

The Role of Education, Religion and Politics in Resolving the Dilemma of the Modern African State

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Abstract

The cultural practices and value system of the African has helped maintain peaceful co-existence among various tribes thereby holding the nations together in one piece. A nation of twenty-four million people as is Ghana and over seventy different languages and so many different ethnic groups would have disintegrated as is the case with some other countries of the world had it not been for the heritage that was passed on from the ancestors.

The sustainability of this peace and tranquility is all threatened in the modern state that is poised to move away from the culture and value system of old. The advent of politics of insults is a good testament to this. Resolving the dilemma of the modern state is about how to bring modern educational systems and philosophies to bear with the indigenous value system in such a way that restores harmony, trust and peaceful co-existence among various socio-cultural, religious and ethnic dimensions in the country.

This paper was born out of a focus group discussion of a team comprising politicians, people of faith, policy makers, teachers and learners. Issues pertinent to the resolution of the dilemma of the modern state discussed emphasized the roles of education, religion, politics, and policy making. Discussants agreed that the time is right for such discussions and pointed out that resolving the dilemma would mean how best to interface the difference between education, religion, politics and policy making, education providers and learners.

Keywords: Education, dilemma, religion, politics, modern state

1.0 Introduction

The lesson of Hobbesian theory is that the modern state is weak because it aims too high and is too large. Worse, the modern state has failed to deliver us from a state of universal predation of all against all into the peace of civil society. Modern democratic states have themselves become weapons in the war of all against all, as rival interest groups compete with each other to capture government, using it to seize and redistribute resources among themselves. In its weakness, the modern state has recreated in a political form that very state of nature from which it is meant to deliver us. Although Critics have disputed Hobbes assertion on the ground that he lived in, and wrote for, an age of civil and religious wars, anyone critically examining the religious conflicts in Northern Ireland or the Middle East will appreciate that wars of religion and politics are as much evil of our age as they were of Hobbes time.

As issues facing nations of the world community in respect of above become more complex, the African and for that matter the Ghanaian State by its nature, its place and the condition of the global environment within which it exists, is characteristically embedded in a far more serious, challenging and sometimes very difficult process of identifying our own course on the global stage. The Ghanaian State like other counterparts in the rest of Africa and the world is pre-occupied with contemporary issues such as food security, education, health care delivery and HIV/AIDS; it is at the same time focused on a more demanding task of economic development, state building, nation building and democratization.

The burden imposed by these problems as well as the prevailing internal socio-economic and political wrangling as recently demonstrated by public pronouncements and outcries in the media termed as “politics of insult” by some, points to the fact that all is not well and at the same time show that the prospect for immediate socio-economic development and political as well as religious harmony is farfetched. Questions are directed more to the internal deficiencies within the modern state such as the failure of leadership and the question of good governance.

The theory of socialization and social interaction teach that humans are transformed in their social group through a process of acquiring culture and other gestures from parents and other social group members and social facts that happen in the environment in which the person lives (Ritzer, 2008). In the traditional Ghanaian tradition, collective socialization is important in the process of personality formation (PF). According to Kasongo (2010), while much of our personality is the direct result of our interaction with our parents (enculturation), the group socialization process (rituals and traditional religion in this case) can shape PF in particular directions by enforcing specific beliefs and attitudes as well as selectively providing experiences. By this means, the African traditional society was organized around the traditional African Education System in developing the collective consciousness of the society.

The failure of the formal education system of today to effectively incorporate local cultural values, has denied us

of the creation of a successful socialization that results in the uniformity within our societies. Where traditional value systems are incorporated effectively into the formal systems, citizens develop same social consciousness and adopt an acceptable and uniform social behaviour. When a change culture such as globalization, civilization or modernism is allowed to totally replace existing cultural values, it causes social frustration and generates maladjustment of group members to this new system which leads to the “demise” of the traditional society. New behaviors that meet the new cultural values are persuasively created as they collide with the existing values (Kasongo, 2010).

Resolving the dilemma of the modern state is about how to bring modern educational systems and philosophies to bear with the indigenous value system in such a way that restores harmony, trust and peaceful co-existence among various socio-cultural, religious and ethnic dimensions in the country.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Origins of the Modern State

Often the terms country, state, and nation have been used interchangeably but there is a difference. According to Rosenberg (2011), a “State” is a self-governing political entity. The term State can be used interchangeably with country and can also be distinguished from “state” which is usually a division of a federal State (such as the states of Nigeria or the United States of America). A nation, however, is a tightly-knit group of people which share a common culture. A nation-state is a nation which has the same borders as a State. In defining States Rosenberg (2011), reports as follows:

- Has space or territory which has internationally recognized boundaries (boundary disputes are OK).
- Have people who live there on an ongoing basis.
- Have economic activity and an organized economy. A country regulates foreign and domestic trade and issues money.
- Has the power of social engineering, such as education.
- Has a transportation system for moving goods and people.
- Has a government which provides public services and police power.
- Has sovereignty. No other State should have power over the country's territory.
- Has external recognition.

