History, Education and Social Transformation in Africa

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Abstract

Africa's current socio-economic predicament is often solely attributed to political and economic mismanagement. However, such an analysis is far from comprehensive, as it fails to account for the historical, sociological and psychological causes of the current unsatisfactory social conditions in the continent. The paper seeks to present the role of history and education in Africa's social transformation. Thereafter, the paper reflects on some apparent mental impediments to Africa's social transformation, namely, conservatism, feeble social consciousness, and blind acceptance of the white-black dichotomy, and a fixation with foreign paradigms of managing public affairs. The paper calls for an interdisciplinary approach to the verifying, mitigating and/or eliminating of these impediments.

Key words: History, education, social transformation, Africa

INTRODUCTION

Since independence of most African States, there has been unwavering adherence to world class laws of power acquisition and the judicious distribution of scarce human and material resources. Our leaders have continued to rely on unrewarding and self saving abstract view of history which disregards the significant lessons of our glorious past; and a kind of history that is incapacitating and burdensome to economic and political development.

Notable, historical -events such as the Egyptian Pyramid, inter ethnic interactions, linguistic interrelatedness and so on form part of our glorious past. Others like the famous slave trade, various civil wars, and military incursion into politics, apartheid and other countless disturbances have on the other hand threatened the unity and development of the continent.

The historical foundations of the continent have been taken for granted. Little effort has been made by policy makers to harness the bountiful harvest of our rich economic, cultural and political history to our advantage. (Ayandele, 1979) Lament that …indeed one of the painful wonders of modern Nigeria is the incredible myopia of policy makers who in their perverted judgment, (think that) development of Nigeria is basically a physical affair and not…in the context of a rationalized authentic cultural heritage of the Nigerian people". A well structured consciousness of the dynamics of our history will promote the development of the feeling of patriotism.

Education presupposes the all round development of the child and the processes of equipping individuals and society with the knowledge, skills, cognition perspectives and values required and or expected to make for a meaningful life. Education entails all the processes of socialization and enculturation in the society. Education therefore evolves as human beings interact with one another and with the environment and develops as the community endeavours to meet their social, economic and environment challenges in their bid to make for a better life.

Fundamentally, education is a veritable instrument for social transformation. Contemporary western technology have also presented education as an index of national development as reflected in the Nigeria's much taunted millennium development goals. But development ideology and or perspective which the social system seeks to attain, sustain, propagate, acculturate and project. Education therefore may be an end but in itself a means to an end.

The educational processes of a society would be programmed and directed towards achieving what that society perceives as development. It then means that with an inappropriate estimation of development values, the education system in such a society may be operating but without the desired results because the realities in the circumstance might have been at variance with the development expectations. Almost half a century since most African countries attained political independence, Kwame Nkrumah's prophecy that political independence would certainly be followed by all-round prosperity has not been fulfilled. Instead, Africa is now plagued by the HIV-Aids pandemic, an increasing number of failed states, violent inter-state and intra-state conflicts, still-born pluralistic governance systems, rapidly deteriorating social services, all of which have culminated in spiraling poverty. It is premised on Kwasi Wiredu's assertion that the task of philosophy is to examine the intellectual

foundations of human life using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human well being (Wiredu 1980). More specifically, in its quest for insight into apparent modes of thought that hinder desirable social transformation in contemporary Africa, this paper employs the critical and prescriptive techniques of philosophic reflection. The critical technique of philosophic reflection is characterized by the questioning of beliefs whose truth is normally taken for granted. It lays great emphasis on independent and original thinking, which includes but transcends empirical investigation (Maritain 1979).

The countries of western education praxis in Africa have not salvaged the continent from the in glorious status of underdevelopment. Therefore to examine role of history and education in social transformation in Africa, this paper seeks to critically examine the nexus between history and social transformation, education and social transformation as well as x-raying the core challenges of history, education and social transformation in Africa.

Delineation of concepts
History

History is adorned with the special privilege of sharing the qualities of the Arts, the Humanities and the social sciences. It also deals with the issues of man's relationship with his fellow beings in the past and the present, which automatically has a way of rubbing off on the future.

There are two simple ways of looking at history. The first sees it as a chronicle or record of important events that took place in the past. The second considers history as a scientific or methodological research into the past of an individual, a people or a nation. The human memory and experience thrive in the past. One's ability to call up the events of the past and exploit them for the benefit of the present and perhaps, the future is intelligence or ingenuity. The importance of history, whether as a discipline or as a store of past knowledge or experience into the memory, beings to emerge rodent we realize that the bulk of human achievement is deep-rooted in the past of history. According to Marwick (1980), History is functional in the sense of meeting the need in which society has to know itself and to understand its relationship with the past and with other societies and cultures. It is also poetic in the sense that there is inborn in almost every individual…a curiosity about the past.

The above assertion presents to us two view points of appreciating history. First it highlights the need for the society to reflect on its glorious past or other wise with proper attention on its achievement or failure.

