

TRADITIONAL VALUES VERSUS MODERNITY: TOWARDS A RESOLUTION OF THE DILEMMA OF CULTURE CONFLICT IN AFRICAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT: *This paper looks at the trend of alien behaviours and attitudes, which have been consciously and unconsciously imbibed by Africans in general and Nigerian youths in particular, and how these have negatively impacted on the various aspects of our life-family, education, economy, among others. Using a hypothetical approach as well as direct observation, the paper attempts a chronicle of these foreign cultural traits which presently threaten our individuality, our family system, our society and the very constituents of our humanity as members of a well ordered society. It looks at the role the movies can play by providing corrective measures, documenting the proper and acceptable values as well as preserving them for the future. It proffers suggestions for the way forward and makes recommendations which, if adopted, could help redirect our culture and refocus our society for a richer, more beneficial and more meaningful existence.*

KEYWORDS: Culture, Culture-shock, Film/Movie, Tradition, Civilization.

INTRODUCTION

There is a wide gap existing between the concept of being primitive, crude, underdeveloped, uncultured, etc. and that of being developed; cultured or civilized. Now, being cultured, which is in most cases, synonymous with being civilized, has no direct bearing with having acquired Western education or not, rather, as it is going to be argued here, it means being or having the right attitude, the proper behaviour towards certain issues; being neither hot nor cold, but being reasonable. It means being conscious and alive to the bonds which bind humanity, the thread with which families are knitted, the balm which heals society's wounds and provides that proverbial, "how are you?" which cures the sick.

It is from this point of view that we are going to look at culture. From those norms and values even taboos, modes of greeting and dressing; manners of speaking and acting, familial and kinship relations. We will also look at marriage, death, among other norms and values, which held the traditional society together and which civilization has made us or rather, our youths, to turn their backs on, to the detriment of all and how the movie can be used to help us retrace our steps and reclaim ourselves.

Definition

Culture is man and that is why every man has an idea of what it is. To that end, the sources of definition of culture shall be limited to two. Acholonu (2002:6) says that culture is the process of development of the mind and the soul of man. For her, culture is all encompassing. It is man in all ramifications since it represents the totality of man's existence. She goes further to say

that, “a nation cannot develop beyond its level of cultural development.” She then expounds as follows:

Culture is the terrain that deals with the intellectual development of a people (Philosophy), their spiritual development (Religion), their emotional development (Arts) and their collective evolutionary development (Civilization).

She notes that it is culture, not biology/anatomy which distinguishes a people from the others. To her, “culture alone captures that unique something that makes us who and what we are, that makes us think, behave and react the way we do.”

On the other hand, Khalil (2004:137) began his definition of culture with a positive assumption that everybody knows what culture is. As he puts it, “devoid of any definition of western scholars and sociologist(sic), everyone agrees that culture is the way of life of any group of people, including their beliefs, morals, language, political organization and economic activity, as well as their equipment, technique(sic), art form and literature.” Thus, culture is all encompassing, covering the entirety of a people’s existence.

Drawing from the above, we can see culture in our upbringing, the way we marry, die and are buried; our modes of greeting, our ceremonies and festivals, our associations, the way we take on and accept new ways of doing things and generally, the way we live our lives. It follows then, that whatever negatively intrudes on the above, would, no doubt, impact on our culture. So, if we welcome new ideas and accept them, for instance, giving up nudity for dressing and covering up our bodies; jettisoning the concept of throwing away twin children and their mothers in the light of our new understanding, such new practices would then become part of our culture. It is important to point out that not all new ideas or changes are acceptable to the people, neither do they sink in automatically, nor do people generally do away with old and unacceptable ways with alacrity. These all take time.

Abandoning old ways of life and accepting new ways are generally a gradual process that take years, even generations to accomplish. Still, some behaviours creep in so unobtrusively that the people are hardly aware of them and these are usually the most dangerous and have decidedly negative impact basically because of their unobtrusiveness. The people tend to accept them without immediately being aware of their flip side. These often come via the media as the latest fad or fashion, the rave of the moment and if one was not taken in, one was seen as conservative, if not outright uncivilized or primitive. For instance, it has become both fashionable and even acceptable among youths and adults to be partakers in one social media or the other. Failing to belong exposes one to ridicule as a person not prone to change. To that end, it has become the norm to pose a compatible medium, preferably a handset, that can make this event possible irrespective of whether the possessor can afford it or not.

