

Education or Indoctrination? The vestiges of the colonial experiment in Ghana.

by Joe Osoe Addo

‘Education is the key to overcoming poverty and enabling people to excel as citizens.....’

The synopsis of this segment is true enough but for me it elicits an emotional response since despite the introduction of formal education in Ghana, as in most developing nations, the results have been so checkered. The word EDUCATION as commonly used in such forums often implies the Western type, of which I am a proud recipient. I cannot lay claim to be an expert on Education per se, but I will attempt to shed light on the impact of current systems on the welfare Ghanaians as I see it. This is my personal take on the subject and I know that real academics on the Subject, which I cannot lay claim to be, may disagree with my position. I will start my discourse by saying the following:

1. Ghanaians are considered very educated by any standards
2. Ghanaians are considered very amicable as group
3. Ghana is the considered by the World Bank and others to be an economic success story by their standards.

The issue for me is are we excelling, given all these intrinsic assets, be it physical or intellectual? The only way to examine this is to critique through the prism of history and understand the contemporary Ghanaian socio-economic context.

Ghana, as the former British Colony of the Gold Coast, was developed educationally to train locals to become Public servants by and large. The British never thought of the aftermath of Independence and the effects on local economies and populace. Colonial rule was strictly geared towards plunder and export of resources. (Points of contention) This could not have been so effectively implemented over several centuries without the almost total co-operation from the locals. Religion and Education (or indoctrination) was the tool used to create an educated class who become more British than the British themselves. Religion, through the Swiss (Basel Missionaries), particularly used Presbyterianism, to reach out to the locals and infuse in them religious concepts of non aggression and respect for all things European, and class system based on European education. Note, traditional education (oral) had existed for many millennia , yet a new social order based on this foreign concept of the written was quickly established often through brute Military campaigns (give/show some examples) and then smoothed over with missionary zeal. It was an effective one-

two punch. It is no accident that the first written text of any of the local languages was the translation of the Bible into Akan by Swiss missionaries in Akropong Akwapim. Christianity was used to great effect in the establishment of Boarding Schools set up all over the country to enlighten the ‘natives’ as the colonials perceived it. Over the next 2 centuries this conversion would be systematic, organized and completely effective. A new African was ‘born’ - ‘civilized’, compliant and willing to do the bidding of the Colonials. I do not want to cast this development strictly in negative terms, but rather shed light on a phenomena which is still unraveling and is shaping the future of the African Continent.

I happen to be a product of this elitist tradition in Ghana, of boarding schools which took young minds and turned them into pseudo-intellectuals. Pseudo because, it is/was incomplete. We know much more about European positions and culture than we do our own. Our Independence leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Gamel Nasser of Egypt, understood this clearly, and thus instituted the notion of Pan Africanism to unite the Continent, a progressive attempt to reverse Centuries of Europeanism which had taken hold. Re-education become the new mantra, unfortunately Global events overtook their idealism and drive to make change- a mind change. The most devastating was the Gold War, which through no fault of Africans, was played out to devastating effect on the African psyche- again the mind was manipulated for ill. It was an ideological battle that most Africans got into without understanding why. Our leaderships got side tracked from their initial noble ideologies of Independence, both land and mind, of Africa for all Africans. It was to become the Emancipation that would inspire all others on the Globe. It is no accident that American Civil Rights sought great inspiration from the African struggle. Equal Education was the first line of attack in the Americas, in Africa schooling was considered excellent overall but too Euro-centric. To quote from Dr. Kwame Nkrumah

Scant resources were spent, depending on which side you were on, on promoting competing ideologies at the expense of developing a unique hybrid education, which took the best of the Native and the European traditions, to educate the populace to respond to Africans unique condition.- a duality which is truly unique. This basic birth right has been denied to many Africans resulting in sub standard education, based on the worst of the West. African traditional thinking enabled great kingdom to be established as early as the 10th century e.g. Songhai Empire, which is now modern day Ghana. The Hallmark of these early civilizations was a sustainable typology, which stressed harmony between man and nature. In the fields of farming, hunting, fishing and architecture. I do not need to get too much into some of the innovative Vernacular architecture that is African but rather draw attention to what has gone wrong in the shaping of the New African mind and failure of the

built environment. I will use my own personal journey to retrace my architectural heritage to illustrate this point.

After 2 decades abroad, I decided to design a 'construct' which would attempt to address this incredible duality. Where would I find the inspiration? Is it from within or without? This quagmire is what plagues Africans today. My construct could be neither exclusively, but a personalized hybrid based on understanding how the Ghanaian worker thinks and works and how traditional systems of construction and habitation can inform architecture. This is a potential minefield, since contradictions abound, but for me there-in lies the fodder for creative solutions. (talk about how things are designed and built currently, the norm and how it is considered a luxury to think out of the box. Also the rich tradition of excellent tradition of the International Style, not all sustainable but journey to build the ultimate adobe block, difficulties especially perception.

Economy can never expand if dependent on current modes of construction eg concrete block....crafts men a dying breed. All want to be university grads. Big deate raging over polytechnics and their role...)

In closing I must say that I have returned home not only to contribute but to enjoy a country that I love so much. Ghana is quite extraordinary in that we are the eternal optimist. the term '...by gods grace...' is the most common phrase used by all. There is certainly no separation of church and state. It will be a Herculean task to re-introduce sustainable constructs since it is deemed expensive, by virtue of being different, but I am firm believer that that 'Build it and they will come'. Being conservative by nature, we are followers of trends but not leaders. We should all understand the condition of all, particularly the African since it has been misunderstood for so long yet has contributed greatly to the world's development through a succession of European Empires, be it the Danes, Swedes, Portugese, French, British, German, Belgian etc.

AFRICA WAS THE SITE OF THE FIRST EUROPEAN UNION!

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