

- Liedman, Sven-Eric (1998). *I skuggan av framtiden*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag.
- Rogers, Carl (1969). *Freedom to Learn*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill.
- Strong, Marie (1992). Self-help learning: a dual concept. In *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, no. 1
- Stubblefield, Harold W. & Keane, Patrick (1994). *Adult Education in the American Experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Törnqvist, Ingvar (2002). Oscar Olssons första folkbildarperiod. I *Årsbok om folkbildning*. Utgitt av Föreningen för folkbildningsforskning.
- Tøsse, Sigvart (1997). The Workers' Education Association in Norway: Political education and hegemony struggle 1931-1940. Paper to the VIth European Research Seminar Cross-cultural Influences in the History of Popular Adult education, Akademie Arnoldsheim, Frankfurt/M, 15-19 September.
- Tøsse, Sigvart (2002). *Selvstyrt læring: Tilbakeblikk på et gammelt tema med fortsatt aktualitet*. Paper to Forskning i Norden, Göteborg, 22-24 mai.
- Tøsse, Sigvart (2005). *Folkeopplysning og voksenopplæring*. Oslo: Didakta Norsk Forlag.
- Tøsse, Sigvart (2006). Lifelong learning and new competence. In Søren Ehlers (ed.). *Milestones towards lifelong learning systems*. Copenhagen: Danish University of Education Press.
- Welton, Michael R. (1996). In Defense of the Lifeworld. In Michael . Welton (ed.). *In Defense of the Lifeworld*. Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Williams, Raymond (1977). *Marx and Literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Zierkiewicz, Edyta (2005). Self-help Books as an Educational Offer on the Modern Market in Poland. In Agnieszka Bron et.al. "Old" and "New" Worlds of Adult Education. Wrocław: ESREA.

Avoseh, Mejai B.M.
The University of South Dakota, Vermillion, USA
mavoseh@usd.edu

Without Genealogy: A Search for the Unwritten History of Adult Education in Traditional Africa

In spite of the complex nature of education, life and everything else in traditional Africa, it is still possible to disentangle aspects of 'adult education' from the lifelong process of traditional education. Tracing the history of adult education within the complex mix, is a much more daunting task. Most documents on the history of education in Africa begin with the incursion of colonialism into the continent and construct the history of education and adult education in Africa as history of Western education in Africa. The difficulty, and almost impossible task of tracing the history of traditional education is understandable given the heavy ascent on Orature in African traditional societies.

With a special reference to institutions of 'higher education' in traditional African education – including secret cults, divinities, and some other aspects of traditional education – this paper attempts a trace of the history of adult education in traditional Africa despite the lack of genealogy.

Introduction

For some people the mere mention of indigenous or traditional education in Africa more often than not; conjures ideas of something of a mythical proportion. For others, indigenous education in Africa simply refers to a body of primitive and rusty tribal ideas in pre-colonial Africa that were quarantined by Western and in some cases; by Islamic education. What is true of education in general is especially true of adult and higher education. The nature of education in traditional Africa especially makes it difficult for one to discern adult education from all other forms of education because education was a continuum that goes along with life.

According to some experts, the history of adult education in Western societies has generally been tied to social movements in quest of justice and equity. The same trend of using socio-political and economic issues to construct the history of adult education may not be applicable in traditional Africa. For one, there are unique and natural differences between Western and traditional African value

systems. However, the most appropriate and unique difference for the purposes of this paper is their worldview. While the West generally interprets the world from a linear perspective; the African has a holistic understanding of the world. Within the holistic way of life there is a link between the unborn, the living and the dead. Within this setting everything flows into everything else just as everyone exists because of everyone else in the family and community. In this setting, education, religion, morals, dancing, rituals, celebrations etcetera all dovetail in the community. Consequently everything is an opportunity for learning because education is everything. Even in education, the African traditional society emphasizes "the integration of all aspects of education, formal, non-formal and informal" (Omolewa 1981, p.20). This complex chemistry makes it almost impossible to separate education into primary, secondary, tertiary and so forth in traditional Africa. However, the institutions that service specific areas of indigenous education including age groups, trade, and apprenticeship can be used to figure out the different 'levels' of education. The institutions that provide 'adult education' in addition to the focus of 'the education of adults' in traditional Africa provide the best pedestal for tracing the genealogy of the people and the communities that give meaning to adult education; and through them the history of adult education.