This brings us to the word, “culture-shock.” *The Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus and Word-power Guide*, (291), defines culture-shock as “disorientation experienced when suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life.” In our case, the culture-shock we are experiencing is not altogether sudden. Some have taken years to manifest, some took us unawares and some crept in from the backdoor, as it were. However, in some of the cases, for example, manners of dressing, speaking and attitude to elders, either our youths or ourselves,

actively encouraged their intrusion. Let us now take a cursory look into history and try to identify some of these alien cultures we are talking about. The importance of this backward glance is self explanatory as it will highlight the positive aspects of our culture and weigh them against their current status.

Culture in the past: the family

Beginning with the family, we know that Africans generally run an extended family system. This means that the African family is decidedly a large one. Every member of this blood-line, nuclear or extended, enjoys equal rights and privileges which stretch to the village level, embracing kith and kin and wherever marriage is tabooed, at least. This gives substance to the proverb, common among the Igbo, that kinship is strength. By implication, therefore, everyone is his brother's keeper. There was collective responsibility in bringing up children and caring for them.

An erring child was punished; a recalcitrant youth was corrected, reprimanded or rewarded accordingly by whoever was privy to the action that needed appropriate response. There was no discrimination in handling issues. One did not defend wrong-doing because the wrong-doer was a relative or from one's ethnic background. An outstanding person belonged to all, physically and psychologically, as he was a role model for all. But presently, there is individualism to the point that a mother-, the most sacred entity of the African family system, - is violated for individual and selfish pursuits. Family members now constitute a large portion of victims of rituals of all sorts; kidnapping, rape, murder, robbery, prostitution, assaults of all sorts, are directed at members of the family. Indeed, a high percentage of kidnap cases in Nigeria today have a family member at one stage or the other of its execution. Where in the past such negative tendencies were carried out in secret, now such miscreants and criminals are revered and celebrated, often with family and community support. In the traditional setting, especially among certain ethnic groups, such crimes committed against a member of one's blood-line, resulted in the concept of the *osu* or outcast system, unless where appropriate propitiation rites were carried out to cleanse the land which is considered desecrated by such act.

Now, where did the concept of glamourizing wealth originate from? It began with outsiders, governments, organizations, etc. as victims. These were not "human beings" but merely "bodies" worthy of such abuse and violence. Over time, however, the knife used to dissect the hawk, was turned on the chick, and families became victims. The age of the individual has arrived. It usually began with the father, mother or a well placed family member abusing his/her office by fraudulently enriching himself/herself. In this way, our culture begins to make way for the new entrants as the extended family system struggles to accommodate the individual who owes loyalty to none but money and flamboyance. A new culture has thus set in, a culture of the cult of the individual as Ekwuazi (1997) would put it.

Religion

Religion is, perhaps, the greatest threat to societal peace in Africa today. And one is not talking about the out rightly violent out breaks from fanatics and adherents of a particular sect or the other. Rather, the major challenge emanating from religion is traceable to pastors and the purported men of God who do more havoc with their preaching than one can imagine. With their false prophecies and economic driven prayers, they sow seeds of discord; witches and wizards are invariably, members of one's own family. There is no ordinary explanation for

sickness, joblessness, barrenness, and other challenges to which the human body is prone. But they all have spiritual attributions preferably to members of the immediate family and recourse must be taken to “holy ghost fire” to rain down from heaven and rout the “evil doers.”

In *The Credo of Being and Nothingness*, Soyinka (1991:13), captures the effect of religious intolerance when he says of the religious crisis that once rocked the quiet of the University of Ibadan’s peaceful environment, “it split long friendships, soured long established neighbourliness, poisoned collegiate ship and implanted suspicion among colleagues.” Families are today divided faster by religion than anything else. In schools, social activities have given way to fellowships and religious worships. Another eminent scholar sees Fellowship as one of the causes of poor academic performance because dogmatism robs one the logic of sound and robust argument. According to him:

But it is not a lie that nowadays, the time that the student or staff used to give to leisure activities, such as reading, or sports or other cultural events, has been diverted to fellowships or vigils or ecstatic prayer sessions. And to worsen matters, the preaching that I am told goes on nowadays in these places is the kind that closes up the mind of the worshipper, freezes up his or her mind from nonconformist, adventurous ideas, and teaches that doubt is sin. (Osofisan 2007:77).