Education

Western intellectualism as presented to Africa perceives education to refer to the processes of engaging in schooling and school related activities of the literacy and numeric's and their associated intellectual activities, attitudes and behavior. This perception of education which incidentally is the popular, dominant and the commonly encountered in the western education system, deliberately and strategically implies as it assumes that before the advent of the European, Africans had no education, until the benevolent missionaries introduced the enterprise of education as part of their civilizing mission. But it is universally evident that education is a heritage of all people and cultures. Some tacit recognition of this fact is evident in such expressions as "Western education, "Oriental or Islamic education" [Kalu, 2006].

Kalu (2006) advanced education as all the conscious processes and activities, both institutionalized and uninstitutionalized, organized and un-organized, graded and ungraded, literate and non-literate which are made to assist succeeding generations of members of a society to acquire the corpus of knowledge-values, attitudes, beliefs, mindsets, skills, central tendencies, and orientation-which are seen as representing the proper way of life in the given time and place. Education is a means of organizing the individual self and the social self, into a disciplined stable and meaningful unity. Education consists of a methodical socialization of the younger generation. It is the process which the individual acquires the many physical, moral, social, capacities demanded of him by the group into which he is born and within which he must functions (Swift 1909) cited in Abraham 2010.

Education is the process of all round development of the child, equipping the individual with the expected approved knowledge, traits, skills, values and worldviews that would make for a meaningful life and well being within the given society and epoch. It is essentially a systematic process of transmitting a people's culture from one generation to the next generation as applicable within the epoch.

From the foregoing, education therefore is the systematic transmission and development of the culture of a people as societal order. Durkheim (1956) argued that education is, above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the condition of its very existence. He contented that it is society as a whole and each particular social median that determines the ideal that education realizes. Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity, education perpetuates and reinforce this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands on the other hand, without certain diversity all cooperation would be impossible, education assumes the persistence of this necessary diversity by being itself diversified and specialized. Therefore, effective transformation of a society is

to be based on the transmission of the history of such society from generation to generation through the process of education.

Social Transformation

The term social transmission is often understood as the change in culture in response to such factor as economic growth, war, education or political upheavals (Castle 2001). Nevertheless such a conceptualization unjustifiably limits this phenomenon to only that change which happens to society, ignoring that which is initiated by members of the society. Yet scientific discoveries have triggered many social transformations throughout history, as have religious and royal edicts. Some countries have achieved almost entirely intentional social transformation, as ended apartheid. Thus, Garonna and Triacca (1999) have correctly underscored the need to understand social transformation which comes about through both natural causes and the deliberate actions of the members of a human group and which contributes positively to the quality of human existence in the said group.

Nevertheless, we must not confuse social transformation with social action-a strategy by social workers to effect limited social change at the intermediate or macro levels of society (Khinduka and Coughlin 1975). In view of the fact that a human person is rational by nature, any effort to effect society change through manipulation is morally unacceptable.

Theoretical perspective
Presentivism

This study is anchored on presentivism approach. This approach becomes clearer when considers the opinion of Schaff (1996) that "periods of instability which go with satisfaction with the present will favour the acceptance of a traditional image of the past. This is another way of saying that history cannot be presented without being coloured by the circumstances and trends of the era in which it was written.

Therefore, presentivism means that the factors determining the climate of the era in which a particular history is written must be married to the raw fact of history "as it really were" with each affecting the other positively. Every historian's perception, concern and enthusiasm are often determined by the prevailing social condition.

History is therefore useful in meeting new situations because a clear comprehension of human behavior in the past paves the way for familiar elements to solve the present problems more intelligently (Marwick, 1980).

Education and Social Transformation

History seems to indicate that human progress towards higher levels of material and cultural achievements has four basic requirements: technological development, sociocultural transformation, the accumulation of Knowledge, and man's struggle for freedom; all of which cannot and would not be accomplished without education and the social awareness it creates and fosters.

Education is the principal method through which societies transmit knowledge from one generation to another, learn how to develop and accumulate knowledge, preserve certain values and transform others, and introduce social and cultural change in the form of new, non-conventional ideas and values and attitudes, and non-traditional ways of thinking. It is through education that people learn how to become more socially and politically conscious, and how to increase their ability to acquire and use knowledge to improve the quality of their lives. But for education to instigate the desired sociocultural transformations in society and produce the know-how needed to achieve material and cultural progress, education has to come with certain things, most important among them are the right knowledge and the right attitudes. Education that fails to instill in students the right attitudes and equip them with the proper training and expose them to right scientific facts and information can, and often does, create an obstacle to change that hinders rather than facilitates sociocultural transformation and technological progress.

Education and Society

Cultural qualities and other factors that individuals as well as groups and societies need to have to make genuine progress are many; noted among them are:
1. The right education;
2. The right tools;
3. The right attitudes;
4. The right institutions;
5. The right societal systems; and
6. Sufficient information.

