DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 105 308 CG 009 676

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TITLE Psychology and Education on the Continent of Africa.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *African Culture; *Area Studies; Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Differences; *Educational Development; Human Geography; *Non Western Civilization; Racial Characteristics; Sociocultural Patterns; Speeches

ABSTRACT

The author reviews her experiences and discoveries during an 11-year period of living and working in 22 different African countries. Several statements are presented by the former Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, concerning his attitudes toward education. This is followed by a discussion of the author's work with Ethiopia's educational system, involving research in learning and intelligence testing. The author's involvement in screening applicants for a vocational training school is also described. Interview research in Ghana and the problems encountered there are also discussed. In response to the question of what can be learned from Africa, the author concludes that sensitivity to an adult's sense of personal dignity is vital if adult basic education type programs are to succeed. A summary statement of the author's impressions is that all babies cry in the same language and for the same reasons, regardless of any specific variables. (BW)

PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION ON THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA

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I am sure that every member of this symposium will decry the impossibility of covering the topic assigned within the fifteen minutes allowed. I shall mention just a few reasons why that situation is so true for me. The continent of Africa is so huge that the continental United States could fit into Africa about three and a half times. Nobody knows how many discrete ethnic groups exist on that bast continent; estimates range from 800 to over 2,000. By discrete groups, I mean social systems with unique languages, not just dialects; with unique patterns of birth-rites, courtship, marriage, child-rearing practices, sex-roles, and burial forms. Clearly, any generalizations about Africans with respect to psychology, education, or anything else would be false.

How, then, can I make any sort of contribution to this symposium on What School Psychology in the United States Can Learn from Other Countries? I gave considerable thought to that question. It occurred to me that Africa has in macroscule problems which the United States has in miniscule: different ethnic groups, different languages, different cultural influences, different religions, many differences. What every country has in common--every state of the U.S.A. and every nation of Africa--is the need to provide an educational program for all of its children. So, with this common purpose in mind, I reviewed my experiences to try to discover what I had learned from Africa. Between the years 1955 and 1972, I spent a total of a bit over eleven years working in, living in, or visiting 22 different African countries. I am a psychologist; I am an educator. What are some of the things Africa taught me? That is what I decided to share with you.

So last spring I began making a topical list of what Africa had taught one psychologist-educator. It would take me an hour merely to read the list to you. By the fourth of July, I had selected 15 topics to which I would give one minute each for my presentation here today. Many of the topics related to learnings I gleaned from my five years in Ethiopia. Then, during July and August, came the decline and fall of the Ethiopian Empire, the last "absolute monarchy" on earth, according to the mass media. I was grieved, I continue to be grieved, by the picture the press gives us of the deposed monarch, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I. So I decided to revise my presentation to you today to include some of his ideas and attitudes toward education, which I shall present in a moment.

Then another funny thing happened to me on my way to this symposium. A few weeks ago, I was sought as a consultant by a legal firm in the capitol city of a midwestern state. They had a client, an Ethiopian student who had committed a murder. Both psychologists and psychiatrists found the defendant mentally ill, a paranoid schizophrenic. But the feeling of the court was that none of our measures of psychopathology were valid for a human being emerging from an African culture such as Ethiopia. The lawyers were trying to find someone who knew something both about psychopathology and about Ethiopia. I hope I was helpful. I do not know. But here is the irony: Ethiopia has a cultural history spanning more than 2,000 years, a history of literature, art, song, dance, political and social structures. Incidentally, Haile Selassie's predecessor was a woman, Empress Gauditu. Ethiopia is the oldest continuously Christian country in the world. The treatment of choice for psychosis in Ethiopia is, first, readings from the Bible in the ancient tongue Ge'ez (comparable to chanting the Bible in Latin in western cultures), not unlike the approach of our modern Christian Science readers. But here we have a Judge in one of our modern U.S.A. cities apparently being most

influenced by his understanding of Africa quite possibly gleaned from watching Tarzan movies. By the way, I suppose that you know that the Tarzan movies were filmed in central Florida.

Some of you by now may be wondering what happened to my neat little package of 15 factual points I planned to share with you about what Africa can teach us about psychology and education, wondering why I am, instead, talking about the decline and fall of the Ethiopian Empire and about an Ethiopian murderer. I wonder how receptive we are, really, to what we can learn from other countries. The Ethiopians have a proverb: "The eye cannot see what the heart will not see."

