and the Limits of Youth Revolutionary Politics

The formation of modern Ghana has produced enduring ideological cleavages that continue to structure the country’s political life. These cleavages are most visibly represented by the New Patriotic Party (NPP), whose liberal-democratic genealogy is traced to J. B. Danquah, and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which draws—albeit ambivalently—on the legacy of Kwame Nkrumah’s social democratic project.³ The symbolic dispute over whether Ghana commemorates *Founder’s Day* or *Founders’ Day* is, therefore, not a mere grammatical quibble but a proxy for deeper disagreements about the nature, origin, and ownership of the Ghanaian state. At stake is whether political

² Tamás Geröcs, “The Sahel Confederation: The Historic Role of the Military in West African Developmentalism,” *International Critical Thought* (2025): 1–25.

³ Kweitsu Richard and Ernest Mensah Akuamoah, “Social Democrats or Property-Ownning Democrats? Contending Political Ideologies in Ghana’s Fourth Republic,” *Journal of African Political Economy and Development* 6, no. 1 (2021): 18–31.

legitimacy is singularly embodied in Nkrumah or diffusely distributed among the Big Six. This debate resurfaces cyclically, particularly during election seasons and celebration of the country's Independence Day on 6 March, revealing the unresolved ideological foundations of the postcolonial state.

Yet beyond this symbolic impasse lies a more fundamental problem: the failure of Ghana's political traditions to adequately historicise governance. Liberal critics portray Nkrumah as an authoritarian whose regime culminated in the incarceration and death of J. B. Danquah,⁴ while Nkrumahists emphasise his unmatched socio-economic achievements.⁵ Judged against historical time, both positions are simultaneously correct and deficient. Ghana's immediate postcolonial condition demanded extraordinary strategies to forestall fragmentation, and Nkrumah's early authoritarian measures—particularly the proscription of ethnically and religiously based political parties—were arguably necessary. However, his subsequent consolidation of the Convention People's Party (CPP) as the sole legitimate political vehicle in 1964 after Ghana became a republic marked a decisive rupture between unity and freedom. Nkrumah's central failure was not authoritarianism per se, but his inability to recalibrate governance strategies once the transition from colonial subjection to civic freedom had significantly occurred.

This dilemma was rooted in the very nature of the Ghanaian state. As a modern political entity, Ghana—like most postcolonial African states—is a social construct forged through opposition to an external British colonial rule as imperialistic.⁶ This oppositional unity temporarily masked profound internal differences. Within this context, Nkrumah's injunction to "Seek ye the political kingdom" functioned as a political theology of liberation, promising that sovereignty would unlock economic emancipation.⁷ The phrase inverted Christian scripture, yet it resonated with nationalist political ambition precisely because missionary Christianity had already framed education, discipline, and sacrifice as pathways to freedom in Christ from the material world. The strategic and purposeful deployment of Christian imagery therefore served to tacitly invest the otherwise mundane state with sacred authority. Thus, through appeals to the 'sacred', the nationalists deconstructed the simplistic binary posited by some scholars between the premodern and postmodern state,⁸ prefiguring an imagined postcolonial unitary state wherein citizens' loyalties, traditionally dispersed across family and religion as pre-political institutions, would be consolidated in the state.

However, the imagined unity of the postcolonial state collided with pre-existing sovereignties, most notably that of the Asante Kingdom. Since the eighteenth century, Asante political authority had been anchored in the Golden Stool, a sacral object believed to have descended from the heavens through Komfo Anokye.⁹ The Stool embodied both divine and political sovereignty, rendering loyalty to it, the primary marker of Asante citizenship. Authority flowed downward from the Stool to the Asantehene and outward to the polity, making Asante unity not merely ethnic but both theological and teleological.

⁴ Simon Baynham, *The military and politics in Nkrumah's Ghana* (London: Westview Press, 1988), p. 207

⁵ Kwame Botwe-Asamoah, Kwame Nkrumah's politico-cultural thought and policies: An African-centered paradigm for the second phase of African revolution (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁶ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa must unite* (New York, 1963), 202.

⁷ Nkrumah, *Africa*, p. 50.

⁸ Donald I. Ray, "Divided sovereignty: Traditional authority and the state in Ghana." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 28, no. 37-38 (1996): 181-202.

⁹ A. Kyerematen, "The Royal Stools of Ashanti." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 39, no. 1 (1969): 1-10.

This structure, reinforced by economic power and trans-Saharan trade networks, enabled Asante society to be simultaneously sovereign, cosmopolitan, and religiously eclectic.

