



A PEOPLE DIVIDED – THAT ALL MAY BE ONE
THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY LECTURE OF ACHIMOTA SCHOOL
(ACHIMOTA SPEAKS)

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Part 1

Introduction

The Chairman, Akoras, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. I begin oddly, perhaps, with a dedication of this talk to two categories of people. First, I dedicate this to *all the peoples of the streets – peasants and proletariat*. Be the streets tarred, pot-holed or outright untarred. Second, I offer this talk in honor of the African scholar and all scholars of the so-called Developing and Emerging World. Many of them have suffered immeasurably at the hands of brutal governments, simply because what they do has truth as its currency.

It is odd that in some ways, our societies neglect both scholars and streets for a convergent reason. The streets are urged to be more scholarly while the scholar is urged to be streetwise – feet on street. A bit of scholarship on the streets and a bit of street in the scholar must, therefore, be a good thing. I am neither street nor scholar. As a striver for both credentials, I cannot help but appreciate them all.

Part 2

So far, not so good

In the second decade of the 21st century, 2017 specifically, Ghana languishes behind in many important ways. And that is the fact. At the onset, I must establish that to my mind, all of humanity must hold itself to a certain category and standard of excellence that exists simply because it is human. It is not my predilection to entertain standards that are lowered by many because we are considered, even if only impliedly, somehow less capable.

To illustrate why we remain behind and demoralised, I choose one damning statistic as a key marker for underdevelopment. Ghana has been ranked second after Sudan in Africa for open defecation. If I need to put it more starkly, 3 out of every 5 Ghanaians are subject to this demeaning and insanitary condition. This damning report was put out by no less a person than the Chief Officer at the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). WASH estimates that Ghana will take 500 years to eliminate the practice due to the slow pace at which strategies, laws and interventions are being implemented.” Mr. Chairman, alas!, we are an open defecation country (ODC)! And yet the elite – the comfortable of the world, as opposed to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, seem to watch in impotent helplessness. A pathetic outcome of the first order. I am being deliberately provocative; on sanitation as in other matters, we are a people divided. Some, the few, live in glamour;

others, the many in fact, live in squalor. We once were a people that spoke like a civilization, with pride about garden cities. Where are our green spaces today?

The great tragedy of capitalism, the most 'successful' system of wealth accumulation and perhaps wealth creation which humankind has come up with in all of human history, is that left to itself it leaves many out. And then around the pools of very successful minorities, grow fetid and stagnant pools of large majorities; swampy, polluted, disabled and marginalized. Paul Polman, Global CEO of Unilever has highlighted that, *"1 in 8 people face hunger; 2 billion lack access to basic hygiene. We are living in a very strange world right now where power is increasingly concentrated in fewer people. If you belong to the lucky 2% of (the) population that, frankly, can do what they want, you have to put yourself to the service of the other 98%."* According to Oxfam, *"85 of the richest people in the world have the same net wealth as the bottom 3.5 billion"*.

No system can ever expect to leave out so many and stay in equilibrium because eventually it explodes. James Baldwin, that stalwart writer, was known to say: *"The most dangerous creation of any society is the man with nothing to lose."* Jean Paul-Sartre put it more plainly, or maybe more poetically, when he remarked, *"Only the guy who is not rowing can rock the boat."*

Part 3

Echoes to the elite

I have a friend called Chude Jideonwo, an articulate and energetic campaigner. He is skilled in the creative use of communication to mobilise and change human behavior. After reading Chinua Achebe's, *"The trouble with Nigeria"*, Chude, by his own admission, lost all energy for activism. For he realized, much of what occupied his time and plenty of what he seemed to be campaigning for were things many before had raised. And yet not much – in his view – seemed to change. Those familiar with that work, will know Professor Achebe, a vigorous writer on the average day, pulls no punches. Chinua Achebe demonstrates in that essay, tremendous courage and bows to no gods. Perhaps with the exception of Mallam Aminu Kano, who he praised for integrity. A favourite quote of mine from that work is: *"The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadershipUnlucky is the country*

where indiscipline is seen by ordinary people as the prerogative of the high and mighty. For, by the same token, discipline will be seen as a penalty which the rank and file must pay for their powerlessness.”