The history of adult education is thus presented in this paper outside the purview of say, a national or continental adult education history. History is applied here as an avenue to provide an opportunity for comparative study of institutions of adult education in traditional Africa. Lalage Bown (1981) argued that this form of 'historical' study is one of the ways to compare "adult education at different stages of a country's..." or a people's growth. Quoting from *The Exeter Papers*, Bown (ibid) gives the many uses of the history of adult education in this way. She contends:

It can be used to illuminate the development of *ideas about adult learning* in different parts of the world; it can be used to examine *similarities and differences in cultural and national backgrounds* and in highlighting the '*significant models or forms* which were important in the original development of the adult education system'; and it can be used to compare different methods of teaching adults (p.164).

I trace the history of adult education in this paper as a way of reviewing some of the key institutions and functions of adult education in traditional Africa. Fajana (1960) uses the agencies and functions argument in his study of educational policy in Nigerian

traditional society. He concluded that "a study of traditional educational policy is therefore a study of the various agencies and their united efforts to achieve the communal goal" (p.37). This line of argument is especially applicable to a study of the history of adult education in traditional Africa. Consequently, the search for the history of adult education within the traditional African educational system is tantamount to trying to understand the place of cults, divinities, religion and morality, festivals and cultural dances in traditional African society. I often feel obligated to clarify the fact that traditional Africa can never be used in one particular instance to represent the tsunamic diversity of the peoples, land, culture and history of the continent. However, one can use certain commonalities that connect most of the life-defining values of the people. This paper uses examples mainly from the Gu and Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria.

Adult Education and its Institutions in Traditional Africa

Education, including adult education, in traditional Africa was a lifelong process of learning that included socialization and acquisition of knowledge of one's culture and history and skills for professional practice. The complex and life-defining process of education is designed in such a way that irrespective of one's age and disposition, there is always an opportunity to learn and to teach. Most indigenous education is 'structured' to some extent. Okello (1993, p. 28) put this structure into three main compartments of "Home-centered methods", "Community-centered methods" and "Institutional-centered methods". Each level of these methods sometimes helps to determine the 'grade' level of the participant(s). At all the levels, the adult is either a teacher or a student but with most of the onus of educating the young falling on the adults. Irrespective of age, institution and methods, the overall aim of traditional education is the cultivation of *Iwa* 'good character' which contains the attributes of an active and ideal citizen who combines intellectual, moral, religious and professional values and skills to sustain family, community and self. Ocitti (1994, pp.19-20) identified both formal and informal aspects of this character-based lifelong learning at the level of adult education. The formal aspects were more consistent with adult education in that they focus on skills, vocational and related training, age-groups and initiations. The most formal levels are in the "apprenticeship training programs that blended the intellectual and practical elements into education so well by putting learning into action and action into learning" (Avoseh

2002, p.8). At this level secret cults serve as 'Institutions of Higher Education' and members of secret cults serve as the 'philosopher kings'.

Although adults provide the leadership for learning at these levels, they too become learners because "the adults continue to learn by teaching the young and introducing necessary changes into the life of the society" (Anyanwu 1981, p.98). With reference to the Yoruba, Anyanwu (ibid) further explains how adult education both prepares an individual for the most esteemed status in the community as well as defines the 'real' adult. The educator of adults in traditional adult education must "guide other people on aspects of traditional education" (p.104) but because such an individual does not possess all knowledge yet, he/she must immerse self in continuing education and professional development. It is worth quoting Anyanwu (ibid) extensively here:

...he/she (adult educator cum learner) must strive to belong to some of the cults, take part in civic assignments and through cultivated diligence, take part in discussions with groups of people on any aspect of traditional education and culture (p.104-105).

It is through such efforts in lifelong education that the adult educator can hope to advance his/her status to that of a 'revered elder' (and in most cases a revered ancestor) which is a synonym for "ripe experience, accumulation of knowledge and a high level of intelligence" (ibid. p.105) and good character.