The right education is probably the easiest and least expensive thing to acquire; most people today have access to good education at home or abroad. The right tools, however, are not so easy to acquire because they

involve more than just buying mechanical equipment and scientific instruments; they require the acquisition of other things that demand time, money and energy to develop and utilize, such as the training of qualified technicians and the creation of environments conducive for learning and working. As for the right attitudes, they are still more difficult to develop and instill in people because they are a function of values and traditions that are most resistant to change. Such values and traditions involve social systems, ideologies, and the upbringing of children in society, which tend to control the internalization process of convictions and ethics in younger people. Institution building in these times is a very demanding task; it requires large amounts of money, unique expertise, good understanding of the trends of scientific and global change, and deep awareness of societal needs in all fields of human endeavor. Such institutions include governmental agencies, specialized research institutes, trade organizations, banking, finance and investment companies, and quality control systems and arrangements. Developing the right societal systems, in turn, is a very complicated process that starts with the conceptualization of such systems, and moves on to design and Implementation. In addition, such systems need to be continuously evaluated, updated, upgraded, and expanded; they are the systems most responsible for meeting the changing and increasing demands of people, while enabling them to maximize the benefits from the services and opportunities available to them. Sufficient information is a critical factor whose absence undermines the chances of individual, group, institutional and societal success. For example, no plan for social or economic or educational development can succeed without sufficient information regarding the needs to be addressed, the audience targeted for change, and the nature of the environments in which experts are supposed to function.

If these cultural qualities and tools were to be ranked according to their importance, the right attitudes and the right societal systems would be ranked first and second, respectively. No society or nation can hope to achieve genuine progress without developing quality societal systems to coordinate and integrate the multiplicity of functions in society, and without arming its labor force with the right attitudes to value work and work honestly and efficiently.

In Africa, the intellectual and political elites are more likely to be the first generation to get an education. The parents of this generation are largely illiterates having no formal education and little knowledge to deal with modern life complexities. The elites, having more knowledge and better skills than most of their countrymen, usually develop an unhealthy sense of superiority. It is a superiority complex that most members of Third World elites acquire and use, not to help and lift their countrymen, but to rule over them and manipulate their needs and fears; they tend to do so in order to keep the masses submissive and often grounded in poverty and tradition.

History and Change

Traditional societies are generally more conservative and religious and therefore, tend to emphasize education that reinforces traditions and traditional values and attitudes; they also tend to give religious and historical subjects priority over most other branches of knowledge. People who are still living in pre-industrial times usually rely primarily on traditional wisdom and old knowledge, which is a function of age-old cultural values and customs and life experiences, not of modern education or scientific knowledge. Being a product of memories and certain life experiences of a long-gone past, traditional wisdom has become, especially after the dawn of globalization and the Internet, largely irrelevant, even to peoples who are still living in its times. It is an invalidated set of popular sayings and ways of thinking and doing and looking at things that defies scientific knowledge. And because of that, traditional wisdom has become an obstacle to economic change, sociocultural transformation and rational thinking. And unlike scientific knowledge, which is a liberating force, traditional knowledge and wisdom is a force of social repression and political oppression.

All traditional cultures that have their roots in the pre-industrial age tend to believe in faith and fate and accept certain myths as facts, and to have a prominent spiritual aspect to their lives capable of sustaining them even in a crisis. Because of such attitudes and convictions and psychological comforts, Africans in general tend to be content and inward looking, to fear the unknown and resist change. They also fear looking at the world around them using an empirical approach, because such an approach disturbs their peace of mind and forces them to question their deeply rooted beliefs in faith and fate. Employing an empirical approach to view the world, furthermore, would increase a believer's life challenges at a time when he or she lacks both the right understanding of the world around him and the proper tools to deal with the increasing life challenges facing him. History, charismatic leaders have symbolized the ideas and convictions that left a lasting impact on the lives of societies. At the same time, no leader could claim greatness and be recognized as historic without being associated with a grand idea and unconventional convictions. Yet, the vast decline in the sociopolitical role of ideological thought in recent decades, and the increasing societal role of institutions instead has caused the power and stature of all types of leaders to diminish. The future, therefore, is unlikely to witness the appearance of a great leader, a great idea, or a grand ideology that can change the course of history in a meaningful way. Because of such a development, no society should wait for a great leader to emerge and save it; every society should accept life challenges as they are and prepare itself to face them. One of these pressing challenges, which

no nation can ignore any longer, is economic and technological development and the sociocultural and institutional transformations it requires and inspires. Economic development, for example, emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as the most desired goal sought by Third World nation. But despite the many national development plans and World Bank programs and foreign aid, no Third World nation, with only few exceptions, has managed to achieve the desired economic goals. This failure clearly indicates that Third World societies in general lack the knowledge and the tools and the institutions to design and implement feasible economic plans. Even with the hundreds of billion of dollars spent by the World Bank to build dams, roads, schools and educational and technical training centers, economic development has remained an elusive goal for most nations. Hesitance to initiate the kind of social, cultural, political and economic changes needed to facilitate the transformation of the existing social and economic structures, has made economic development a difficult, if not a largely unattainable goal. Societies that lack the right knowledge and attitudes and societal systems to live the age and recognize its limitations and opportunities are unable to develop and climb the civilization ladder in an orderly and timely manner. This is evidenced in African states. Development, to be feasible, needs much more than traditional education, or the abundance of natural resources, or the availability of cheap labor, or a fairly developed infrastructure, or even a good supply of capital. It needs a society whose values are conducive to change, whose human resources are skilled and disciplined, and whose institutions are capable of designing and carrying out reform plans and leading change. No nation has so far managed to industrialize without experiencing profound social and cultural transformations, and no socially and culturally developed nation has failed to enter the industrial age.