Earlier I said that all nations have in common a desire to educate their children, and I said that I would present some of Haile Selassie's attitudes toward education. While I read you some of his statements, hold in mind the possibility that his dedication to education may have contributed to his downfall. Also, please remember that, in the U.S.A., prior to the Civil War, it was illegal to teach a slave to read, the rationale being that a literate person, an educated person, may be difficult to manage.

Now I shall use a few of my very few precious minutes to read to you some quotations from the recently deposed last absolute monarch on earth. All of you anywhere near my age--I'm in my 68th year of life--know of his speech before the League of Nations wherein he predicted that if the 52 member nations did not respond responsibly to an act of overt aggression the League would die and a world war would ensue. They did not, and both of his prophesies came true. Following are excerpts from what one great African has to say about education:

August 1944, DECLARATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY: Mass Education, affecting all ages and both sexes, should be a primary objective...should aim at spreading literacy, promoting better hygiene, and encouraging social life and recreation...The education of girls is regarded as being at least as important as that of boys...and the proposed University College will have women students from the first. Amharic is the official language...and will be taught in all schools; English will be the principal foreign language. In Muslim areas, Arabic will be taught, and other Ethiopian languages will be used in the schools in the primary stages of education. (Kenya: England wasted about $3 million trying to teach English through Swahili, in the 1950's; then reverted to teaching literacy first through each ethnic' groups spoken language: Ruth Yudolowitz, in Nairobi, was illustrating primers, she told me, on the average of one new language a week!)

July, 1946 speech: Humanity by nature is gifted to think freely, but in order that man's free thought should lead him to the goal of liberty and independence, his way of thinking must be shaped by the process of education. It is understood that the independence of mind created by education individually will have as a result the creation of an independently minded nation... We call upon all Ethiopians to send their children to the nearest school, for it is suicide and a crime against responsibility which God places in all parents not to educate one's own children. (The last absolute monarchy on earth has fallen before that education which creates an independently minded nation. Remember, pre-civil war in the U.S. it was against the law to teach a slave to read since it was assumed that an educated slave would become unmanageable.)

October; 1955: GOVERNMENT NOTICE DECLARING THE NECESSITY FOR UNIVERSAL FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION. It is required that all young persons, male and female, shall receive instruction in elementary education. It is incumbent

upon parents and upon all persons who have responsibility as guardians or custodians of children to cause children from the age of seven to eighteen years to receive instruction at very least in elementary education.

November, 1957: SPEECH, OPENING OF PARLIAMENT. We would have you add to the love of your country love of knowledge and science. Only thus can you partake of the spirit of the modern age and serve your country in a fruitful and fitting manner...Consequently, the extensive development of education should be paramount in the list of your objectives...Knowledge is power...Praise be to Him who has enabled Us to express it to the present as well as to the future generations...Education is as vital as life itself... Education is the factor of everlasting significance in the greatness of nations.

That ends the quotations. His Empire is dead. In my opinion, he goes down a winner. I'm reminded of the quotation: "Beware of what you set your heart upon,for it shall surely be yours." He set his heart upon educating the people of Ethiopia. He succeeded.

Now, in the few minutes I have left, I shall touch upon some of the other learnings I gleaned from Africa. Since we have been so much with Ethiopia, so far, I shall start there.

Item 1: I was asked to create a test of intelligence for nine-year-old boys, to be used in a research project designed to test whether traditional Ethiopian education, i.e., rote-learning supplied by priests or modern educational methods were more effective in teaching children to read. There were no vital statistics available, records of birth dates were not kept; therefore, no chronological age could be used as a denominator in an equation to determine an intellectual quotient. The many applicants for inclusion in the research project were first screened by physicians in an effort to determine, via physiological developmental criteria, which boys were probably

about nine years of age.

Then the selected children were sent to me for evaluation of their intellectual endowment. None of them had ever been exposed to a learning situation of any formal kind. Also, considering the many languages of Ethiopia, the verbal communication systems of the children were varied.