Based on the foregoing, it can be affirmed that the lifelong nature of adult education and indigenous education in general allows a thin line between the educator and the learner. The indicators of adult education and one's level of advancement include the complexity of the content, advance use of language, application of proverbs and stories, decoding myths, adjudicating, exhibiting patience, self-control, knowing how to keep secrets, knowing the depths of one's chosen career, the size of one's farm, knowing how to lead prayers and pour libation, and knowing how to put oneself in other 'people's skin' etcetera. These indicators can be put under broad headings. The first is intellectual training and growth which include coordinating experience through abstract reasoning, knowing the seasons and their relation to agriculture, knowing plants, animals and the geography of the community and its neighbors. Also included in the intellectual training are knowledge of proverbs, stories, poems and the good command of language. The second is vocational education that includes a cluster of trades and professions including native

medicine, music and arts, hunting, farming, forms of priesthood among others. The vocational education component is usually predicated on the apprenticeship scheme. All these forms of education converge in participation in the community and are therefore inseparable irrespective of the fact that many avenues and institutions service the educational system. I shall briefly examine some institutions and functions that help our historical search and understanding of adult education in traditional African indigenous education.

Cults and the History of Adult Education

As was pointed out earlier, the history of traditional education at the adult and higher level is the history of the institutions that house and dispense adult education. In most traditional communities, cults and secret societies were the highest institutions of learning just as membership of such societies was one of the highest 'degrees or qualifications' as long as one's character does not suffer blemish. In most traditional societies, including those of the Gu and the Yoruba, there are usually two categories of cults, mainly those of the living and those of the departed. The cults of the living are usually referred to as secret cults because they are the philosopher kings. The Yoruba call them *Egbe Awo* or *Egbe Imule* while the Gu refer to them as *Awono*. The second category of cults is that of the ancestors. The ancestors are the bridges between the living family and those of the spirit world. Hence, they are part of the family and part of all the community's efforts. This is why they are known as "the living – dead (who) are partly 'human' and partly 'spirit'" (Mbiti 1969, p.85).

Secret Cults: The history of cults is as old as the communities in which they exist. Secret cults belong to those of the living and members usually form the intellectual cream of society. Members of these cults are believed to exercise "powers ranging from the intellectual, judicial, moral to metaphysical powers" (Avoseh 2001, p.484). They put these powers to use in the educational process at the adult and higher levels through initiations and rituals.

Daramola ati Jeje (1975, p.130) trace the history of *Egbe Awo* (secret cults) in traditional Yoruba society to *apapo awon agba ilu* (the council of elders). These authors further establish the historical fact that in those days the members of secret cults were same as the chiefs or title holders in their different communities. They formed the king's advisory council and served simultaneously as 'checks and balances' should a king decide to be too absolute in his powers

(*nwọn si maa ndá ọba l'ẹkun nigbakugba ti o ba nfẹ gbe sáraá rẹ koja mpsalasi*). Members of secret cults wielded such powers because of their intellectual, moral and experiential advantage.

These are the powers that make them “institutions of higher or further education” and put them in charge of the education of the “select or the elect” of their communities (Fafunwa 1974, p.16). Fafunwa (ibid) added that at this level of the education of adults;

...the secret of power (real or imaginary), profound native philosophy, science and religion were mastered...(and) the curriculum was relevant to the needs of the society (p.16).

The content at this level was usually woven into initiation rites, rituals and other religious and advanced ceremonies of the community that belong more to what Ocitti (ibid) classified as ‘formalized’ aspects of indigenous education. At such formal levels, “learners may be kept incommunicado for weeks or months” because ‘only the deep can call the deep’ (Avoseh, 2001, p.484). As a matter of fact, the training of a priest by a master-priest takes more than a decade because in “ancient times Ifa priests were the guardians, counselors, philosophers and physicians of their various communities” (Onabamiro 1983, p.66). Onabamiro (ibid) further illuminates the fact that “if the training goes well without a hitch and if the trainee has a retentive memory the training lasts...ten to twelve years”. The master-priest will usually be a member of secret cults. In that case, members of secret cults have power over education in both the intellectual and the vocational realms and so are very powerful. It is important to clarify the fact that irrespective of individual attributes of members of secret cults; their individual and collective powers are held in trust and on behalf of those who have held such powers before them, that is; the ancestors. So, the cults of the living, in most cases, derive the authority of their powers from the ancestors.

