Nkrumah

The history of colonialism in Africa has had a long term effect on the continent until the present day. The ideas of nation, citizenship, and state are only a mental exercise that many African nations are going through in order to believe that they have some semblance of autonomy. The democracy they seek is not one that liberates, but is only one that has changed the skin color of the colonialist so that he looks more like the general population. Instead of freedom for the people, many nations have only found cooptation that continues to enrich those at the top while the masses live in poverty. Nkrumah envisioned a Africa that was free and autonomous but he was looking at the world with rose colored glasses. In studying the western ideals of freedom and liberation, it appears as if the African nations were not willing to take the struggle to the next level. Revolution!

Isn’t that what happened in all of the western nations that obtained their independence. They had to fight for it, negotiations took place after the fight not before it. And that inability to coalesce into a fighting force that could repel the colonialists still has ramifications for Africa today. He failed to realize that the unity seen in places like the west was forged under warlike circumstances. Nkrumah was a diplomat through and through and that diplomatic idealism was probably a direct effect of colonialism. It is hard to struggle without weapons and there was no struggle in the traditional sense for Ghanaian independence. In fact it seems in retrospect to be a ploy, by an extremely creative colonial power, to prevent armed struggle.

Nkrumah hoped to develop Ghana into a showcase for other colonialized people to look at and see how successful a former colony could be without colonialism. He knew what Ghana needed as far as infrastructure, but forgot that he needed to obtain some buy-in from the colonial powers in order to achieve his desires. They had the knowledge and skills he needed to turn his policies from dream to reality and they were adamantly opposed to that kind of help for Africa. Nkrumah often quoted the statistics about what the west was taking out of Africa in mineral and other forms of goods and even talked about how Africa was the engine that powered the west. But he failed to realize this was not a casual relationship, this was an addiction. And no addict gives up his addiction cold turkey, and just walks away. So his dream for a strong, independent, self sufficient Ghana leading the way to a similarly endowed and united Africa were overshadowed by this simple fact. This addiction to the resources of Africa left the west willing to do anything to maintain the relationship.

The west was willing to continue to beg, borrow or steal what it needed from Africa both then and now. So today the modern Ghanaian finds himself in a very similar circumstance. The major corporations have replaced the colonialists in the framework, but look around Africa and one sees the result is the same more than fifty years after the fact. In reality the only areas that are being developed are the one’s that provide entrance and exit for their activities. That sounds vaguely familiar. The difference being corporations are not people so how do you redress your grievances in this new age of colonialism/corporate takeover.

Take China for instance. It had the same problem as many of the African nations did but in order to succeed at liberation first it fought against the rulers that kept the people enslaved, then it closed its borders to foreign influence and spent its time developing the infrastructure it needed to become a world power. And on the world scene today China is seen as a victor, not a victim. But in a homogenous culture the need for unity does not have to be an overarching theme, it was a natural state. In a real sense Africa’s diversity may be at the root of its undoing.