Going by Rosenberg’s definition there are currently about 196 independent countries or States around the world including modern Ghana. Territories of countries or individual parts of a country are not countries in their own right. Nations are culturally homogeneous groups of people, larger than a single tribe or community, which shares a common language, institutions, religion, and historical experience. When a nation consisting of people have a State or country of their own, it is called a nation-state. Places like France, Egypt, Germany, and Japan are excellent examples of nation-states. There are some States which have two nations, such as Canada and Belgium. Even with its multicultural society, the United States is also referred to as a nation-state because of the shared American “values and culture.”

According to Schraeder, (2000), the pre-colonial African State predates the birth of the nation state as defined by the Westphalian treaty of 1648 which marked the beginning of the nation state system in which sovereign political entities, independent of any outside authorities, exercised control over people residing in separate territories with officially marked boundaries. Correspondingly, Bamidele (2004) notes that the African states of Axum (100-700AD), Kush (800BC-350AD), Old Ghana Empire (700-1200 AD), Mali (1200-1500 AD) and Songhai (1350-1600 AD), for example, predated the treaty and many other sovereign states that followed later like the Benin (1500-1800AD), the Oyo empire (1600-1850AD), Buganda (1600-1900AD) and Kanem Borno (800-1900AD), all demonstrate some of these characteristics.

The colonization of Africa and the resulting re-organization of territorial boundaries under the new colonial infrastructure do not in any way render inconsequential what these states were. What actually happened as a result of the imposition of the European nation state system is that the artificially created state was in no way sovereign because its sovereignty remained in the hands of the occupying power (Bamidele, 2004).

The debate about the state in Africa assumes that the state did not exist in the proper sense until the end of colonial rule. It can also be argued that independence marked the transformation of the state into European-type modern states in Africa. And at that same point merging the pre-colonial with the post-colonial aspects of the state. The period of colonial governance served as a period of interruption, which clearly muddled the process of state building and national identification as a result of political reorganization and administrative engineering resulting from the Berlin conference (Young, Undated; cited in Bamidele, 2004).

2.2 Religion, Politics and National Security

National security is a necessary ingredient for political stability and socio-economic development of every nation. Religion is a recognized factor that can promote or destabilize the security of any nation at any given period of time. Religious value systems play very significant roles in collective self-awareness and identity, which draw

together individuals, families and regions, and pull them towards for greater greater self-consciousness needed to build and animate a nation from within. At the same time religion can be manipulated as an instrument of destruction and disintegration, which would, threatens the peace, stability and security of a nation. The place of religion in the socio-political structure of Ghana and its role in national building cannot be compromised.

According to Okyerefo et al (2011), religious interrogation of state and civic life is not new in the body politic of Ghana. Pobe (1988), recounts the relationship between Ghana's first President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and the Protestant Churches in Ghana at the peak of independence and thereafter. A critical examination of the Ghanaian experience reveals that, religious groups have often taken an overt, almost confrontational approach to politics. Example being the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference's position on PNDC Law 221, entitled "Religious Bodies (Registration) Law 1989", which was enacted on 14th June 1989.

Oquaye (1995: 566; cited by Okyerefo et al, 2011) had argued from a human rights perspective that such a law was quintessentially an infringement on citizens' basic right to "freedom of religion and association". What is more, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana saw in the law an attempt to "push the church to derive its existence and validity from the state" (Oquaye, 1995: 566; cited by Okyerefo et al, 2011). Having refused to comply with the law, it was subsequently "repealed after the inauguration of the Fourth Republic" (Gifford 1994: 258; cited by Okyerefo et al, 2011).

Recently, the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference's voice was added to press home demands to put in place modalities to enable the verification of the Biometric Voters register during the December 2012. Perhaps the most recent input to the political debate in recent times is the call by the head of the Presbyterian Mission in Ghana to suspend the passing into Law of 45 electoral constituencies before the December 2012 elections. All these efforts from Christian and other religious groups provide evidence that religion has become a tool in strengthening the democratic process in Ghana.

Ghana embraces various religious groupings including the Traditional African Religion, Christianity, Islam and others. In their specific ways all of them leave their mark on the Ghanaian public sphere. In Traditional African Religion the position of the chief is of absolute importance. Not only is the chief an embodiment of the ancestors and a political figure, he also plays a religious function of leading his people in religious rituals (Okyerefo et al, 2011).