Chinua Achebe was a maestro, just as insightful as he was articulate!

When I was invited to speak at this function, I remembered Chude. For I too have been through a period of wondering. Wondering whether it is worth continuing to say anything about the need for us to wake up to our collective retardation as a country. And then whether we can ever work together to change it for better. Akora Norkor Duah yanked me out of my hibernation to speak in Accra, for the first time in a long while, at the International Advertising Association in April of 2015. And it is her and Joel Nettey, my friend and fellow Akora that you must now hold accountable for inflicting me on you.

Nonetheless, I thank them. It is too much risk waiting till the end to do so because I am careful not to assume you can stand me till then.

We are a people divided in reality and experience when it comes to opportunity, preparedness and dignity. I intend to hammer this point until out of frustration perhaps, inspiration if I am lucky, we start to act. Our challenge is not really that we always do not know what to do, our challenge is that we know what to do yet we do not do it.

Part 4

Education and social mobility

On this occasion, given there is a planned interaction, a lengthy one at that, at the end, I will touch on a few areas in development and offer only glimpses of the opportunity for development using randomly selected opportunities for improvement as cases. In the discussions that follow, we can go into more detail.

Education is a lever of social mobility – the seeds of education give rise to the fruit and flower of capability in the citizen. Education, it remains my conviction, is one of the most revolutionary forces known to humanity. It is often my joy to remind people that my own generation is often separated from poverty and peasantry by only one generation, if at all. In my case, both my maternal and paternal grandmothers – the only grand-parents I

knew, given the grand fathers were gone before I was born – were illiterate peasants. I was fortunate to see the mud houses in which they spent their early lives. The villages my parents roamed as children are there, sometimes in more or less the same conditions of penury that they experienced. Who I have become is largely thanks to what they became. And the fact that they lived in a society where the son or daughter of a peasant, even if infrequently, could sometimes end up in Ghana's best schools with the children of the aristocracy. Competing academically, rubbing shoulders, mingling, and accessing the future with confidence. When my mother arrived in Achimota School in the 1940s, she was encountering electricity and running water in her living quarters for the very first time. Yet she ended up in Ivy League Universities. I have read the biographical notes of many in her generation and I know this was not atypical. Today, we live with the horrendous shame that this expectation is not that real for a peasant. Not many from the interior of Effiduase, studying only in rural schools, wrapped in rural life, can expect to jump the tracks in this way. A system, a society, a people, a community, that expects that the children of the poor will always remain poor and bring forth offspring condemned to poverty, soon explodes. For this social calculus, however, much we seek to paint it as a natural order and a divine division of labour, does not work. Kwegyir Aggrey, one of the founders of the Achimota School project wrote with stunning clarity: *"Don't tell me what you know; show me what you can do!"*

Fate and fortune have placed us with the responsibility and the penalty of Achimota. The products of Achimota School, have always been active vessels in the formation of this nation's history – for better or for worse. We have a legitimate claim to much of what Ghana celebrates and a burden of responsibility for much of what it condemns. 90 years is a long time, it must be a period of some reflection.

Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, the Kenyan nationalist agitator once denounced his colleagues, as the larvae of the oppressive precolonial era morphed into the Imago of disappointments of post-colonialism. J.M.Kariuki roared in protest that they had not fought a bloody war against the colonialists to create a post-colonial Kenyan society of, in his notorious but famous and felicitous phrase, *"ten millionaires and ten million beggars."* I say the same to Achimotans. Today's Ghana is a Ghana that is in need of radical surgery. The tumours are many and many are malignant. We have become a people, separate and unequal, divided in a way that inoculates the comfortable from the misery of the not so comfortable. The net result is that many sleep homeless and yet many in their own homes, mansions in some cases, do not sleep. The homeless sleep, the homeowner remains sleepless. The electric fence, the security man at home, high walls, are the prisons of the privileged.