Cult of Ancestors: Again, the holistic approach to life puts the ancestors at the center of everything because they are the spiritual arm of the extended family. Understanding the role of the ancestors in everything may provide the ‘outsider’ of traditional African value-system “an intelligent appreciation of traditional educational policy” (Fajana, ibid. p.34). The ancestors’ involvement in education is at all levels and the history of their involvement dates back to the first ancestors of any given community. Fajana (ibid) puts it more succinctly in his explanation of the part that the ancestors play in the world of the traditional Nigerian. According to him (p.34):

The spirits of the ancestral dead were incorporated into the social system as an intimate and integral part of the social group. Also *law and custom were believed to have been handed down from the spirit world from time immemorial, from ancestor to ancestor*. From birth onwards, there was a gradual education ...into the various strata of the society, each stratum scrupulously distinguished from the others in rights and duties, until ...the individual ...became one of the elders and a repository of all the wisdom and lore of the tribe (emphasis mine).

The importance and life-shaping role of education makes it a terrain where the ancestors are involved at all levels as a matter of obligation to the extended family and the society at large. However, the degree of their involvement at each level is marked by content and methodology. In the history of adult education in traditional Africa, ancestors had been involved from time immemorial and have continued to sustain and overhaul the content of education especially at the higher level. Whereas secret cults derive their authority from the ancestors; “the cult of ancestors is the source of its own authority and power” (Avoseh, 2001, p.484).

Although various communities express the involvement of ancestors in the educational system in different ways; most of the ways converge in rites and initiations. Among the Gu of southwestern Nigeria for instance, initiations into the *zangbeto* and *oro* cults are advanced level education processes that involve incarceration and or nightly sessions in jungles for long periods. Those who were selected at given points for this advance education class were screened by the ancestors through the *bokoro* (diviner). The ancestors advise if there is any danger ahead and what sacrifices to make to appease a particular god or great ancestor before the session begins. One recalls being involved in one of such educational process as a young adult. The format was usually formal. Each session began with prayers and libation to the ancestors. There were codes of secrecy, of ‘manliness’ and the need for valor. The idea of nightly meetings in the jungle and of sneaking out of the village in the dead of the night, all added an air of awe to the process. The nightly sessions were rather inconvenient but the status and recognition that go with graduating from that ‘class’ pay for all the inconveniences in the world. The ancestors serve as the institutions and represent the history of such sessions as described above. Their presence is a ‘given’ and this is one of their ways of fulfilling their obligation to sustain the community, its tradition and solidarity and “to guarantee

moral consistency" (Teffo & Roux 1998, p.142). Consequently, the cult of ancestors has a pervasive presence even in festivals, religious and cultural dances and celebrations.

Festivals, Cultural Dances and the History of Adult Education

At the risk of tautology, one needs to point again to the epistemological universe of traditional Africa as being along the lines of a holistic approach in which there is a constant intercourse between the knower and the known, between the process and the product, between the dancer, the music and the drum and so on. Consequently, aesthetic is ingrained in epistemology just as both flow into religion and culture. It is for such reasons that Anyanwu (1983, p.105) concluded that the traditional African does not separate "the inner world of spirits and the outer world of reality" but instead constructs a "unitary world of aesthetic continuum". This aesthetic continuum is especially italicized in the use of festivals, cultural dances and religious celebrations to foster adult education.

The interface defines most festivals, initiations, and worships as religious, moral and educational programs of the community.