When asked about the lack of economic development in his country, former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami said in late 1999, "It is impossible to have economic development in a socially and politically underdeveloped society." While arguing correctly that social and political development is a precondition for economic development, president Khatami acknowledged, though implicitly, that Iran under its current ideological system has failed to accomplish either social or political development. In fact, after nearly three decades of Islamic rule, it is estimated that about 40% of the Iranian people are still living at or below the poverty line; in addition, all political and social and cultural freedoms are vastly restricted.

Resources that a nation may have are useful only if people know how to evaluate them, how to use them, and how to employ them where they are most needed, or where the benefits are most rewarding. Though people can and often do learn and borrow from others, their previous training of how to learn, how to apply what is learned, and what kind of knowledge matters most, is most important to determining the usefulness of their knowledge. These are questions of culture and its value and belief systems, which by defining priorities, determines what is to be learned, how much to be learned, and how much freedom the learned should have in applying their knowledge. Ideas, convictions and beliefs, on the one hand, and technologies, institutions and societal systems on the other, have had a competitive relationship throughout history. Wherever and whenever beliefs and traditions and convictions prevail, knowledge is usually constrained and used primarily to enhance the power of ideology and its leadership, not to enrich the lives of people. And whenever and whenever knowledge, in the form of technologies, tools, institutions, work ethics, and societal systems prevail, ideology and its leadership tend to be weak; and their adherents tend to be marginalized, allowing economic and social and political progress to be made. Thus, the undermining of the power and influence of ideology in society, particularly rigid belief and value systems, has become a precondition for economic and political and technological progress and sociocultural transformation.

In addition, the dominant forces and ideologies in society have claimed the best talent available and employed it in the service of the ideology and its leadership. During the European Middle Ages, for example, the Church claimed the best talent and employed it in the service of religion; and in the early stages of the nation state system, the state claimed the best talent and employed it in the service of nationalism and state institutions, especially the army. In the industrial age of societal development, industry and related services such as trading and banking, claimed the best talent in society and employed to produce more and better goods and develop financial and management systems to raise productivity of both labor and capital. Today, in the age of knowledge, information technologies and the info-media claim the best talent in society and employ it to develop newer technologies to maximize returns on capital, including human capital, and improve the quality of life for all peoples. This means that underdeveloped societies tend to waste their talent in serving causes and institutions that have nothing to do with economic or scientific or technological development.

Social Transformation in the Knowledge Age

At the beginning of the twenty first century, life conditions in many countries of the world have reached a dynamic state; technologies to enhance our abilities to deal with every aspect of life are being developed at the speed of light. Countless individuals, institutions, organizations and socioeconomic forces, having varied, and oftentimes contradictory interests, are leading this development process. A "world in transition" has emerged, where impersonal, non-institutional, and non-ideological forces have assumed the leading role in instigating

change, causing conflict, and producing social transformations of immense proportions and implications. As a consequence, ideologies and deep convictions and belief systems of the past have lost much of their power to initiate change and cause profound transformations in human life. Whatever change such ideologies and convictions may produce is more likely to cause people to incorrectly believe that history is capable of reversing itself, and that a future could be constructed on a vision of a glorious, yet fading and largely fictitious, past.   In the 1980s, the most advanced industrial societies, particularly the United States, began to enter a new transitional period leading to a new age, the age of knowledge. It is an age where scientific and technological knowledge is increasingly becoming the most valuable individual as well as societal asset; and where communications and the mass media have become the most effective tools influencing the politics and sociocultural lives of people everywhere. Consequently, a new economy has emerged, much more dependent on information and communications than on any other factor of production. The new rewarding jobs that are being created by this economy are knowledge-based; they require, in the words of Peter Drucker, "a good deal of formal education and the ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge. They require a different approach to work and a different mind-set. Above all, they require a habit of continuous learning." As a result, knowledge has become more valuable than all factors of production; it enables people to produce more products and services more efficiently using less space and resources. In the US for example, it is estimated that the contribution of knowledge to the gross national product has reached 85%. Knowledge workers in the new age are capitalists; they possess valuable social capital that consists primarily of specialized skills and unique attitudes that can be invested in several ways in many places. Knowledge workers, as a result, have become largely free, less dependent on others, less committed to national and community causes, and very individualistic. They have become modern nomads having weak or no ideological ties, and sharing no particular collective memory with others; they, as a result, do not mind wandering from one place to another, from one organization to another, and from one country to another to advance technically and succeed materially. Their primary interest in life is to make the best use of whatever knowledge they may possess, to acquire more knowledge and get the most money and recognition they can for it. People who fail to acquire the right education and the right attitudes are unable to participate in the new global economy and secure decent jobs, at a time when gainful employment has become a major source of self-satisfaction and social recognition, and a key to living a rewarding and dignified life. The emerging knowledge society is characterized by complexity, diversity, and dynamism. Complexity causes systems to fail and thus forces them to adapt and restructure continuously; diversity deepens sociocultural divides and socioeconomic gaps in society, creating and recreating new antagonisms and group balances continuously. Dynamism, meanwhile, makes both change and conflict in society and around the world an uncontrollable process that affects human values, interests and relationships at all levels, at all times. No ideology, no leader, no system, no plan, and no state, therefore, is able to manage change by itself; and history is no longer able to provide the tools or knowledge to explain the present or predict the future.