The first priority, of the few I chose to touch on today, is that we must act to broaden access to good quality but affordable education. And that means, let us be absolutely clear, a system of affordable state/public education. One that can assure solid preparation for all, on merit – rich or poor, peasant or patrician. So long as potential intellectual capability exists. There is nothing wrong with an expensive system of private education for those who can afford it with legitimate and ethical earnings. It is wrong to stigmatise ethical prosperity. But there is everything wrong with the denial of good education to the majority of our compatriots in the name of whatever *-ism*. Education is a necessary propeller of the craft of development and of high culture in any civilization. Education, properly deployed, has the capacity to evacuate the horror chambers of extreme poverty of its neglected occupants. I am not seduced by the seeming popularity in recent times of an argument that I thought, until recently, had been vigorously settled by Du Bois in his fierce debates with Booker T Washington over the Tuskegee experiments. Du Bois observed once: *“Education is that whole system of human training with and without the school house walls; which molds and develops men.”* I hasten to add, as he must have meant, “and women.”

The sole purpose of education, I often remark on social media, with such conviction and authority as I can muster, is not the accumulation of gold. Education enables civilization. Our society and civilisation require the artistic and analytical abilities of the novelist, the poet, the artist just as much as it does other fields. Those who argue that our development endeavor should focus only on vocational and technical knowledge, miss the point that we set out to build a civilization not just an efficient construction machine. The sciences and the arts, the plumber and the painter all find useful contributions to make in a civilization – a holistic civilization.

Part 5

Tradition and culture must not be static

In his recent book, *“Birth of a Dream Weaver,”* Ngugi wa Thiongo writes: *“But there’s nothing sacred about any particular custom. Customs and practices that go with it change in the light of new knowledge. The Jews used to sacrifice human beings, but the story of Abraham and Isaac tells us there came a time when they substituted animal for human sacrifice. Many other societies have gone the same way. I have problems with customs that have outlived their initial basis of being.”*

As though to hammer the final nail into the coffin of this matter, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, has said with characteristic vigour and some trademark irony, *"There are no African truths, only truths – some of them about Africa."* I put it simply, Africa and Africans are not and cannot be incompatible with science. It is dangerous to sign up to any argument that suggests culture and tradition must be static for their own sake. Society evolves as part of progress or to occasion progress, so must our way of life.

On this occasion, let me choose two examples to illustrate some aspects of our national character or even sub-national character that need to be altered. The examples are chosen merely because they are on my mind and principally because they make good illustrations, in my view.

Among others, the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto has made the issue of the establishment of sane property rights, a much discussed issue. We need only look at the situation with land ownership in Accra. There are upper middle class residential areas for which land leases are given for a mere thirty years. People build residential castles, Taj Mahals indeed, on these plots, in the hope that there will be no vehicle of enforcement. Land guards, a euphemism for private militias, abound. Sometimes, armed to the teeth, ready at a moment's notice to unleash terror. Many times in enforcement of rights that do not exist in law. Multiple ownership and a host of other ills dog the land discussion. With the net consequence that in many places, our land management regime is incompetent and obsolete and dangerously so.

We are incarcerated in this regard, in the dungeons of one of the most explosive consequences of an effete state. What can be more primitive? Restoring sanity to land rights is a difficult exercise. It will involve even the discussion about the role of chiefs, in some cases. It is not a wonder therefore that many governments and politicians think tackling the land matter, too tricky and the political cost too high. The status quo for years has been "do nothing" and the eventual consequence of "do nothing" can be that everything explodes or drowns or is polluted. If we cannot afford to discuss and tackle an explosive issue, can we afford to be consumed by the impending explosion or implosion? The rampant spread of illegal mining, *galamsey*, and the attendant pollution of our water bodies is a furiously blinking light. It is a sign of a terribly weak State. In one of my less generous moments, I would have called such a state, a Buffoon State. This fault-line is as dangerous as it gets and we must act. And act NOW. A Presidency made up of a Lawyer as the top dog and an Economist, as his deputy, is well placed to understand the urgency. They must deal with the matter.