In this light the chief can speak on behalf of his people to avert any actions of any individual(s) that would jeopardize the harmony of the community. Consequently, traditional leaders can and do make pronouncements regarding the welfare of the community, such as calling for peaceful elections. In much same ways, Christian and Muslim leaders command great deal of respect and moral authority as well as social influence that enable them to make public calls for the common good. It is not uncommon, therefore, for politicians to seek counsel from or lobby religious leaders to win their favor, and by so doing hope to win in elections. In countries such as Nigeria, India and Pakistan, it is well known differences in opinions and beliefs stemming from inclination different religious philosophies can disrupt national unity and peace.

2.3 Ethical Dilemmas in Education

Caffarella (1988) suggested that ethical dilemmas are an inevitable part of teaching and learning. Brockett's model identified three dimensions to ethical dilemma in education. The first dimension is the personal value system which affects how individuals teach, what they teach, and how they interact with their students. Teachers' personal value systems will determine whether they emphasize learners' strengths or inadequacies; whether they treat students equally regardless of political affiliation, religion, race, gender, ethnic origin, or creed; and whether they believe adults can learn regardless of age, social class, and previous learning experiences.

The second dimension considers multiple responsibilities in view that teaching adults is seldom a full-time occupation. Ethical dilemmas may occur when other responsibilities conflict with teaching or are given a higher priority than the teaching role. Individuals whose teaching role is secondary to other responsibilities may need to examine their motives for teaching. For instance a teacher may teach to promote a cause other than what he is intended to teach for. Such teachers could incite students to embark on religious and political motives that can destabilize national peace. In discussing how teachers operationalize their values in the practice of their craft, Caffarella addresses the third dimension of Brockett's model. She suggests that teachers need to model ethical behaviour in teaching that should require all participants in the learning activity, teachers and students alike, to be willing to question what is being taught and how the subject matter is being addressed. An important part of this process is considering the ethical questions affiliated with the subject matter under discussion. Example, teachers should encourage students to freely share their views without being reprimanded. Teaching and learning should empower students to challenge value positions that may be viewed as unacceptable by society, other practitioners, clients, sponsors, or planners.

3.0 Methods

A focus group discussion was employed at the method of choice. This method was employed because it had the

power to uncover feelings, attitudes, motivation, insights and perceptions. It also allowed for the in-depth probing of the topic on religion, politics, education and national peace. Three different groups were used for the discussion. Each group consisted of eight individuals and each discussion lasted for 90 minutes. The groups were carefully selected and included individuals willing to freely share their thoughts, feelings and opinions about a topic with which they are intimately familiar.

The groups comprised politicians, people of faith, Christians, Moslems, policy makers, teachers and students. A skilled facilitator led participants through an open discussion of six carefully crafted, open-ended questions with the goal of generating maximum number of ideas from as many different people within the time allotted. Questions were designed to generate an open but guided discussion that strictly focused to the topic. Discussants were pledged anonymity.

The facilitator created an opportunity for all participants to add their comments and encouraged the sharing of widely divergent ideas and opinions. In effect, the focus group discussions created an accepting environment that put participants at ease, allowing them to expand, change, and deepen their answers. Responses from the three focus group discussions were ultimately summarized, categorized, and analyzed for major themes, insights, and inconsistencies. In this paper results are presented from the major themes and insights generated on the topic.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Education

Asked about what roles education play to foster national peace, unity and development must, discussants had these to say: Discussant I (group 1), made a passionate appeal that if we as a modern State can meaningfully and sustainably expand access to secondary education, then a definite political turmoil could be curtailed. It was agreed by other discussants that a massive reduction in illiteracy would go a long way to help national peace, unity and development. Discussant II (group 3) said, reforming the formal as well as the non-formal/informal sectors of education would be important to put us in a new dimension of progress.

He recounted that nearly, 376,860 candidates wrote the B.E.C.E. examinations in April of 2012 representing an increment of over 4,000 candidates when compared candidates who wrote the 2011 examinations. "Every year" he noted "at least for the past three years 350,000 students on average write the B.E.C.E and just about a maximum of 175,000 students are placed in all secondary, vocational and Technical schools. Discussant II also recounted that, "from Primary to Junior High School (JHS) 67% of all pupils who enroll in school manage to go through and 33% drop out. From JHS 3 to Senior High School (SHS1), only 37% of all students who enrolled manage to go through, 63% drop out. From SHS 3 or 4 to the University 60% of all students who enrolled go through and 40% drop off or fail.