Impediments to Social Transformation in Contemporary Africa

What is it that motivates African political elites to make decisions out of short term personal expedience, instead of taking into account the long-term good of their countries? What encourages the African masses to behave in a manner they were behaving, suggesting that were they to get the opportunity, they would commit the same atrocities now being committed by the political leaders who currently impoverish them? It seems probable that the answers to these questions are partly related to modes of thought that guide the actions of African masses and leaders. In other words, there seems to be a causal connection between certain modes of thought on the one hand, and the political and economic mismanagement in contemporary Africa on the other. Some of these impediments are;

Conservatism

By conservatism, I refer to the inclination to maintain a traditional order. Africa has experienced astronomical changes - modes of governance, transport, communication, trade and inter-ethnic relations are all significantly different from the way they were two centuries ago. All these changes were thrust upon communities, each of which had a rich heritage that had enabled it to be productive and fulfilled in its environment. Despite Mbiti's contention that preoccupation with the past is a distinctively African outlook (Mbiti 1969, 16-17), it is actually typical of pre technologised, pre-urbanized traditional societies all over the world to be retrospective. Yet in the fast-changing world in which we live, a preoccupation with the past is a great impediment to innovation, since solutions to new problems cannot be found in the past where they had not been encountered. The Igbo saying concerning Eneke the bird, who learned to fly without perching because men had learned to shoot without missing, is apt in this regard. In this section, we shall examine a number of manifestations of conservatism which hinder desirable social transformation in Africa today, namely, adherence to antiquated customs, uncritical veneration of African cultures, communal authoritarianism, imprecise handling of modern technology, poor management of time, and belief in fatalism.

Adherence to Antiquated Customs

With the advent of the industrial revolution coupled with massive urbanization, European masses were forced to cast off their preoccupation with the past, and to adjust to the future-oriented society in which they found themselves. However, despite having experienced considerable industrialization and urbanization, African masses seem to be locked in the backward-looking worldview of their forefathers. How else can we explain the veneration of past cultural artifacts, even when their usefulness has been evidently superseded by new innovations? Is there any other explanation for the fact that our politicians easily win the hearts of the masses by adorning indigenous African regalia during political rallies, only to abandon them for Western suits in the corridors of legislative and executive power?

There are many customs which were of great utility in the pre-colonial African past, but which currently serve to diminish the quality of human life. For example, among the Luo of Kenya, it is a taboo for a parent to spend a night under the same roof with his/her married son or daughter. Sadly, this custom persists despite drastically changed conditions. In the contemporary urban setting, young Luo couples often have to travel considerable distances to take their parents to a different house to lodge for the night, even when they have spacious guest wings. If only the members of this community would ask themselves why the taboo was there in the first place, they would probably come to the understanding that it was instituted in the context of the single-roomed huts in which families lodged in the past, and that in the contemporary urban setting with spacious guest wings and difficulty of intra-city travel, such a custom is enslaving and retrogressive. Similar instances of anachronistic customs can be cited from many other Kenyan communities: the Kikuyu insistence that the bride sets out from her mother's house even if it means traveling vast distances on the wedding day, the Bukusu insistence on sharing the traditional circumciser's knife despite the glaring danger of HIV-Aids infections, the intransigent perpetuation of female circumcision among the Maasai, and the insistence in many communities that only sons inherit their fathers' estates are all cases in point.