Consequently, Nkrumah's nationalist project posed an existential question for Asante elites: could sovereignty be transferred from a sacral object to a 'secular' state (non-directly religious establishment), and from a historically Asante authority to a non-Asante leader? These anxieties, exacerbated by disputes over cocoa pricing, produced the National Liberation Movement (NLM), led by figures such as Baffour Akoto Osei, which demanded a federal rather than unitary state.¹⁰ The NLM's resistance delayed independence and, more importantly, exposed a central resource of Ghana's statehood: postcolonial unity required symbolic and ideological resources at least as compelling as those of precolonial sovereignties.

Nkrumah responded by constructing the state through political symbolism and ideological socialisation.¹¹ He aligned his personal destiny with that of the nation, mobilised Ethiopianist colour symbolism to invoke a redemptive African future,¹² and institutionalised ideological formation through education, youth movements, including the Ghana Young Pioneer Movement, and the Winneba Ideological Institute.¹³ Similarly, as indicated, Nkrumah deployed religious imageries, which could be read as a counter-hegemonic strategy to inspire nationalism and drive for postcolonial development.¹⁴ Yet these efforts provoked resistance from mission churches, which interpreted them as attempts to redirect loyalty from God to the state—and ultimately to Nkrumah himself.¹⁵ Thus, from its inception, the Ghanaian state was entangled in unresolved struggles over loyalty, ideology, and authority.

Unable to command the coercive apparatus of the colonial state, Nkrumah increasingly relied on legislation to discipline dissent. By the early 1960s, amid persistent opposition from religious actors and residual NLM sympathies, his regime assumed a markedly authoritarian character. Ironically, this strategy—intended to secure unity—precipitated his overthrow in the 1966 military coup. What followed was a prolonged period of economic instability, oscillation between military and civilian rule, and recurring threats of re-tribalisation, all of which undermined the consolidation of a coherent national ideology. Even Ghana's return to constitutional democracy in the 1990s introduced new challenges, including the proliferation of foreign-funded non-governmental organisations that operate as vehicles of contemporary neo-colonial influence.¹⁶

It is against this historical trajectories and theoretical backdrop of state formation that the #FixTheCountry Movement must be situated. Like Nkrumah's nationalist project, the Movement mobilised affective reward, symbolism, and moral outrage against

¹⁰ Jean Marie Allman, *The quills of the porcupine: Asante nationalism in an emergent Ghana* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 62

¹¹ Harcourt Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian nation-state: Kwame Nkrumah's symbolic nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. xvi.

¹² Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian nation-state*, p. 29.

¹³ Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian nation-state*, p. 127.

¹⁴ Rupe Simms, "'I am a Non-Denominational Christian and a Marxist Socialist:': A Gramscian Analysis of the Convention People's Party and Kwame Nkrumah's Use of Religion." *Sociology of religion* 64, no. 4 (2003): 463-477.

¹⁵ Baba G. Jallow, "A Sign of the Times: Catholic Advocacy for Social Justice in Nkrumah's Ghana, 1958." *Journal of Religion and Society* 14 (2014): 1-13.

¹⁶ James Petras, "NGOs: In the service of imperialism." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 29.4 (1999): 429-440. Published by University of Ghana Online Journal Management Services

structural injustice. Yet unlike Nkrumah's project, the Movement lacked a coherent ideology capable of disciplining passion, sustaining loyalty, and mediating the complex relationship between individual desire and collective transformation. In a state whose unity has always depended on carefully curated symbols, competing sovereignties, and negotiated loyalties, the Movement's emphasis on immediate economic grievances—on *how* resources are distributed rather than *why* the state is structured as it is—rendered its revolutionary impulse inherently fragile. In this sense, the #FixTheCountry Movement did not merely fail contingently, it bore the inscriptions of *a priori* failure embedded within Ghana's unresolved quagmires of building a postcolonial state, constituted by individuals with multidimensional loyalties.

Revolutionary movements are not sustained by grievance alone; they are animated by affect, desire, and the promise of pleasure, embodied in 'seeking the political kingdom'. By pleasure, this article does not mean hedonism in its vulgar sense, but the deeper anthropological/human drive toward recognition, belonging, moral satisfaction, and symbolic elevation. In other words, political activism offers participants not only the hope of structural transformation but also immediate affective rewards: visibility, camaraderie, moral righteousness, and the intoxicating sense of being on the "right side" of history. In contexts of prolonged economic precarity, such as postcolonial Ghana, these affective returns often function as substitutes for material security, making activism a site where desire is temporarily fulfilled.