The irony of the above is that with the profession of religiosity all over the place, rather than the society experiencing more moral and spiritual edification, what prevails is moral decadence and spiritual acrimony to the point that the negative spirituality is attributed to members of the family, preferably elderly ones and especially parents and grandparents. These are no doubt, alien cultural traits, or at least, misinterpretations of them. In the past and to some extent even now, family bloodline is sacred and it stretches to the kindred level up to the larger society. But religion has come with its demystifications of sacred things, including persons, spreading disrespect and disloyalty, helping to confer wealth on the wrong people. It has created its own ethics, and brought in new uncomfortable values. City dwellers become afraid of their rural based relatives, including parents and therefore, refuse to go home. Worse, some of these men of God are bereft of morals. This brings loss of integrity and credibility as the people we look up to, to provide the necessary and much needed exemplary conduct, are the very ones who bring the society to opprobrium. The newspapers are replete with the story of pastors who were catalytically responsible for the breakage of their members’ marriages. There are stories of pastors who not only covet their members’ wife, but go ahead and kill the husbands, after getting details of their bank accounts and other assets from the wives! These men and, sadly, women ‘of God’ forget that, “leadership is a sacred trust like the priesthood in civilized, humane religions. No one gets into it lightly or unadvisedly because it demands qualities of mind and discipline of body and will, far beyond the needs of the ordinary citizen,” (Achebe 2006:12).

Achebe rightly, notes that whoever offers himself or is offered to serve the society, should know that the role demands much from him or her, and if in doubt, should refuse such prompting. A call to serve is an exercise in credibility, dignity and integrity. But what do we have today? Leaders who are bereft of even the commonest communication skills, but who, because of the neo-cultural celebration of mediocrity and fraudulence, found themselves in such positions.

Education

Much has been touted about the falling standard of education in the country without any serious attempt being made to address it. It appears the new god that belches and the world catches cold is money. Because of money, men have lost their manhood; women sacrifice their maidenhead and mortgage their role as mothers, and as societal foundation. University dons are not any better. Time was when teachers at all levels were revered and respected. But confronted with poor remuneration on one hand, and mouth-watering financial gratifications from politicians on the other; weak academics cave in. As Achebe (2006:20-21), says further:

The University men who had sailed forth into national politics have had a rather dismal record. No one can point to any shining achievement in national politics, which the nation can recognise as the peculiar contribution of University men. Rather, quite a few of them have been splashed in typical accusations of abuse of office and other forms of corruption. Those who have remained in the ivory tower have hardly fared better. Many have cheapened themselves and eroded their prestige by trotting up and down between the campus and the waiting rooms of the powerful, shamelessly vying for attention and running one another down for the entertainment of the politician.

Achebe then laments that for a country to exist for twenty-six(26) years without having been ruled by a University graduate, would have necessitated the traditional set up to seek the services of *afa* divination to find out why! That observation above by Achebe was made in 2006, when Nigeria was 26 years old, and when the likes of Professor Dora Akunyili (late), of National Agency for Drug Enforcement and Administration (NAFDAC) had not made incursion into politics from the academia. However, it took Nigeria well over forty-five (45) years to achieve this feat, that is, get a graduate as president. Has the country and indeed, the educational sector fared any better as a consequence? The reasons are spelt out above. Thus, came the culture/era of certificate racketeering, examination malpractice at all levels of education, cultism, et cetera. And because those who hold and occupy the positions to make a difference lack both the will and the relevant qualification, they can only reproduce what they have.

In the pre-independence era and up to the first two decades of independence, teachers at all levels had clout, were respected and seen as role models, custodians of truth; parents sent their erring children and wards to them for discipline. But now, such things no longer obtain as teachers are either not interested or lack the will to discipline any erring child. The *Guardian* newspaper in its editions of Wednesday November 14th and Thursday November 15th editions, 2012, capture the rot in Nigeria's public Universities most effectively.

Miscellaneous

The things which we hold sacred as a people have become so profaned while the tabooed ones are now the norm and the norm is profaned. We thus live in the world of reversals. For instance, we claim to fight corruption yet one of the most visible evidences of corruption is celebrated everyday. For example, in Nigeria, few people can recall the last time they went to any commercial bank and came away with crisp Naira notes. Yet, every weekend, these same crisp notes are hawked by children of school age at social functions – weddings, funerals, birthdays, etc. at a price! How did these children come about these crisp Naira notes of all denominations?

Is it perhaps, the norm to hawk crisp naira notes that could have come from nowhere but the apex bank? And by people who in all ramifications have not toiled to earn their living?

But by far, the culture or is it a policy turned culture (?) -which has turned the country around and placed it on its head is the quota system. This policy has turned out to be the epicenter of the celebration of mediocrity and ethnicity rather than a stabilizer in a federal system which it ought to be. This is because for the purpose of accommodating a given tribe or interest, a less qualified person is preferred for a job. For example, a candidate who by virtue of intellectual and experiential acquisition is qualified for the office of the Vice chancellor, may be denied that position, if he lacks political clout. In this same token, many potential candidates have lost university admission opportunities for this weak policy. The same obtains in every sphere of the Nigerian polity. This policy denies the right person for a job because he came from a particular place and not the other.