Uncritical Veneration of African Cultures

Following the thoughts of their opinion leaders such as G.F.W. Hegel and Diedrich Westermann, European colonialists systematically and consistently disparaged African cultures (Ochieng'Odhiambo 1997). They conditioned Africans to be subservient to European domination through missionary work, violence, and the school system, with the most effective element of this tripartite de-culturation being the school system (Thairu 1975, 1-15). Thus due to the colonial education system, many Africans came to share the colonialists' view that Africans had no culture and therefore no history. Indeed, even today, many Kenyans use the Kiswahili word kienyeji ("traditional") to refer to any improvisation considered to be crude and inefficient. Consequently, the inclusion of indigenous African songs in national music festivals, the incorporation of African motifs in urban architecture, the production of literary works in African languages, and the inclusion of African cuisine in restaurants, all help to affirm to the African that he/she has a rich heritage, contrary to the colonialists' assertions. Indeed, movements such as Négritude and the African Personality have offered intellectual rationales for the assertion of the dignity of African culture. However, just as the African's repudiation of his/her own culture is a function of colonialism, so is his/her uncritical veneration of it; for when the African responds to foreign cultural assaults by declaring that his/her culture is perfect, he/she thereby over-reacts to the challenge, thus still responding to the colonial assault rather than thinking independently and in a self-assured manner. Furthermore, an uncritical veneration of one's culture means that one is avoiding the responsibility of undertaking a thoroughgoing evaluation of its worth. This being so, those aspects of the culture that are truly contrary to human welfare are perpetuated instead of being abandoned. Africans need therefore to be secure enough to concede that although there is much that is of great value in their cultures, there is also a lot in them which is not worth being proud about - the killing of twins among the Igbo of Nigeria, cattle raids among pastoralist communities of East Africa, female circumcision, the subjugation and exploitation of women, and a heavy-handed approach to child-raising which discourages curiosity and critical thinking, among others. At the intellectual level, the uncritical veneration of African cultures has led some scholars to urge that African philosophy is distinct from Western philosophy, and therefore beyond any scrutiny that relies on standards by which Western philosophy is judged. In this regard, Wiredu's caution ought to be heeded: To present African philosophy as an untouchable possession of Africans is to invite a touristic approach from its foreign audiences. If the philosophies may not be evaluated as false, they may not be evaluated as true either. In that case they might merely be noticed as cultural curiosities (Wiredu n.d.). Africans must therefore be proud of their cultures, but also be committed to subjecting them to scrutiny. In this way, they shall be able to utilize all truly human aspects of their cultures, while abandoning all of their elements that inhibit desirable social transformation.

Communal Authoritarianism

The Kiswahili proverb, "Asiesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu (He who does not heed the word of a superior breaks his own leg)" is typical of the African reverence for the elderly. It could be argued that this

reverence points to the Africans' high regard for experience, and ultimately for knowledge. In the pre-colonial African communities, the elderly served as points of reference for diverse kinds of knowledge. However, one negative effect of this outlook was the growth of authoritarianism - an emphasis on absolute obedience to superiors, rather than the cultivation of individual freedom and the attendant independent thinking. Wiredu (1980) aptly noted the highly authoritarian character of pre-colonial African communities: Our social arrangements were shot through with the principle of unquestioning obedience to superiors, which often meant elders. Hardly any premium was placed on curiosity of those of tender age, or independence of thought in those of more considerable years. Our traditional culture is famous for an abundance of proverbs …. But it is rare to come across any which extol the virtues of originality and independence of thought (Wiredu 1980, 4). Along similar lines, Nyasani (1997, 129) identifies the traditional African family as a setting wherein the vertical power structure of the society is introduced and sustained as predominant over the freedom of individuals. He also argues that the African communal authoritarianism was conducive to the colonial subjugation of the continent (Nyasani 1997, 113-114).

Even in the post-colonial era, authoritarianism continues to be one of the key impediments to desirable social transformation. While it is true that with increased modernization and urbanization the youth enjoy unprecedented personal freedom, it seems that a sizeable proportion of many African populations still defer to elders in matters such as rites of passage and indigenous medicine. Authoritarianism also seems to partly account for the amazing docility with which Africans have endured decades of one-party one-man dictatorships. In Kenya for example, both Presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi were frequently referred to as "father of the nation", and this family idiom reinforced the idea that they deserved unquestioning deference, contrary to a democratic theory and practice. Even the military coups that frequently supplanted the one-party autocracies were often motivated by the raw desire for power rather than by a desire to replace the one-party dictatorships with more open societies (Johnson, et al. 1984; Kposowa and Jenkins 1993; McGowan 2003). This is not to say that Africans have endured dictatorships more than people in other parts of the world - such a verdict would require reliable comparative statistics. Furthermore, the struggle for the return of pluralism, which began in the 1970s but gained great momentum in the mid 1980s, is evidence that docility is not the only characteristic of African masses (Vanhanen 2004; Ambrose 1995; Ihonvbere 2000). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that even with the reinstatement of pluralist politics, elderly politicians frequently seek to intimidate their younger competitors by claiming that the younger politicians owe them the respect that sons owe to fathers!

The authoritarian outlook worked well in pre-colonial times, when both social and technological changes were slow, and the survival of the group was largely dependent on mastering the accumulated tested and tried ways of doing things. However, in the information age in which we live, authoritarianism is a recipe for retrogression, because the younger members of society tend to embrace new innovations faster than the older ones. As such, the advice of the old is likely to fail to take into account the revolutionary socio-economic changes that the continent must adapt to if it is to compete in the global village of which it is now a part. Thus in place of traditional authoritarianism, Africa needs an open society, in which the experience of the old and the innovativeness of the young can be effectively utilized in the quest for desirable social transformation.

