

A justified fear of militarization or a projection of trauma?

[The article I wrote on why the security sector should take up education](#) elicited far greater controversies than I had imagined. I had expected there would be some criticism, which is why I did an auto-critique in the article. What seems clear is that people want structural change in education, as long as it deals with cosmetic improvements. They don't want to hear that delivering that expectation is impossible simply because it is a contradiction. Consequently, I am now convinced that a slow change in the sector is the persistent expectation that [conflicting imperatives](#) should be pursued simultaneously.

Generally, there's agreement that a three-step process is needed. First, properly defining what education means and what an educated Rwandan should know. Second, the imperative of putting in place structures to express that idea. Third, to identify the right human resource pool for delivering the idea along its structures. There's controversy whenever an effort is made to address the three points in substance. The critics of my views were less hostile on the first two steps than they were on the third, which suggested that the military should take up the education sector. But is their hostility substantiated or dogmatic? Consider these arguments.

They say the proposal amounts to "militarizing" education. However, they want an education sector that is efficient, effective, accountable and centralized around a clear purpose. When you tell them that commonsense and research (Rwanda Governance Board RGB studies) show that the institutions in the security sector (army and police) are the best performers on these measures, it becomes obvious that they want the

organizational capacity of the army and the police but without the soldiers and police officers. But there's a reason why these institutions are organized and have a sense of clarity about what it is they ought to do and how they should do it, which I called 'doctrine'. I suggested that we don't have a civilian doctrine – a system of values that we all prescribe to – precisely because the education system that was supposed to produce it suffered a stillbirth.

This is the intellectual dishonesty in this criticism. It takes the auxiliary argument regarding the security sector, reduces it to the military, and then transposes it over the primary thesis that demonstrates the imperative of organizational capacity and a sense of purpose in any changes we wish to see in our education system. In other words, any institution whose organizational capacity rivals the kind in the security sector would do well in overseeing education. But as the reality, and research demonstrate, such unique organizational capacity has thus far been demonstrable only in the security sector.

In fact, there has been a tendency to take officers of the army and police into leadership positions outside their institutions in order to export this ethos. Critics point out that this has not worked out so well, and use this as proof that the security sector would fail in the area of education. However, they forget that these officers are deployed there as individuals. They cannot change the culture that they find in an institution. On the contrary, they get swallowed by the culture of the institutions where they are posted, and are likely to lose the clarity and effectiveness that led to their deployment. For such deployments to have effects on the culture of the institutions to which such officers are deployed, they would need to deploy what constitutes a critical mass of officers into that institution.

It seems this is the only alternative to actually handing over institutions to the security sector. When the Rwanda

National Police was created in 2000, a critical mass of officers of the RDF were deployed there in order to transfer the organizational capacity and culture of the latter into the former. Today, it is difficult to separate the two in terms of doctrine and how it is manifest in producing the clarity of purpose around security and law enforcement.

The point is that if a leader is good, he or she will need a critical mass to implement her doctrine; without a critical mass ready to support her, any attempt from her to impose discipline will mean death, a coup, or exile.

Critics also point out that “militarized” education will kill innovation and out of the box thinking. This is not supported by evidence. Some of the best schools in the world belong to the military, although they are not military schools. West Point, for instance, is in the caliber of Ivy League schools.

Moreover, the military has been the centre of innovation in the US and Israel; they have globally renowned think tanks that shape global thinking on strategic matters. The US defense is responsible for discovering the internet, for instance. The RDF, on a lesser scale and for obvious reasons, has been investing in Research and Development.

If anything, the present education system of cramming and regurgitating information is – by design and intent – a militarized education; it takes place in an environment of command and control in the classroom where only the superior (the teachers) knows everything and the subordinates (students) know nothing.

Therefore, critics confuse the concepts of discipline and command. They are not the same thing. Out-of-the-box thinking may be difficult to nurture in an environment of command; however, no worthwhile endeavor – including innovation – happens without discipline. As noted above, the military has traditionally excelled at research and innovation. I think

discipline has a lot to do with that.

Even if one were to concede that argument on militarization as somewhat valid, does Rwanda's security sector fit the definition of a militarized force? Is it brutal, suppressive, coercive, and feared? As noted above, repeatedly Rwandans rank them among the institutions they trust and are most satisfied with – above 85% satisfaction. The RDF's civil military affairs and the RNP's community policing departments have been involved in streamlining the force to be "community"-oriented. Consequently, they have been involved in "human security" activities that include mobile hospitals where they have treated people; they have built houses; and have given out cows and mosquito nets. They have also been paying health insurance for the most vulnerable members of the community. Without exhausting these examples, the question to ask is this: Beyond liberal dogma, in what ways is Rwanda's security sector militarized?

I have been thinking about this and have come to the conclusion that the police and army are still conceived this way as a result of trauma. We all have a traumatic memory or memories tied to the armed forces, which we transpose and project on the RDF and RNP.

It's our memory that is militarized. However, the RDF and RNP carry the burden of offloading this trauma from us, which they are doing through their community outreach and human security programmes. For this reason, I suggested that taking education to the security sector would accelerate this demilitarization of our minds and society. This way, a generation that is entirely unburdened with this trauma may emerge in the near future.

Criticism must be in context

I do agree with the critics in their general view that under normal circumstances the military should not have anything to

do with education. Heck, even the government should not be in education. Ordinarily, the government should only participate in education in the sense of articulating its needs; it ought to make some input because it needs a certain knowledge base to run society. It should not take ownership or charge of crafting education. In fact, the government is expected to fund it without owning it. However, the task of crafting education is entirely that of the intellectual class; they debate ideas and come up with a consensus about certain fundamental ideas and ideals that should reflect and grow society.

This is the conventional sociology of education. However, there's nothing conventional about our situation. Colonial and missionary systems of education have not allowed us, as a society, to know what its intellectuals think; we are therefore unable to distil out who our best thinkers are, and allow them to articulate education. Even when they do, the ideas they express reflect the perpetuation of the colonial and missionary intent: our education system has not been able to create home-grown intellectuals in the real sense of it. As a result, the edifice of colonial thought and practice remains intact. The globally renowned African intellectual, Mahmood Mamdani, has noted that for Africa to get out of this maze, to find a cure, it must grow its own timber – nurture homegrown intellectuals. This deficiency is the reason my proposal replaces the process above with Urugwiro deliberations on education, as would be the case with any structural national emergency.

It is only out of necessity that the government finds itself deeply imbedded in education; it's filling a void because it can't afford to do nothing. However, it can only do so much. Which is why no structural transformation has taken place in the sector: the cart is pulling the horse because government is avoiding a necessary confrontation against forces that are invested and entrenched in the misdirecting Africa's education

– because it's the real frontline in the struggle for real independence. This is the politics of education, which is closely linked to the economics of education but is entirely different from the sociology of education noted above.

If the aim is to fix education, then avoiding the confrontation is delaying the inevitable. A bandage approach can only stop the bleeding but can't be a cure for the wound. When you apply a bandage to a wound, you must replace it – the recurrent changes. These changes show that at least this government is trying to grapple with the challenge. Others have entirely given up and have turned to prayers to heal the wound. A more reliable and stable education system that is only subjected to generational changes will only emerge when we are clear of the inbuilt contradictions.