The issue with education in the modern state is what do we do with all these numbers of students who failed to find a place in mainstream education? Should we focus only on the more fortunate and brilliant ones and leave the poor and unlucky ones to their own fate? A quick reflection on the recent mishaps in the Northern African and Middle Eastern countries will remind us that leaving the majority of students and youth for that matter who drop out from school to their own fate will be a dangerous ground to chart. Then what should we do?" he asked

Discussant III (group 3) said, when pupils and students drop out from school they do not stay young forever. In the long run they become adults but ones with big problems with literacy. He noted that the 2003/2008 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) reveal that close to 50% of Ghanaian women has no primary education. Discussant IV (group 2), observed that it is a good thing that we have so many private Universities springing up in recent times in the country.

Private Universities and higher institutions of learning will complement the already well established public higher education system in reaching out to most Ghanaians including adults with high quality university education. However, he called for a more lenient approach on the part of the national Accreditation Board when it comes to enrolling mature students into institutions of higher learning citing specifically NAB's requirement of Institution's of higher learning not to recruit any more than 20% of their total student intake through the "mature student window." Discussant I group 2, feared that such a move will deny more potential mature students of a place in higher education.

In comparing learners' educational experiences as youths and adults, Discussant V, (group 1) drew from three common factors: teachers' attitudes, academic quality, and cultural respect. Discussant recounted that, both youths and adults often feel that learning programmes or curriculum did not address their educational goals and disregarded their cultural heritage. Although these views can be subjective, when learners belief this to be the case, they often chose to abandon programmes of learning. By doing this, learners are not rejecting education in general but curriculum and programmes that do not meet their needs and do not support their cultural identities and values

Discussant V (group 1), cautioned that teachers and administrators of institutions of learning who fail to promote cultural awareness and understanding may unknowingly contribute to the nonparticipation of adult learners.

Citing Sparks (2002), Discussant V recommended that educators should examine adult education programmes for practices that potentially limit equitable access, quality, and respect for all learners. He further recommended that instructors should reflect on their own cultural identities (e.g., their assumptions, behaviors, and values), and how their beliefs and attitudes can influence the learning environment.

In more of a concluding remark, Discussant VI (group one), commented that administrators and teachers of institutions of learning should serve as agents of change to ensure a culturally relevant environment for learners. Those who reflect on their own behaviors and critique the policies and practices of their institutions embark on steps to acknowledge cultural differences and respond positively. Creating a culturally relevant learning environment will help adult learners' especially to feel comfortable in adult education because their cultures and histories are valued and respected. The good thing about this is that, it promotes unity and peace and moreover, learners are more likely to persist in their learning and meet their educational goals.

4.1 Religion

Discussant I (group 1) said that religion is one of the important factors that can build or destroy the peace of any country. Therefore religious value systems should be guided to play the all very important role in creating collective self-awareness and identity, which draw together individuals, families and regions, and pull them towards greater self-consciousness needed to build and revive a the modern State from within. Since religion can serve as a double-edged knife capable of building and destroying the modern State, that should be all the important reason when religious leaders, politicians and citizens alike should make it a point to understand the place of religion in the socio-political structure of the modern State.

Discussant III (group 2) said that, religious and political tolerance should be permitted. After all, most of the major religions have emerged from paganism and that all major Religions preach love for the neighbor and love for the stranger and even the enemy. Therefore tolerance and respect shown to one another for whom one is and the faith or belief he/she upholds can go a long way to ensure peaceful co-existence. Disrespect, that is often shown to people for who they are such as belonging to a minor tribe; and what they believe in breed intolerance. The onus is therefore on religious leaders to communicate effectively to their followers and charge them to refrain from all acts of violence that can threaten our young democracy and peaceful co-existence. Wrapping up on the role of Religion, it was noted that Religion can bring about hope, peaceful co-existence and morality. That religion can promote tolerance among peoples as a way of interfacing the dilemma of the modern State. That religion should match teachings with practice and that religious leadership must lead by example and be exemplary.

4.2 Politics

On politics, discussant IV (group 2) was quick to point out that politics is a major cause of divisions in the modern State. "Our politics has caused a lot of problems" he noted. "Politicians" he continued "use ethnicity and religion to source for political points. Government institutions are highly political. Policies are meant to unite people but what do we see? Politicians will go to the extreme to get what they want at all cost. And this is the problem. People who are not in the frontline politics have a role to play as they must hold frontline politicians to ransom for their words and actions" Discussant III (group 2), bemoaned politicians as people who generally think of their personal interests than that of the people.