The #FixTheCountry Movement thrived initially because it successfully mobilised these affective economies. Digital platforms, already serving as channels of political activism in Africa,¹⁷ amplified outrage, street protests produced collective effervescence, and inscriptions on placards condensed complex grievances into morally legible slogans. Participation in such protests offered young people pleasure in the form of public recognition and shared indignation. Nevertheless, this affective intensity masked a structural weakness: pleasure, unlike ideology, is fleeting, transient and deeply unsustainable. Without an organising and intentional ideological framework capable of disciplining desire, sustaining sacrifice, and converting affect into durable political commitment, movements risk collapsing once the initial emotional rewards dissipate.

This limitation becomes pronounced especially within the context of the modern Ghanaian state, where loyalty has historically been mediated through ideology, religion, and symbolism. Nkrumah recognised this and sought—however imperfectly—to channel affect into disciplined ideological formation through institutions, rituals, and pedagogies. By contrast, the #FixTheCountry Movement remained largely allergic to ideology, wary of hierarchy, and suspicious of discipline. Its horizontality, while initially energising, left it incapable of regulating internal desire or managing disappointment when immediate outcomes failed to materialise.

The figure of Oliver—subsequently rebranded by supporters as *Osagyefo*—offers a revealing vignette of this dynamic. His elevation was not the product of institutional leadership or ideological clarity but of affective projection. The sacralisation of his persona drew on Ghana's political memory, borrowing messianic symbolism historically associated with Nkrumah. In this moment, Oliver functioned less as an organiser than as

¹⁷ Charles Prempeh, "Digital Cultures, Voice, and (New) Forms of Civic Participation in Ghana." In *Digital Technologies, Elections and Campaigns in Africa*, edited by Duncan Omanga, Admire Mare, and Pamela Mainye, 227–244. London: Routledge, 2023.

a receptacle for collective longing. His arrest intensified this dynamic, transforming him into a martyr figure whose suffering appeared to authenticate the Movement's moral claims.

However, messianic politics is structurally unstable in the absence of ideology. When Oliver's legal predicament failed to yield immediate redemption—either through mass mobilisation or institutional reversal—the affective economy that sustained his symbolic elevation began to unravel. His continued court appearances in near-public obscurity signal not merely political defeat but affective exhaustion. The Movement did not collapse simply because repression was overwhelming, but because pleasure—its primary adhesive—proved insufficient as a foundation for revolutionary endurance.

This dynamic reveals the deeper inscription of *a priori* failure within the #FixTheCountry Movement. Operating within a state whose cohesion has historically depended on disciplined ideology and negotiated loyalty, the Movement prioritised immediacy over endurance, affective desires over structural and ideological reforms, and moral clarity over strategic ambiguity. Its emphasis on exposure, expression, and emotional resonance reflected a broader generational politics shaped by digital temporality, where visibility substitutes for organisation and outrage for ideology. In this sense, the Movement's failure was not accidental. It emerged from a misrecognition of both the complexity of the modern state and the embodied human subject. In other words, the Movement approached the state as a responsive apparatus rather than a historically sedimented structure of power, while activists understood themselves primarily as moral agents seeking expressive fulfilment rather than political subjects bound to long-term sacrifice. All of this reaffirms the article's thesis that without an ideology capable of subordinating pleasure to purpose, desire to discipline, and charisma to structure, revolutionary politics remained vulnerable to collapse at the very moment when sacrifice became necessary.

Post-COVID Precarity and Complexities of the State

The post-COVID-19 condition did not merely intensify material deprivation; it also reshaped the affective terrain within which youth political activism emerged. Economic precarity, social dislocation, and the collapse of future-oriented optimism produced a generation increasingly oriented toward immediacy—toward experiences that offer recognition, moral clarity, and emotional relief in the present. In this context, political activism became not only a vehicle for structural critique but also a site of affective compensation. Protest, digital visibility, and collective outrage offered temporary pleasure in an otherwise depleted social world. The #FixTheCountry Movement must therefore be understood as emerging within the context of Ghana's economic morasses, shaped by exhaustion and desire. The Movement's rapid mobilization, therefore, drew strength from the pleasures of participation: the exhilaration of public dissent, the affirmation of moral righteousness, and the sense of belonging generated through online and offline collectivities. Yet these pleasures were not anchored in a coherent ideological framework capable of disciplining desire or sustaining commitment beyond moments of affective intensity. In the absence of such an ideology, activism remained oriented toward expression rather than endurance.