Considering these limitations, I devised a series of problem-solving tasks based on many of the performance items of Western intelligence tests, going back to Goddard. I was able, through these measures, to classify the children into three levels of relative brightness in problem solving, with four steps within each level. My tour of duty in Ethiopia ended before the study was completed, so I do not know the final results of the study; however, interim reports indicated that the children were doing equally well in both media of education as related to their measured level of relative brightness. No one in this audience would be surprised at that tentative finding. But here was one bit of learning experience for me: Just for the fun of it, I did some sub-test analyses of the performance of Ethiopian children compared with U.S. children. On one subtest--repeating tapped rhythmic patterns--Ethiopian children, on the average, were about two years in mental age ahead of American children. On another subtest--copying a circle, square, and diamond--American children were about two years in mental age ahead of the Ethiopian children. This fascinated me. Of course, Ethiopia is a drum-beat culture. Every ethnic group has its drum-beat rhythmic patterns for announcing birth, marriage, death, etc. And our children start scribbling on walls with crayons from about two years of age. Every time I hear of a controversial point arising among Arthur Jensen, William Shockley, and Peggy Sanday, I remember my Ethiopian children with their exquisite sense of rhythmic patterns and their pathetically distorted drawings of diamonds.

Item 2: I was involved in screening applicants for a vocational training school offering courses in plumbing, construction, electricity, etc. Almost all of the applicants wanted to study electricity and refused to consider other programs. The American administrators of the school were at a loss to understand the resistance, as was I. Fortunately, one of the successful applicants was a lad I had subsidized through elementary school. He had opted for electricity but had been assigned to a course in plumbing. He pled with me to intervene in his behalf, explaining that any Ethiopian who worked with metal (as in plumbing) would become an agent of the devil and would turn into an hyena at night. I don't have time to tell you the whole history of the origin of this superstition, it goes back to curses related to Sheba's trip back from her visit to Solomon--before electricity was discovered--, but the point is that until a cultural key had been found for the students' resistance to learning needed trades, that much needed vocational training program could not begin to go into operation. In our U.S. multi-culture we have similar problems in education, perhaps less dramatic, but of course we are a much younger culture.

I want to digress a moment and tell you of an amusing incident. The first fully trained Ethiopian psychiatric social worker burst into my office one day and, obviously frustrated, stated, "I'm so glad you are here. You are the only person in Ethiopia to whom I can speak about a defense system who doesn't think I am talking about the military."

Let us skip to Ghana. I was assigned there to do a research study which required interviewers capable of handling a programed schedule exact enough that results could be compared with results in other countries. No local persons had the skills, but a few persons in one government agency were attempting to acquire them. Some of them had earned vacation time and agreed to work with me, learn the techniques, and conduct the survey. They were to be

paid, on their vacation, the same amount they earned on duty with the government agency. I trained them for two weeks. Then they went on strike. They refused to conduct the survey interviews, to apply their new skills, unless I paid them 50% more than their regular salary. Rationale? They had learned so much that they were worth much more. I was reminded of the landlord who was invited to look at his tenants' house, which the tenants had painted, and then remarked, "It's beautiful; I'm going to raise your rent." In retrospect, these stories are fun, but the fact is that one of the things I really learned from this experience is that there are many facets to education, so many facets. I was so angry with those young men to whom I had taught improved skills, marketable skills. Stewing in my anger, I had a flash of thought: Chinese? I do not know for sure. Some culture holds that if you save a person's life the saviour is responsible for the saved person for the rest of the life of both of them. Is education that important? Maybe so. I didn't have that much faith; I simply got the Minister of their department to threaten to fire them if they didn't carry on with my research project. But I learned something about the relationship of education to economics.

So what can we learn from Africa? Let me again digress from the major theme of education and touch a bit of social psychology. Zanzibar is a beautiful place to spend a vacation. Leaving the island, after a vacation jaunt, I found at airplane seat next to a lively, English-speaking Zanzibari woman with whom I made quick conversational contact. Shortly, she asked me, "Is it true that in your country fathers think so little of their daughters that they give them away in marriage for nothing?" Of course, on returning to the States, I was asked, "Is it true that African fathers sell their daughters into marriage for a bride price?" That anecdote leads nicely into a situation in Eastern Nigeria which is very meaningful for those of us who are interested in the value of education. Following World War II, returning soldiers were

picking off brides, with mustering-out pay, unmatchable by lads who had stayed home to keep the home fires burning. So the legislature decreed a maximum bride price of about $U.S. 85.00. However, the black-market ignored the legal limits. The fascinating point for us educators here today is that the black-market fee-schedule was specifically related to the years of education acquired by the potential bride. More than one Ibo male and female told me that a college-educated woman had just about priced herself out of the bride-market.