Religious Festivals: Most festivals in traditional Africa had their origins in religion. Most of such festivals were ways of adoring and expressing gratitude to the Supreme Being through His ministers-deities like *Sàngo*, *Oro*, *Ọsun*, and even through the ancestors (Idowu 1962, Mbiti 1969, Omolewa 1981 and Yerby 1971). Such festivals, according to Omolewa (1981, p.20) "provide the local population with 'courses' in the history of the locality, accounts of origins, stories and legends of families and great men (women) produced in the society". Also through such festivals, praise songs (*oriki*) are used to enliven the history of the community with references to the feats and failures of ancestors and the lessons there from. *Ewi* (poems) are used at such occasions to teach moral lessons. Even the dances on such festivals have educational impact. Again, Omolewa (ibid) puts it well: "...the exquisite dancing steps and body contortions, and carefully worked out arrangements for order of appearances, embodies education".

Idowu (1962, p.192-194) gives the history, moral and educational lessons of *egungun* and *oro* festivals in Yoruba culture. He outlines how both festivals are used to educate celebrants of the ancestors and the need to be of good conduct in readiness for life after death. *Orisà-nlá* festival is for instance used to teach and re-emphasize the need for good conduct and especially self-discipline in terms of

alcohol consumption. Any celebration of *Orisà-nlá* is a lesson in character education for the adult because in "the theology of the Yoruba... *Orisà-nlá* represents the norm of ethical and ritual purity" (Idowu, p.151). *Orisà-nlá* for instance, forbids palm-wine because "wine is an intoxicant which is capable of spoiling man's (woman's) personality" (ibid). The *Ọsun* festival is another important Yoruba festival with a lot of educational, religious and moral significance. History has it that *Ọsun* was one of the wives of the god of thunder *Sàngo* who was a powerful king of Oyo. He became a deity because he was a super active citizen in his life. *Ọsun* is worshiped in most parts of Yoruba land as the goddess of fertility who is associated with the *Ọsun* River. *Ọsun* festival in Oshogbo is a process of teaching morals, hope for the barren and the importance of procreation. The rites and rituals of *Ọsun* Oshogbo festival are therefore more educational and again re-emphasize the complex mix and the hands of the ancestors in everything.

Initiations and Cultural Dances: Initiations are one of the most pronounced forms of formal education in traditional Africa. They usually have religious cum educational contents and significance in addition to the socio-cultural merriments that accompany the complexion of different stages of initiation. Again there are variations in the format and specifics of who does what at what point. What is constant across-board is the fact that the history of initiations carries with it advanced levels of indigenous education woven around religious rites and age groups. Most stages of initiation were sacrosanct so much so that to violate them would lead to sanctions from the deities and or the ancestors.

The *Dan* *Votùn* of the Gu of Southwestern Nigeria is one of such initiations where new recruits for *Dan* are put in confinement for periods ranging from nine to twenty four months. During their seclusion the *Votùnsi* in-the-making, undergo different forms of training that include language peculiar to the deity, forms of greeting, dancing steps, new spirits of commitment to other devotees and the need to pursue the finest things after graduation. In fact, some learn new trades while in the 'seminary'. By their graduation/initiation, they are entirely 'born again'. They take new names; have different types of incision on their faces and bodies. They are now *Votùnsi* and by virtue of which much is expected from them morally, intellectually and spiritually because of their advanced level of education. In return, they are accorded very high respect and recognition. At their 'graduation' there are celebrations, eating and dancing. Those who

aspire to be so initiated go for special prayers and make offering so that when their time comes, the gods will not say no. The neo-*Votùnsi* also looks forward to the next and higher level of their initiation cum education.

Mbiti (1969, pp.121-122) gave a list of initiation rites across Africa and summarized their significances to include ritually introducing the young adult into 'the art of communal living', 'incorporation into adult life', and also "introduces them to the life of the living-dead as well as the life of those yet to be born" (p.121). Mbiti gives a round up of initiation thus:

Initiation rites have a great educational purpose. ...often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated...a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationship; and in some areas, ... they join secret societies each of which has its own secrets, activities and language (p.122).