Only because it is a deeply vexing issue, I also raise the veil on the matter of funerals in Ghana for scrutiny. In 2016, why in Ghana in God's holy name, is a person's written instructions on how she should be buried, if the means for doing this exists and are provided for unenforceable in law? We must reform the law here. Or perhaps, educate people more on exactly what needs to be done to ensure that burial wishes of individuals can be respected by surviving loved ones. In addition to the deep misery that many bereaved people must endure when they lose a loved one, it is an experience in the hottest part of hell to deal with funeral preparation in many cases. All who live must eventually die, so why are we so unprepared? Reading Kwame Appiah's experience recently, when his well-known father died, as he narrates it in his book *"In My Father's House,"* reminded me once again that we have a custom that needs reform. Urgently.

Part 6

Advancing Human Capability

The Nobel Prize Winning Economist, Professor Amartya Sen, argues persuasively in my view, that *"Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realize one's full potential as a human being"*

Our African compatriot, also a Nobel Prize winner - this time for literature, Professor Wole Soyinka, once made the poignant remark that *"I cannot accept the definition of collective good as articulated by a privileged minority in society, especially when that minority is in power."* I use Soyinka and Sen as props on this occasion. The point is whatever else the statistic, the purpose of development has to be the attainment of freedom and justice in their broadest sense; the installation of capability in dignity, so that people can live their full potential out. That has to be why government is necessary in the end. And why people will be motivated to participate in the governance effort in the first place. But is it? The examples of fraud and corruption that have dogged our development, many times with deliberate official connivance are worrying in the extreme. The institutional base of our democracy can definitely be strengthened further.

Up till now I have tried to show that we are not an exceedingly law-based society at the micro-level. The green shoots of renewal in ethics and values must be made to blossom to their full height and glory. To do that, we must have the conversation about what is wrong. Why is it that so many of us have no idea, in the real sense, and just to select that example, how much goes into funding political campaigns? Who pays? Where do they source their money? A dense and opaque funding environment for political parties is a

menace to transparency, in the long run. It offers avenues for money laundering and rent seeking and influence buying that should bother us. Why we do not discuss this fully may lie in the fact that we are so deeply polarized and politically divided that on many occasions we forget what binds us together. Again, I call for urgent review of the laws and mechanisms of enforcement of political campaign funding.

Open this space Mr. President, dare to tear down the iron curtains of opacity. Let the oxygen of transparency flow again in our land and in our body politic.

Part 7

Execution is key

Put a few Ghanaians together anywhere, and they start to proffer solutions for the Ghanaian condition. Our conversations, when we are patient enough to be diligent can be among the most insightful analysis of any society's problems and experiences. We talk, we argue, we debate but we do not DO enough.

I have spent all of my adult life in business, in particular in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) tradition. We often say in FMCG that who wins in the market place is usually down to who executes best in the market place. A strategy or the most felicitously expressed vision that is not implemented, is as good as not having one at all – perhaps even worse. This country is not starved of ideas and programs and willingly expressed points of view about what to do. Ghanaian life, I dare to say, is poorer for the main reason that having gained insight we do not do what we need to do.

It is not often that business people look to Karl Marx for inspiration in execution. This quote from his Critique of The Gotha Program, a searing denunciation of The United Workers Party of Germany, is something to bear in mind by the new Government of Ghana: *"Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes."*

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan in their instructive work on the subject of Execution also make an observation that is worthy of all our attention. *"The leader must be in charge of getting things done by running the three core processes—picking other leaders, setting the strategic direction, and conducting operations."*

It is key, indeed essential for the transformation of this country, that we step up our execution capacity, defined simply in this case, as our ability to do in full and on time, what we decide needs to be done. There is not much more I can say on the subject beyond

wishing the government of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo well in this regard. He does not seem to lack much in terms of cerebral capacity. Success, however, will turn on how much his government can convert that cerebral capacity of his and, of his team, into impactful action. My reflections on Execution over my own experience lead me to suggest that, among other things, sustained execution capacity depends on some of what I now list.

- Clarity of Purpose and ability to Focus.
- Management capacity in terms of required skills sets.
- Tenacity and Resilience: principally the stamina and energy to get things done in the environment one finds herself in.
- Humility to be able to learn from everyone and everything and every experience and then to act decisively.

There is no management system on earth that can survive without a feedback loop. Leaders that do not listen are soon overthrown, hopefully, in our circumstances, by the ballot box. For it is the job of us all to ensure that this country once divided so much by the bullet, in coup after coup (sometimes mistaken as revolution), will now come together to be one on the issue of protecting our democracy. And that the Fourth Republic will remain an enduring last republic.