Some of you may feel that this phenomenon is wrong, or vulgar, or whatever. I suggest that it is a tribute to the profession we practice. In all honesty, however, I must tell you that I participated in a debate at the University of Nigeria wherein it was resolved that a university man would be happier in marriage with an uneducated girl from his native village than with a college-educated girl. Our side, negative, lost. The Dean of students, chairman of the event, spoke strongly for the affirmative side of the debate.

The next statement I want to make is a defensive one. I am sure that there are persons in this audience who want facts and statistics. I have very few, if any. My presentation, so far, has been personal and anecdotal. It will continue to be so. I had planned to make this scientific disclaimer at the end of my presentation, but I am so afraid that I shall run out of time that I am sticking it in here. Our Chairman, Jack Bardon, in a communication to symposium participants stated, "In preparing your remarks, please keep in mind that our major purpose is to address ourselves to what we in the United States might learn from your experiences." So now I shall go on with reporting to you my personal experience which I think may be relevant to our mutual concerns.

I was assigned to study ways in which the governments of Zanzibar, Kenya, and Tanzania were attempting to provide elementary education to adult females.

To squeeze down my findings, I learned that no program worked so long as adults were asked to go to school. School is for children. Successful programs centered on organizing adult women's clubs where, very incidentally, the club women became interested in literacy programs, hygiene programs, etc., etc. These sorts of solutions are not just semantic differences; they are reflections of sensitivity to an adult human being's sense of personal dignity. We can use this order of sensitivity in the USA in our educational programs for imigrants as well as for many of our indigenous citizens with deprived educational backgrounds.

To the best of my knowledge, my home-town, Miami, Florida, is the only city in the U.S.A. which is officially bi-lingual. All public announcements are in both English and Spanish. If you dial any service agency, you get answers in both languages. This is great, in my opinion. And it leads to another experience I had in Africa. I was asked to study various aspects of the U.S. program in Liberia and make recommendations for training programs for Liberian employees. (Remember that Liberia "Liberty" was the African territory to which freed slaves, after the Civil War, could return to Africa if they wishes. And the capital city is named Monrovia, after our U.S. president Monroe under whom this return to Africa was organized.) You might not be interested in my formal report, but I think you might be interested in an exchange I experienced as I was driven to the airport by a Liberian. I had discovered that a major problem in working relationships, interpersonal relationships, was that American English and Liberian English are so different that communication was almost at a standstill. The Liberian driver, taking me to the airport at the end of my study, communicated with me clearly. I understood every word he spoke; and he understood me, too. I asked him if he thought the Liberian employees of the U.S. Government would appreciate a language-training program, so that all Liberians could communicate with their

employers as well as he. His answer: "Why not teach the Americans to understand Liberian English? We understand one-another." The psychological and educational implications of that statement can stand without interpretation.

In a number of West African countries, markets are dominated by women, and the market women teach girls from childhood the art of marketing and bargaining. But mothers rarely teach their own daughters; they swap children for teaching purposes on the theory that mother-love will interfere with the discipline necessary for effective teaching. Similar swapping of children boys and girls is done for the purpose of training children in domestic skills. In most African countries vocational education is very limited for females, e.g., a recent book by Obukar and Wrns, entitled The Modern African, devotes only four pages to "The African Woman." The chapter on education lists 41 areas open to males, only 11 for females.

This discrimination is not so marked in some African countries. I spent the summer of 1972 visiting North African countries to study the changing roles of women in some Muslim cultures. Tunisian women in secondary education are enrolled almost exclusively in teacher-training programs; whereas, in Egypt, 85% of the girls in secondary schools were in university oriented programs. One of my graduate students, Wayne Tillman, analyzed some of the data I gathered on locus-of-control, i.e., internal or external orientation. The religion of Islam is almost totally externally oriented--everything that happens to a person is the will of Allah! However, the Egyptians, both men and women proved to be significantly more internally oriented than the Tunisians, an interesting correlate of the differences in educational and vocational opportunities for women in the two Muslim countries.

A final comment: My experiences in Africa strongly reinforced for me the learning that--regardless of nationality, skin-color, religion, or any other variable--all babies cry in the same language, and cry for the same reasons.