Initiation rites from their commencement to the final stages of graduation and celebration, including the cultural dances that accompany such celebrations all combine to add to the complexity of education. This complexity also extends to religion, the spiritual, the corporeal, the environment, the un-born, the living, and the living-dead which are all embed in an individual's life. Thus, life and living in traditional African societies was a manifestation of this holistic continuum. This continuum is what makes education a lifelong and historical process that connects present, past and future generations.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made in this paper to tease out the history of adult education in traditional Africa in spite of the heavy accent on orality. The paper has not attempted to delve into criticisms and limitations often raised against most issues that are linked to traditional Africa because that would correlate to searching for the history of adult education in traditional Africa vis-à-vis a Western history of adult education.

One is however not unaware of such criticisms which include too much emphasis on orality and age, tendency towards authoritarianism, and over-glorification of the past that makes it all appear more utopian. Most of these criticisms and observations are well-placed especially coming from those who are 'outsiders' to the

culture or from those who are products of the culture but have become what a prominent African scholar called 'deluded-hybrids'. Most of us who are outsiders to the Western society, irrespective of our degree of education in the West, still remain, to a large extent, *Ogberi* (the uninitiated) in most Western cultures.

The more important issue I have tried to address is to determine the extent, if any, that one can trace the history of adult education in traditional Africa. At this point the question still remains: what is the history of adult education in traditional Africa? Given the unique nature of African traditional societies, this question is logically a loaded one. For one, the history of anything in traditional Africa almost implies the history of everything else because of the complex continuum I mentioned repeatedly above. Notwithstanding this holistic symmetry, I have been able to link the history of adult education with the genealogy of each given community. The genealogical line extends to the first ancestors and thus the history of education, of religion, of culture, of trade, of war and of adult education is the history of the people. The institutions and formats that we have identified in this paper are more of signposts that lead to more fundamentals that connect everyone to everyone else and establish education including adult education as a life's journey. The history of this journey starts in the womb and continues in the tomb down to the first ancestors. This genealogical line is bridged across the living, the dead and the unborn through Orature.

References

- Anyanwu, C.N. (1981). Principles and Practice of Adult Education and Community Development. Ibadan: Abiprint Publishing Company Limited.
- Anyanwu, K.C. (1983). The African Experience in the American Marketplace. Smithtown, NY: Exposition Press.
- Avoseh, M.B. M. (2002) 'Investigating the World of Adult Education in Africa'. In AERC 2002 Proceedings- Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Adult Education Research Conference, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, May 24-26, pp.7-12.
- Avoseh, M.B.M. (2001). Learning to be active citizens: lessons of traditional Africa for Lifelong learning. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20, 6 479-486.
- Bown, L. (1981). History and Adult Education. In Bown, L & Okedara, J.T. (Eds.), An Introduction to the Study of Adult Education (pp.159-167). Ibadan, University Press Limited.
- Daramola, O. ati Jeje, A. (1975) Awon Àsà ati Òrìsà Ilẹ Yoruba. Ibadan, Onibon-Oje Press.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1974) History of Education in Nigeria. London: George Allen & Unwin.

- Fajana, A. (1960) Educational Policy in Nigerian Traditional Society. *Phylon*, 33, 1, 33-48
- Idowu, E. B. (1962). *Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman.
- Mbiti, J.S.(1969) *African Religions and Philosophy* , London, Heinemann.
- Ocitti, J.P. (1994) An Introduction to Indigenous Education in East Africa. *Supplement to Adult Education and Development*, 42, 1-126.
- Okello, G.A. (1993) The conceptual and practical environmental orientations of African indigenous education. *Adult Education and Development*, 41, 27-32
- Omolewa, M. (1981). *Adult Education Practice in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited.
- Onabamiro, S. (1983). Islamic, Christian, and Indigenous Religion in Nigerian Education. In Obayan, P. & Arinze, E. (Eds.), *The Use of Cultural Heritage in Nigerian Education* (pp.59-68). Lagos/Ibadan, National Commission for Museums and Monuments/Institute of Education, University of Ibadan.
- Teffo, L.J. & Roux, A.P.J.(1998) *Metaphysical Thinking in Africa*. In Coetzee, P.H. and Roux, A.P.J. (Eds.), *Philosophy from Africa* (pp.134-148). Johannesburg, International Thompson Publishing (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd.
- Yerby, F. (1971). *The Dahomean*. New York: Dell Publishing.