Imprecise Handling of Modern Technology

By technology, we refer to the application of scientific knowledge to the meeting of specific human needs. For instance, the body of knowledge subsumed under biology is science, while the application of that knowledge to the alleviation of human suffering is technology. Contemporary Africa has access to vast technology - electrical power, motorized transportation, equipment for the mass production of various goods, among others. One of the apparent differences between pre-colonial African technology and modern technology is that the latter requires a high degree of precision. Electronic telecommunications, for example, require much more intricate calculation during design as compared to the talking drums. Could this difference be having a negative impact on our technological progress? An exhaustive answer would require the input of social scientists, with their empirical and comparative methodology. Nevertheless, it seems evident that while a number of Africans have excelled in areas such as information technology, medicine and telecommunications, Africa is not drawing maximum benefit from modern technology because of an inadequate handling of it by a sizeable portion of her population. With regard to motorized transport, for example, one finds vehicles that are very poorly maintained, as is evident in unserviced wipers, extremely worn-out tyres, and vehicles that are overdue for routine service. It seems that the owners of these vehicles do not understand the law of nature that what is not maintained disintegrates. Wiredu (1980, 13) gave the now famous example of many an African mechanic's imprecise adjusting of the gap at the contact breaker point in the distributor of a car, resulting in many stalled vehicles. While the number of cars using contact breaker points is fast diminishing, Wiredu's example poignantly illustrates the crisis of Africa's technological revolution. Furthermore, in our efforts to create jobs for our people, we have encouraged the development of the informal sector. However, the quality of the products of this sector often leaves much to be desired. For instance, often when one looks at furniture manufactured in this

sector, the wood used is not properly dried, the furniture is vanished unevenly, and doors of cupboards or legs of tables leave a lot to be desired. When one questions, for example, the roadside carpenter as to why the workmanship is so lacking in precision, the carpenter will often retort, "There is nothing really wrong with the furniture!" While it could be argued that the imprecisely made furniture is commensurate to the money that a rural African carpenter's clientele is able to pay, the same kind of imprecision is often observed even in furniture sold in up-market shops in African cities. The net loss of this African imprecision in the handling of modern technology is difficult to compute. What can be said with certainty is that it puts African countries at a disadvantage in their competition against economies such as those of the four Asian Tigers - Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan - where meticulous skill is evident in the production of all sorts of wares, including electronic equipment. As Barro (1998) observed with regard to factors of economic growth, "The accumulation of huge amounts of capital and labor can work for a time, but ultimately must be backed by improvements in technology." We must therefore reform our education system to encourage precision in the handling of technology. The consuming public must also learn to demand products characterized by all-round finesse, rather than by basic functionality.

Poor Management of Time

Fifty six years ago, John S. Mbiti shocked many of his colleagues in the African academia, when he claimed that Africans do not have a substantive concept of the future, but rather that of a long past and a present (Mbiti 1969). To buttress his position, Mbiti (1969) reported that the three verb tenses in the Kikuyu and Kamba languages which refer to the future cover the period of about six months, and certainly no more than two years. However, using the Luo language as a basis for his argument, Olela (1971) asserted that Africans do have a concept of the distant future. He also contended that "it is one thing to say that the Africans do not consider the future as important as the past and present, and completely another to deny the existence of the concept of future" (Olela 1971). For Olela (1971), the fact that Africans fear the possibility of evil befalling them as a consequence of displeasing the ancestors is yet another indicator of the Africans' apprehension of the future dimension of time.

Both Mbiti and Olela are guilty of hasty generalization, since their inferences about the whole of sub-Saharan Africa are drawn from a study of the languages of one or two ethnic communities. Mbiti's position has the further weakness of assuming that if one cannot find a word for a concept in a particular language, then the owners of the language do not possess that concept. Indeed words are used to name what one already knows, so that it is quite conceivable for one to be aware of the existence of something, without having a name for it (Oduor 1990, 109). Whether or not one agrees with Mbiti's account of the African conception of time, it is difficult to gainsay the fact that one of the challenges in contemporary Africa is the poor time management by its indigenous inhabitants. Meetings will often begin more than an hour after the scheduled time. This situation has even led to some people declaring false starting times for functions in an attempt to ensure that the accurate starting time is honoured. Furthermore, the meetings that begin well behind schedule are often characterized by long speeches, which suggest a total unawareness of the time lost. In pre-colonial Africa, there was no need to view time as a scarce resource to be quantified as seconds, minutes and hours, because the pressures of modernity were unknown. However, in contemporary African societies aspiring to modernization, the meticulous management of time is of utmost importance, because the cost of time is inextricably bound up with the cost of labour, and this linkage is factored into the pricing of goods and services. As such, a society which treats time as an amorphous and non-binding entity cannot effectively compete with others that regard it as a prized resource. Thus if Africa is to experience desirable social transformation, her technocratic opinion leaders must re-double their efforts at helping the people understand that in the contemporary social milieu, time is a precious resource which they can ill afford to waste.