Ideology, as understood here, is not dogma but a structuring grammar that organises sacrifice, regulates pleasure, and stabilises loyalty over time. Meanwhile, both in the formation of the pre-modern state and the nationalistic desire postcolonial political

figures to constitute an imagined nation-state, the political class grasped the insight of subsuming citizens' pleasure to that of the state. Particularly in relation to Ghana's nationalists of the middle of the twentieth century, they institutionalised ideological formation through education, youth movements, symbolic politics, and persistent *Othring* of the colonial order. By contrast, post-COVID youth activism in Ghana, including #FixTheCountry, was largely suspicious of ideology, associating it with authoritarianism, hierarchy, and historical failure. This suspicion, while understandable, rendered the Movement incapable of transforming affective desire into durable political subjectivity.

The post-COVID state further exacerbated this limitation. As economic policies such as the E-levy deepened everyday hardship, the gap between expectation and outcome widened. When protest failed to yield immediate relief, pleasure rapidly gave way to frustration and withdrawal. Loyalty, unmediated by ideological commitment, proved fragile. What remained was not radicalisation but fatigue. In this sense, repression alone did not account for the Movement's collapse; rather, its failure was structurally inscribed in the mismatch between heightened affective mobilization of economic difficulties and ideological absence. Thus, the post-COVID lived reality did not simply catalyse youth political activism—it also predetermined its vulnerability. A movement sustained primarily by affective gratification in a context of prolonged crisis is ill-equipped to endure moments that demand discipline, patience, and sacrifice. Without an ideology capable of subordinating pleasure to purpose, post-COVID youth activism in Ghana reproduced the very fragilities it sought to overcome, rendering its revolutionary promise unsustainable from the outset.

Reflecting the above on scholarly analysis of the collapse of youth movements, extant literature has already identified several factors accounting for the collapse of youth political activism in Africa. Scholars have identified gerontocracy, human rights abuses, poor democratic structures, and endemic poverty as causes of the collapse of these Movements.¹⁸ As a remedy, suggestions have been made for young people to apply recent technology and education to foster accountability and positive change in their respective countries. The fact, however, is that nearly all the young people's movement and their use of the internet have failed to engineer the publicly declared goals they had. In this article, I offer a complementary and relatively underexplored perspective by foregrounding the complexity of the modern state itself. I argue that youth political movements often falter because of an inadequate appreciation of the nuances of state power, particularly the dynamics of authority, loyalty, and coercion. Concurrently, these movements struggle to negotiate loyalty and power within their own constituencies. When movement leaders prioritise technical solutions over ideologies capable of fostering moral transformation as the basis for economic change, they frequently encounter accusations of betrayal, internal fragmentation, and eventual despair. Drawing on inscriptions deployed by the #FixTheCountry Movement, I demonstrate how these structural misrecognitions contributed to its collapse.

In situating my assessment of the #FixTheCountry Movement in the context of intellectual history of the state since the seventeenth century, there is broad consensus in political philosophy that the modern state is a social construct emerging from a social

¹⁸ G. J. Abbink, "Being Young in Africa: The Politics of Despair and Renewal," in *African Dynamics* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 1–33; Van Gyampo, Ransford Edward, and Nana Akua Anyidoho. "Youth politics in Africa." *Oxford research encyclopedia of politics*. 2019, 1–20.

contract that marked the transition from an imagined state of nature to civil society.¹⁹ What remains contested, however, is the scope of this contract—particularly the extent to which individuals surrender power to a sovereign authority. Central to this debate is the concept of power itself. Following Max Weber, the modern state is defined by its monopoly over the legitimate use of coercive force within a given territory.²⁰ This monopoly confers upon political elites a form of authority that is neither evenly distributed nor easily accessible to the governed. It is precisely this asymmetry of power that enables elites to enforce law, maintain order, and coordinate collective life.

Even so, power, once diffused, diminishes in exerting influence. Consequently, political elites tend to consolidate and concentrate power in their hands—intensifying the justification against presidentialism.²¹ In developing economies such as Ghana, where material insecurity remains widespread, political authority is often reconstituted through neo-patrimonial logics.²² Political leaders assume paternal roles as “fathers,” presiding over what has been described as an economy of affection,²³ in which access to public goods is mediated less by bureaucratic rationality than by moral sentiment. Because moral sentiment functions most effectively in private spheres (particularly within the locale of pre-constitutional institutions of family and religion/faith), its extension into public governance channels resource distribution through familial, religious, and ethnic networks. The result is the entrenchment of ethnocentrism and religious polarisation within the political arena, with profound debilitating implications for citizenship and national cohesion.

