The Case for Civic Education in the New Zimbabwean Curriculum

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Introduction


It is the same position that these writer take, with modifications in colonial societies. In the latter societies, the people’s cultures have been heavily compromised by colonial conquerors and the cultures reflected in the curriculum are largely those of the colonial conquerors. However, the people’s cultures that have emerged in the post colonial era are those located in their struggle for socio-economic liberation and emancipation. This is the context in which this paper examines the strong case for a civic education curriculum in the revised curriculum in Zimbabwe. This civic education curriculum could be confined to primary schools, while a higher level civic curriculum could take the form of “National and Strategic Studies” at secondary school level.

What is Civic Education, and why Civic Education?

Basically Civic Education is education for responsible citizenship. The Americans believe that individuals do not automatically become responsible citizens. They need to be socialized into developing the traits of such citizenship. In the United States of America, the primary goal of all public schools is to educate young people for responsible citizenship.

Civic Education, in our view, including its higher form such as National and Strategic Studies, is not meant to really indoctrinate young people to become docile followers of their governments. It is actually meant to educate young people on their rights and duties in the context of their interaction with fellow citizens, the government bodies, the economic activities, their history and their heritage.


What is coming out in all this is the motivation that knowledge and skills interacting with one’s society do not just come to the individual automatically. These are either imparted or acquired by the individuals through a deliberate effort of educating. Civic skills which are intellectual and participatory require deliberate educative processes that involve designing a curriculum that will effectively orient individuals in the direction of the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge. Essential traits or civic dispositions such as appreciation of egalitarian and democratic values can only be acquired through the socializing agency of education and in this case, civic education.

Civic education is particularly necessary in Zimbabwe’s curriculum because of the need to impact liberating values such as development of reflective skills that one uses to understand who one is? Where
one comes from? Where one is going? What one’s place or role is in the context of the so called global village? What one’s relationship to or share of national resources is? What one’s responsibilities are in relation to defence of the national resources, identify, national ethos, pride and cultural values in the context of the so-called globalized world?

It is particularly telling that, while I was teaching at the University of Zimbabwe around 2003, I stumbled into a group of first and second year students having a discussion on the land reform movement that was taking place in Zimbabwe then and was in its infancy. There were five students. They were all agreeing that “Mugabe was stealing the white man’s land”. One of them actually said that black Zimbabweans did not need this land which was being “grabbed” or “invaded” by “Mugabe’s thugs”. He went further, (apparently with the concurrence of the rest of his group) to say, “The Harlem blacks in America are supporting him (Mugabe). Therefore, he should give that land to them (the Harlem Blacks) and not the black Zimbabweans”.

I actually stopped to engage these students in discussion on this issue. I asked them whether they were all residents of Harare or they came from elsewhere. They confirmed that they were indeed residents of Harare, and that their own parents or guardians did not have properties of their own or sizeable land they owned or possessed in the rural areas. They confirmed that they owned nothing themselves. When I asked them whether they knew how the white farmers they were defending came to own those farms, these students did not even know. At least, that is what they expressed to me.

So, here we have a situation where University students were ignorant about who they are. They;

1. did not know the history of their own country;
2. did not know the origin of ownership of farms by the whites in whose corner they were fighting;
3. were condemning the land reclamation movement instead of defending it; and
4. were even using the language of the thieves of their resources and heritage such as ‘land invasion’ or ‘land grabbing’.

My feeling was that this was not their fault. It was the fault of our curriculum which did not educate them on where the white farmers came from; how they acquired the land they called their farms; how the national liberation movement fought for the recovery of the land; and what happened between the stage of political freedom and that of land reclamation and general black empowerment. If they had been civic educated on the above, I believe they would have immediately defended and supported the land reform movement.

One can also point to the behaviour of journalists in the private media and black Zimbabweans working for the non-governmental organizations, when they campaign against the land reform movement and the general black empowerment. This all goes back to the absence of a civic education curriculum that empowers citizens to know their rights and responsibilities including the right to recover stolen resources and the responsibility to defend your independence and sovereignty and to defend your space and corner in the so called globalised village. Even the politically and culturally conscious sometimes fail to interrogate the idea of the ‘global village’, where you even fail to identify who the ‘chief’ is and who the ‘subjects’ are in this ‘village’.

In a nutshell, I propose that we seriously consider introducing civic education at primary school level and national and
strategic studies at secondary school level so as to educate our young for not only “responsible citizenship” in the American sense of self-governance, but also in the Zimbabwean liberation ethos of defending our heritage and other national resources; defending our space in the global world; developing self pride and self-actualization; defending our identity and sovereignty and moving away from “aping” other nationalities and races. At the moment we have some people in Zimbabwe who cannot see what they are worthy as a people and as individuals, people who could have been liberated mentally through our own form of civic education.

Bibliography