Perhaps on the request I now make I am pushing my luck too much. It would be such a major step forward, if the annual targets of each minister were made known to the public. In very accessible ways to the ordinary citizen. Then we will be able to track achievement against targets. Steady execution depends on granularity. Not just rhetoric.

It remains my fervent hope and wish and aspiration, that in this era, power and authority among those chosen to serve in government, will be wielded with more humility and purpose than we have ever witnessed before in our eventful history. We have a tendency to deify and ritualise political officeholders in Ghana. The mystification and contrived hierarchy is expressed in all manner of ways, as though we elect gods and not simply human beings to power. Much of this is needless and alienating. It will help to bring the people of Ghana together if the ceremony of power can be reduced, and it is a call I again make to the President. These noisy and disruptive sirens now commonly deployed by any semi-demi quaver in office must stop and be more carefully used and regulated, where necessary. The orientation to keep people waiting at meetings advertised to start at particular times, waiting for hours for the high and mighty to make grand unapologetic entries, must be stopped – in the name of all that is good. And so on. We have work to do, a lot of work, to get Ghana going as it should. All of us – peasant and President alike.

Part 8

Conclusion

We are a people descended from forebears who have fought historic battles and endured heroic struggles through time for freedom and dignity and justice. Our coat of arms boldly announces that we value freedom and justice. Justice is a condition of humanity that ensures fairness and a chance to all to live in dignity simply because they are human. The postcolonial development history of Ghana, one in which Achimota and Achimotans have played a major role, for better or for worse has been unsteady at best.

New beginnings offer new opportunities. The current government may not have asked for that responsibility but they have it. Fate and Fortune combine to make Nana Akufo-Addo a president who may finally determine the fate of the constitutional democracy so many, including - no, especially – him, fought so hard for. He, and us all, have a responsibility to dramatically accelerate the process of taking this country decisively on the path of the journey from Third World to First. We are the people who must say with that riveting writer from Harlem, I refer to James Baldwin again, that: “at the very moment (we) thought (we were) lost, our dungeons shook and the chains fell off.” Together as a people we have gone through the electoral cycle that has been the bane of many fragile democracies. Now together let us build this country. My irreverent and radical but intellectually stimulating Uncle, Tony Kofi Obeng, says in his new book, *“Decolonising Africa and African Development,”* thundering with the energy and characteristic authority of an Old Testament prophet: *“None may substitute themselves for the people. Only the people themselves can guarantee the success and irreversibility of their liberation and development. And the people, who are permanent, must own revolutions carried out in their name in fact and not just in theory if they are to outlast leaders who can only ‘come and go’.”* There is much merit in that statement.

Our political campaigns leave us with many footprints on the sands of time. I remember them also for the slogans that emerge. If our politicians are nothing else, in the search for power, or a chance to serve if we are more generous, they can be poetic. We who live in this time must change the destiny of our country and put it on the trajectory of rapid and sustainable development. We need CHANGE and we need to go forward.

Blanket equality of circumstances for all in everything may not be easily attained. We must, however, strive to ensure there is equality in our access to dignity as human beings. It is on that basis that we may lay claim to the status of a truly just society. There is richness in diversity but danger in divisions that precipitate into explosive social fault lines. Whatever else we may be in this life, let us never forget that we are first of all human and in our humanity we are all one.

I began by saying I am a street boy, at heart at least. So, I shout on behalf of the streets if I may, in a grand unity of political polarities, with the combined slogans of the two leading political parties in the last election, this time about Ghana: ***Wonmakyakemi! No Abaabase!!***

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity, there is no better time than now. God bless our school. God bless our country. God bless the human race. We shall all be one.

i **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

- Ghana exceeded the gross enrolment and completion target but net enrolment is a challenge.
- Gross enrolment reached 107 percent in 2013/2014 while net enrolment made slow progress from 88.5 percent in 2008/09 to 89.3 percent in 2013/14.
- The completion rate at primary level exceeded the target by 12.4 percentage points.

2015 Ghana MDG report