These dynamics underscore a deeper instability because loyalty within the postcolonial state is neither fixed nor guaranteed. As a social construct, the state competes with pre-political institutions—family, religion, chieftaincy—for citizens’ allegiance. Loyalty is therefore divided, shifting between the state and these primordial formations. This divided loyalty reveals the fragility of citizenship itself and becomes especially pronounced when the state fails to translate its coercive power into shared economic prosperity. Under such conditions, unity fractures along pre-existing institutional lines. It is within this fractured landscape that corruption flourishes. I argue that corruption in Ghana is less a deviation from the system than a predictable outcome of the misalignment between power and loyalty. Resources are diverted not toward the imagined collective interest of the state but toward individuals, networks, and even foreign actors. At stake here is not merely moral failure but existential survival. When economic insecurity persists, individuals are compelled to prioritise self-preservation and self-pleasure over abstract collective commitments. The immediacy of individual desire thus proves more compelling than the deferred promises of national belonging.

These conditions pose formidable challenges for youth political movements. Sustaining cohesion requires the capacity to regulate loyalty and confront power—tasks

¹⁹ Johann Sommerville, “The Social Contract (Contract of Government),” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–14.

²⁰ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 79.

²¹ H. Kwasi Prempeh, “Presidential Power in Comparative Perspective: The Puzzling Persistence of Imperial Presidency in Post-Authoritarian Africa,” *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* 35 (2007): 1–107.

²² C. A. B. Brobbey, “The Logic of Neopatrimonialism and Democratic Deepening: A Case of Ghana’s Fourth Republic,” *US-China Law Review* 12 (2015): 60.

²³ Goran Hyden, “The Economy of Affection: Why the African Peasantry Remains Uncaptured,” in *Contemporary Perspectives on African Moral Economy* (2008), 16–32.

that many movements struggle to accomplish. The most visible manifestations of these failures are the very issues young people protest against: unemployment, corruption, and exclusion. However, as this article contends, the roots of these challenges are not primarily technical but philosophical. Kwame Gyekye's intervention is instructive here. He argues that political corruption in Ghana is fundamentally a moral problem rather than a technical one and therefore cannot be resolved solely through institutional reforms. Instead, Gyekye advocates a moral revolution capable of reshaping values, disciplining desire, and reorienting loyalty toward the common good.²⁴ In this sense, the collapse of youth political activism—exemplified by the #FixTheCountry Movement—cannot be fully explained by repression, weak institutions, or economic hardship alone. It is also the product of a failure to grapple with the complex anthropology of the modern state, in which power, loyalty, and pleasure are deeply entangled. Without an ideology capable of mediating these forces, revolutionary movements remain vulnerable to fragmentation and exhaustion from the outset.

#FixTheCountry Movement Inscriptions of A Priori Failure?

The rise and collapse of the #FixTheCountry Movement can be better understood by analyzing the inscriptions on its placards, which reveal a predominantly technical rather than philosophical reading of Ghana's structural challenges. These inscriptions provide what I term inscriptions of *a priori* failure: they signal a superficial understanding of state, power, and social cohesion that limits the Movement's ability to sustain itself. A first indication of failure lies in the uncritical use of the term "country". Ghana, as a political and geographical entity, exists with clearly demarcated boundaries, yet these borders do not guarantee social cohesion among its citizens. Loyalty, as a result, is fluid and often spans multiple social, ethnic, and even national boundaries. Historically, the cartography of modern Ghana emerged from the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, its borders engineered to fragment ethnic cohesion and facilitate colonial governance. These boundaries have persisted into the postcolonial state, which, despite rhetoric of Pan-African unity, reproduces colonial-era divisions. Consequently, citizens maintain social ties across borders—Akan families in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, for example, move fluidly despite legal boundaries.

The fluidity of pre-colonial notions of social citizenship, against the colonial rigid composition of geographical boundaries render the non-philosophical use of "country" rather challenging. It specifically leads to the group calling on tribalism in politics as a signal of backwardness (see Figure 1) without considering how the composition of the state is entangled with the canker. So, to be sure, ethnocentrism is a major issue in Ghana, but not putting it in a historical and social perspective leads to simplistic rhetoric of symbols that largely enlarges anger with the least lasting positive impact. For example, beyond the historic narrative of the NLM and CPP, the Constitutional privileging of chieftaincy as an institution of local or traditional governance has had a mixed impact on ethnic politics. This means, whereas the Constitution of Ghana invests resources found on a traditional land in the "imagined" state that is supposed to re-distribute it, the decentralisation system is poor.

The failure of decentralisation is also a failure of the devolution of power. And the failure of the devolution of power is precisely because power, as I have indicated above,

²⁴ Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 192.

diminishes when it is shared. Consequently, whereas, chiefs have been divested of power over resources in their jurisdiction, they are also barred from active politics. In effect, chiefs are given royalty, which is expected to be used for development. However, there is hardly public conversations about how chiefs who are mandated to work as custodians of culture and tradition render account on royalties that are given to them. All of this is complicated by the state that assumes to take care of development because it takes the larger share of the resources and yet hardly undertakes decentralised development. The political class who also come to office through elections are not funded as part of their election campaigns. With the question of how political parties are funded hardly responded, could it not be that politicians use state resources to pursue neo-patrimonial politics for their own self-preservation?