Belief in Fatalism

Fatalism is the doctrine that whatever happens has to happen regardless of what human agents do. This belief seems to involve a peculiar sense of necessity: it is neither logical nor causal necessity, and should not be confused with what is often called "determinism". Nor is fatalism theological necessity (as in "It's God's will"), for notions of fate thrive in many cultures that do not invoke the concept of God (Solomon 2003, 435). Fatalism is usually strongest in societies that have not experienced drastic scientific progress, with its great emphasis on material causes and effects. For example, the ancient Greek goddess, Themis, had three daughters called the Fates, who jointly determined the destiny of each individual (Lewis 2008). Similarly, fatalism seems to be rampant in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In Kenya, for example, many people see the course of their lives as bound to follow a pre-determined "graph". Thus quite frequently, a reckless Kenyan driver will declare that however he/she drives, he/she cannot die until his/her appointed day arrives. Dixey (1999) reports a similar outlook among the Yoruba of Nigeria. Solomon (2003, 451) sees a distinction between belief in luck and belief in fatalism. For him, while the scientist and the fatalist seek for explanation, the believer in luck does not.

Nevertheless, beliefs in fatalism and in luck seem to be very closely linked in many people's minds, as they see good luck as fate acting in their favour, and bad lack as fate acting against their interests. This fact is behind the saying that someone was born with a silver spoon in his/her mouth, meaning that fate/luck has marked him/her out for success. Indeed, one indicator of belief in fatalism is substantial talk about "luck". Thus very frequently, when an African lands a well-paying job, his/her relatives and friends will declare that he/she is "lucky".

An objector could point out that acquisition of jobs in Africa is very often dependent on family and ethnic networks rather than on personal merit. As such, the objection might run, it is understandable for Africans to adopt a fatalistic approach to the quest for jobs. However, accepting patronage as the order of the day and deferring to its oppressive modus operandi seems to the present author to be defeatist. Instead of yielding to patronage, Africans must work towards the growth of a social order governed by meritocracy and egalitarianism. African intellectuals must therefore help their compatriots to understand that the logical implication of fatalism is utter inaction, because if fate determines the course of our lives, then we are helpless pawns in a mysterious destiny game. Those who believe in fatalism must therefore live inconsistently, because they make substantial effort to earn a living, take medicine to fight infections, lock their doors at night, among others, instead of leaving all these things to fate. Yet they are not likely to engage in maximal self-assertion in pursuit of self-improvement, believing that their endeavours amount to nothing in view of fate, thereby stunting desirable social transformation.

Feeble Social Consciousness

By social consciousness, I refer to awareness in individual members of society of their need for, and responsibility towards, other members of society. Thus a person with a feeble social consciousness is one who erroneously thinks that he/she is self sufficient. Communalism in pre-colonial Africa is a well attested fact, encapsulated in a number of sayings. "An individual is people", and the "You cannot scratch your own back" are cases in point. However, due to the imposition of the individualistic Western model of political organization, the indigenous ethnically based integrative socio-political formations have almost entirely disappeared.

Nevertheless, while it is true that modernization and its attendant urbanization result in societies with unsatisfactory human relationships, it does not necessarily follow that members of such societies fail to recognize their common interests. The solidarity of a substantial proportion of the US citizenry during the 2008 presidential elections illustrates this fact. Yet in a number of African countries today, the populace has largely lost the sense of collective responsibility. This might largely explain the silence of the vast proportion African populations as their dictatorial rulers exiled, tortured and murdered the few voices that challenged their hegemonies in the 1970s and 1980s. Even today, the apathy manifested in many general elections, the littering of our cities and towns, the diversion of public resources to personal use, all point to a feeble social consciousness- a failure to appreciate that if the social fabric were to collapse, all of us would be the worse for it, and desirable social transformation would remain a mirage.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the roles of history and education in socially transforming in Africa. The paper outlined that traditional societies are generally more conservative and religious and therefore, tend to emphasize education that reinforces traditions and traditional values and attitudes. They also tend to give religious and historical subjects priority over most other branches of knowledge. People who are still living in pre-industrial times usually rely primarily on traditional wisdom and old knowledge, which is a function of age-old cultural values, customs and life experiences, not of modern education or scientific knowledge. Being a product of memories and certain life experiences of a long past, traditional wisdom has become, especially after the dawn of globalization and the Internet, largely irrelevant, even to peoples who are still living in its times. It is an invalidated set of popular sayings and ways of thinking, doing and looking at things that defies scientific knowledge. And because of that, traditional wisdom has become an obstacle to economic change, sociocultural transformation and rational thinking. And unlike scientific knowledge, which is a liberating force, traditional knowledge and wisdom is a force of social repression and political oppression as evidenced in Africa.

African social and education order is not yet indelibly defined. Ultimately, transformation in education and society will be shaped by the choices and decisions we make about economic and social development. If we are serious about social transformation, we must refuse, as the Palestinian Scholar, Harmmama puts it 'to accept the logic of inequality and the repression that is involves' and continue to search for human agency, for the means through which inequality can be undone. We must be angry with our past and make the real fire that cooks, both with respect to education and transformation.

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