He also blamed the media for improper conduct within the political realm. He noted that people see themselves as party members rather than Ghanaians. He also bemoaned how the media flirts with these political parties and gave example of Rwanda where the media promoted the genocide which killed nearly a million people. A third discussant noted that people are more comfortable driving the party policy rather than the national policy. He noted that political parties lack simple co-existence. He further noted that, ethnic backgrounds and affiliations are used for power play within politics.

Discussant IV (group 2), noted that the current political culture in the modern State leaves much to be desired. He said that political parties are not doing enough to educate their supporters and wished that political tolerance would aggressively be promoted. "The political code of conduct must be binding and enforced" he said in conclusion. Asked about whether the Western type of democracy should be blamed for our troubles, a discussant had this to say " Western democracy is not as bad as it is thought to be by some Africans and as a matter of fact it should be maintained" He further noted democracy is the ideal.

4.3. Policy Implications

The foregoing discussion has highlighted certain issues that are difficult to miss.

- The big growth in demand for education and the potential to even grow bigger in the future
- The need to provide universal and equitable access to all citizens, regardless of economic or social status
- The need to guard against sacrificing quality for quantity and
- The need to sustain efficiency in administration of resources towards this sector

The bare issues are that we must increase quantity of educational provision at high quality standards with a

scarce resource base. This calls for policies that aggressively pursue total quality management and committed to zero tolerance for wastage of resources. This means that policies that can sustain the establishment of more schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning to produce adequate number of teachers and administrators to manage schools and institutions sustainably.

It also means that we pursue policies that provide alternative pathways for primary, JHS, SHS, vocational, technical, and polytechnic and university students who drop out from school or fail to gain admission to institutions of higher learning. It also means that policies that tighten up the supervision and evaluation of student learning and administration of such to ensure that quality standards are adhered to in terms of infrastructure, laboratory equipment, teacher-pupil, teacher-student ratios and assessment criteria.

There is also implication for policies that will support innovative massification interventions especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities. The use of ideas such as distance education, open universities, night schools, community colleges and academic production units to expand and extend education to those who cannot participate mainstream fulltime programmes. Massification interventions in education means that ICT should be at the forefront of any intended policy programmes to roll out.

There are implications also for partnership promotion the public-private-partnership (PPP). But PPP can also be private-private- partnership or public-public-partnership. These are all necessary to ensure that there is public and private business communities and other non-governmental organizations' involvement in education service delivery.

The failure of the formal education system in the modern state to effectively incorporate local cultural values, has denied us of the creation of a successful socialization that results in the uniformity within a our societies. Therefore this too has a serious implication for policy making. In this respect educational policies should help develop cultural awareness and promote meaningful cross cultural engagements, this should lead to the provision of high-level and challenging, culturally relevant curriculum.

Taken together, the policy on revamping education in Ghana should focus on end-to-end processes with the mindset of prevention and continuous improvement. Everyone involved (Religion people, Politicians, Administrators, Teachers, Learners) should manage a process at some level viewing themselves as a customer at one point and a supplier at another. Learners' needs should drive the process of improvement and change. Corrective action should focus on root causes and there should be means of measuring accomplishments and comparison of results with the standard as a basis for corrective action.

5.0 Conclusion

To assure national peace, it will take the collective effort of all. Those who find themselves at the top should work for national unity. People should see their positions in politics, as an opportunity to render greater service to the State. We should be far removed from serving for rewards or some personal gain and think of the good of the entire society. Leaders must serve rather than be served. We should show commitment and put our nation first. Our minds should be prepared to undertake national projects. There should be both individual and collective actions. In all things we must remember the "golden rule" that says "if you want to be treated fairly, treat others fairly; if you want to be told the truth, tell others the truth; if you want your privacy respected, respect others privacy".

Religious leaders must perform their Divine Role of the "Watchman" to the State in reproofing of sins and cautioning unfair practices, policies and of unnecessary wastes in the economy (Ezekiel 33: 1-9). Religious leaders must direct their followers along the path of peaceful co-existence and must talk to them in obeying the laws of the land and in committing themselves to civic responsibilities. Politicians as policy makers must be committed to innovative policies that enable us to co-exist as peaceful people with one destiny. They must craft out policies that enable us expand education to meet the ever growing demand and at the same time maintain exceptional standards in quality.

Teachers should examine adult education programmes for practices that potentially limit equitable access, quality, and respect for all learners. Administrators and teachers should serve as agents of change to ensure a culturally relevant environment for learners. Learners especially adults must be self-directed, meaning, they should have the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). If we all do our individual parts well we will be contributing to make the "Golden Rule" work for the unity, peace and prosperity of the modern State we love to call Mother Ghana.

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