Consequently, depending largely on which political party is in power and their historical ethnic ties, chiefs play a major role in national development. For example, since the 1980s, the challenges that have burdened Ghana led to the Asantehene Opoku Ware II establishing the idea of *Nkosohene*, also known as development, to register the presence of chiefs in the corridors of local and national development.²⁵ This has grown and received replication in other traditional areas of Ghana. It has also seen some chiefs, including the Asantehene going all the way to international financial institution like the World Bank to seek financial aid for Asanteman and Ghana's development. Citizens and their expression of loyalty, as I have discussed, is, therefore, very discursive. But whereas it is a bit stable to chiefs and family and other forms of social ties, it is hardly fixed to the nation. After all, the expression of the postcolonial state as a social construct is the fact that the government of Ghana is still known in the local parlance as *aban*.²⁶ This indexes the walled officialdom of the colonial regime, making the colonial governor an alien institution to the colonised, even though it had power and used it against the colonised. "Tribalism" can, therefore, not be wished away on the whims of street protests, a reason Ghana's elections remain around ethnocentrism as a valve.

The #FixTheCountry Movement's calls for political unity often overlooked these historically embedded social realities, treating the *country* as a unified social whole rather than a complex, constructed, and contested space. The Movement's technical framing also failed to account for ethnic politics and decentralised governance. While ethnocentrism is widely criticised in Ghana, it cannot be divorced from the historical and institutional composition of the state. The Constitution invests land under chiefs while simultaneously limiting their political authority. Chiefs, expected to use resources for development, face structural constraints that reduce accountability. At the same time, political elites, often elected without public funding, may turn state resources into tools of neo-patrimonial politics to secure self-preservation. The asymmetric distribution of power across traditional and political institutions complicates citizen loyalty and fosters structural corruption. As a result, technical solutions proposed by street protests or social media campaigns, such as those of #FixTheCountry, cannot resolve these underlying structural and philosophical challenges.

²⁵ Ivor Wilks, "Unity and Progress': Asante Politics Revisited," *Ghana Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 151–179.

²⁶ Baffour Agyeman-Duah, "Ghana, 1982–6: The Politics of the PNDC," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (1987): 613–642.



Figure 1: #FixTheCountry protest against the high cost of living during the Covid-19 pandemic, planned in Accra, 4 August 2021. The image illustrates the role of pre-political institutions in polarising postcolonial Ghana. Photo. Onua.com, August 4, 2021. https://onuaonline.com/icymi-all-what-happened-at-fixthecountry-demo/#google_vignette. Accessed June 12, 2025.

The Movement's symbols further reveal the philosophical limitations of its approach. Its logo (see Figure 3), a raised fist, signifies anger and the force of power. While anger can be a resource for political mobilization and social reform, unmediated anger risks producing counter-anger among other segments of the populace or legitimising state coercion. The #FixTheCountry Movement's call for measures such as the right to bear arms during protests exemplifies how unbalanced anger can justify the state's coercive interventions, undermining the Movement's goals. The fist, intended as a symbol of empowerment, becomes instead a signal of vulnerability to state repression.

Similarly, the imagery of a crying child (see Figure 4) in the Movement's symbols reflects a moral appeal for protection and care. While culturally resonant, it also naturalizes a technical and individualistic response: feeding, attending, or fixing immediate needs, rather than fostering proactive engagement with structural injustices. Childhood socialization in Ghanaian and global cultures teaches children to move from self-centered cries toward responsible action that considers others' needs. By relying on the symbolism of crying without fostering action-oriented solutions, the Movement invited a counter-movement, #FixYourAttitude, emphasizing that symbolic anger without strategic action is insufficient for systemic change. A crying child does not think about the mother's interests other than food and the mother's attention. Meanwhile, a child can also use crying as a manipulative tool to seek parental attention. For all these, there is hardly any culture that leaves socialisation to chance. This is because as more of a biological being with ontological dignity than a social being with a set of responsibilities, a child's socialisation is more about making him responsible and considerate to the needs of others. This may explain the use of lullabies in nearly all cultures to curate a child's pleasure from food alone to music as pleasure. It may also explain the centrality of storytelling, more so, of heroes to a child, to let the child appreciate the centrality of seeking the pleasures of *Others*.



Figure 2: #FixTheCountry protest against the high cost of living during the Covid-19 pandemic, organized in Accra, 4 August 2021. The image illustrates the devastating impact of illegal mining (galamsey) Photo. Citinewsroom, August 4, 2021.

<https://citinewsroom.com/2021/08/fixthecountry-demo-finally-comes-off-today/>. Accessed June 12, 2025.

So, through the philosophy of music and folklore, a child's socialisation takes him away from crying just to receive attention to crying to solve the attention of *Others*. Meanwhile, a grown-up child, unlike the image of the #FixTheCountry does not cry in solving problems but rather takes proactive action. This also explains the importance of heroic culture as an index of immortality in world cultures. An example could be deduced from the three persons, including Nana Tweneba Kodua, Chief of Kumawu, Nana Asenso Kofo, Chief of Adwumkasekese who was buried alive and Nana Dikopim I, Chief of Edweso, who was to be butchered to death, to consolidate the Asante Kingdom. It is, therefore, not enough for a child to cry perpetually.

Taken together, these inscriptions reveal a recurring pattern: the Movement's focus on technical solutions, anger, and symbolic appeals overlooked the philosophical foundations of state, power, and loyalty. Its failure was a priori because the Movement underestimated the complexity of Ghana as a social construct and the entanglement of personal pleasure, survival, and political allegiance. Without a guiding ideology capable of mediating these forces, the Movement's mobilization was inevitably short-lived. The #FixTheCountry Movement illustrates a broader truth about youth activism: the failure to ground activism in ideology, moral philosophy, and historical understanding predisposes movements to a priori collapse. Technical solutions, symbolic anger, and moral appeals cannot substitute for coherent strategies that navigate loyalty, power, and social norms. Ghana's postcolonial state, like other modern states, consisting as both an imagined and contested space, where citizen loyalty is divided, corruption is structural, and pleasure often outweighs collective ideals. Without addressing these foundational realities, youth movements are likely to experience short-lived mobilization and recurrent failure.



Figure 3: This image, showing the logo of the #FixTheCountry Movement, illustrates the Movement's revolutionary approach to promoting economic and political justice in Ghana. Photo. FixTheCountry, <https://fixthecountrygh.com/>. Accessed June 12, 2025.

The #FixTheCountry Movement frequently romanticized Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah (see Figure 5), casting him as the archetypal leader and the ideal figure the country has ever had. In doing so, the Movement relied heavily on the "apostrophe" in the founder/founders' debate,²⁷ positioning Nkrumah as a primordial ancestor and moral canon against which leaders of the Fourth Republic are measured. This form of idealization, however, risks reducing history to nostalgia and moral exemplars, rather than a tool for critical reflection and pragmatic learning. There is no question about Nkrumah's contributions to Ghana's development—his infrastructural projects, pan-African vision, and state-building efforts remain foundational. Yet, his tenure also reflects violations of the very principles of governance he espoused. Nkrumah's centralization of power and tolerance of political sycophancy created opportunities for corruption and institutional dysfunction, as exemplified by ministers such as Krobo Adusei. Such lapses contributed to Ayi Kwei Armah's critique in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, highlighting the gap between visionary promise and lived political reality.²⁸

The #FixTheCountry Movement's invocation of Nkrumah's image, therefore, presents a tension between symbolic inspiration and practical governance. To seek a revival of Nkrumah's economic successes without critically interrogating his political system risks reproducing the same structural pitfalls: a concentration of power, curtailed political freedom, and the subordination of pluralistic governance to charismatic authority. In the contemporary Ghanaian context—marked by political pluralism, heightened media scrutiny, and regional instability—returning to an Nkrumah-style party-state is neither feasible nor desirable.

²⁷ Edem Adotey, "A Matter of Apostrophe? Founder's Day, Founders' Day, and Holiday Politics in Contemporary Ghana." *Journal of West African History* 5.2 (2019): 113-139.

²⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Harlow: Heinemann, published 1968).



Figure 4: #FixTheCountry protest against the high cost of living during the Covid-19 pandemic, planned to be organized in Accra, 27 July 2021. The image illustrates Ghana's vulnerability and the need for protection from poor public governance. Photo. GBC Ghana Online, July 27, 2021.
<https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/general/fixthecountry-demo-will-come-on-despite-new-covid-19-restrictions-organisers/2021/3/>.
 Accessed June 12, 2025.

Moreover, the Movement's Osagyefo rhetoric reveals an ideological gap. Elevating Nkrumah to a mythic figure provides emotional and symbolic cohesion, but it does not substitute for a philosophically grounded strategy capable of navigating the modern state's complexities, mediating loyalty, and converting anger into disciplined political action. Just as the fist and crying child symbols could generate short-term affective energy, so too could the nostalgic invocation of Nkrumah inspire momentary enthusiasm. Without embedding such inspiration within a coherent ideological and historical analysis, the Movement risks affective mobilization without structural impact, mirroring the broader pattern of a priori failure seen in youth activism.

The collapse of youth political movements in Ghana, such as the #FixTheCountry Movement, cannot be understood solely through conventional explanations—gerontocracy, human rights abuses, poverty, or weak democratic structures. While these factors are relevant, they overlook the philosophical and structural dimensions of the modern state, as well as the role of ideology, loyalty, and the pursuit of self-interest in shaping political outcomes. I argue that youth movements falter because they misread the complexities of the state, mismanage loyalty, and rely on technical rather than moral or ideological solutions.

In developing economies like Ghana, where poverty is widespread, the political class often consolidates power in neo-patrimonial and personalized forms. Governance becomes intertwined with moral sentiment, deployed along family, ethnic, and religious lines rather than rational bureaucratic structures. Consequently, loyalty is divided: citizens maintain allegiances not only to the state but also to primordial institutions such as chieftaincy, family, and religious networks. This fragmented loyalty produces systemic challenges: corruption, misallocation of resources, and the prioritization of personal over

collective interests. In such a context, pleasure—the existential and social pursuit of self-interest—often outweighs the imagined collective good, reinforcing the difficulty young people face in mobilizing sustained political activism. The #FixTheCountry Movement illustrates this pattern.

The Movement's placards and symbols reveal a superficial reading of structural and historical realities. Their unproblematic use of the term "country" masks the fact that Ghana is not a social unity in existential terms. As a geographical entity, Ghana exists with fixed boundaries, but socially and historically, citizens' loyalty extends across multiple boundaries, including ethnic, religious, and cross-border ties. Colonial and postcolonial governance created these boundaries, yet the precolonial social and political fluidity of groups like the Akan persists, with individuals exercising allegiance both to family, lineage, and local chieftaincies, often more strongly than to the state. This misreading of the "country" leads the Movement to prioritize technical fixes over philosophical reflection. Their symbols mirror the developmental paradox of Ghana's postcolonial state: the force of the state is legitimate only through elite-defined authority, and citizens' loyalties are discursive, fluid, and historically contingent.



Figure 5: #FixTheCountry protest against the high cost of living during the Covid-19 pandemic, planned in Accra, 4 August 2021. The image reflects Kwame Nkrumah's legacy as a model for promoting economic relief and equity. Photo. HappyGhana.com, August 4, 2021.

<https://www.happyghana.com/fixthecountry-here-is-what-ghanaian-youth-are-saying-with-placards/>. Accessed June 12, 2025.

Compounding this is the challenge of chieftaincy and resource governance. Chiefs, divested of political power yet tasked with local development, navigate a constrained institutional framework, while politicians rely on state resources for neo-patrimonial politics. Issues like illegal mining (*Galamsey*) exemplify these tensions: citizens engage in extractive practices not merely for personal gain but as expressions of ancestral and social loyalty over land. Consequently, technical solutions—street protests, slogans, or symbolic gestures—cannot address these structural entanglements.

Invoking Nkrumah as a touchstone thus reflects both affective mobilization and ideological shortfall. The Movement's energy, anger, and hero-worship, while symbolically potent, fail to translate into long-term, organized, ideologically grounded political action. This mirrors the broader pattern of a priori failure in youth activism:

movements are energized by immediate pleasure, emotion, and symbolic justice, but struggle to navigate the intricacies of loyalty, power, and historical realities within the social construct of the modern state.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the demise of the #FixTheCountry Movement through historical and theoretical lenses. I argued that the Movement failed to frame its demands as a coherent call for nation-building. By assuming the modern state is ontologically given, the Movement fell into the common trap of expecting the loyalty of Ghanaians to the Movement and the State, while trusting that elite use of political power would yield benevolent outcomes. Consequently, it focused on technical solutions rather than developing a philosophy or ideology capable of channeling the energies and aspirations of young people toward national unity. Furthermore, by relying on superficial slogans and symbolism, the Movement failed to emulate the strategic vision of Nkrumah, whose achievements they profess to admire. While Nkrumah leveraged symbolic nationalism and revitalized the primordial religious and ideological bases of state formation, the #FixTheCountry Movement lacked a clearly articulated philosophy to sustain its activism. Nkrumah's ideological institute and the Young Pioneer Movement drew youth engagement from personal interest to national purpose; the #FixTheCountry Movement had no comparable institutional framework. Ultimately, reliant on online platforms and political rhetoric, the Movement confronted the enduring challenge of engaging a state that had become, in effect, comatose.

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