The normal thing should be to let the right person(s) by merit and qualification be taken. This will encourage others to buckle up and create the atmosphere for a healthy competition. That such practice encourages both mediocrity and sycophancy, there can be no doubt. It is for this policy that Nigerians can never revolt against perceived autocracy, criminality, evil, et cetera on the flimsy excuse that the perpetrator is from a particular zone. Rather than condemn, they dig up negative antecedents from other cultures within the same nation just to defend evil. Examples are too rampant to be repeated here. But, the recent case of the Aviation minister and the purchase of two armoured vehicles will be sufficient. Suffice it to say that the celebration of alien cultures covers every sphere of our lives.

A look at the network providers will also prove this to be a culture of upholding negative tendencies in preference to the positive ones. A situation where one pays for services not rendered, is condemnable. On the broadcast and show business area, especially music and dressing, the situation is no better. It appears censorship does not cover music and musical videos. Then what goes for fashion currently is an apology. (See Anyanwu, in *Humanities Review Journal*, 1.2.

This is where the media should come in to remove what they have helped to institute.

The Role of Film in Culture

The film medium is a medium which can be used to do just about anything. Its only limitation, where there is available finance, is the film maker's personal limitations. Otherwise, the medium is capable of casting doubts on reality by its use of the imagination. Thus, the film medium is a veritable vehicle for preserving, promoting, propagating and even of recreating and castigating culture. It all depends on the film maker's aim. Anyanwu (2013:24) cites two Russian leaders on how they see and use the cinema.

Among all your acts the most important is that of the cinema." – Lenin.
 "Moulding the feeling and intelligence of the masses is one of our political problems and for this end, we find the movies most effective" – Eisenstein.

The above indicates that film is used for political goals and to control minds. Ernest Lindgren, Cited by Anyanwu, reveals how this is done when he quotes Pearsall-Smith!

That's exactly it, I answered gravely. If I take people to pieces, I do it so as to put them together again better than they were before; I make

them more real, so to speak, more significant, more essentially themselves, if you catch my meaning.

Thus, film helps to make life more interesting, more captivating and more exciting than reality itself. So, where it has been used deliberately, or inadvertently to affect the African/Nigerian culture negatively, the same medium can be employed positively to reverse the trend. And this is how it can be achieved.

Scripting

It has been reiterated that the movie can be used to do just about anything; that the only limitation on its way is that of the filmmaker. In effect, if the government and people are genuinely concerned about reviving their cultural heritage or rather in repositioning their culture to be pro-active, what is required is a deliberate crafting of the script and production formats. In film production, from preproduction through post-production, every effort would be geared towards emphasizing the objective of the movie.

Define the objective

Recall that this was also the method employed by the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) in its colonization efforts. One of its major objectives was to show the outside world the excellent work being done in heathen parts under the aegis of the Union Jack (*Day break in Udi*) being an example (Anyanwu, 2013:6). In effect, it is not out of place to employ a little propaganda to achieve the desired goal or objective of the movie maker. Thus, care must be taken in defining the objectives and aims of the movie.

Self/Corporate Censorship

The movie can be used to emphasize the desirable while condemning the unwanted and also negating the needless. But this is unfortunately not the case. Our movies are replete with glorifying the condemnable, upholding the negative and emphasizing the undesirable. On the musical video side, it is even worse. All we hear are lyrics that are not edifying and which almost without exception denigrate women and cast aspersions on their values. For instance, the album *Your Waist* by Onoyum Mbuk, popularly known as Iyanya, with the refrain of: “Your waist, your waist, your waist. All I want is your waist,” etc. One wonders what such song can contribute to society even by way of entertainment. The need for self and corporate censorship cannot be undermined.

This of course, is where the Censors Board comes in. It is not enough to classify videos without paying attention to lyrics of songs/music. Reacting to the controversy that trailed the banning of the first musical ever in the United States of America by Luke and 2 Live Crew, entitled *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*, Leo (28) poses: “why should our daughters have to grow up in a culture in which musical advice on the domination and abuse of women is accepted as entertainment?”

Musicals rather than be the source of inspiration and entertainment which they are supposed to be, turn out to be the exact opposite. And, this is done through the graphic lyrics, the videos, the manners and modes of dressing of the musicians; their life-styles, their marriages that break up even before the marriage register is signed; among other outlandish ways and cultures which they foist on the society.

Training/Retraining

The video film can be effectively employed to enlighten the professional and amateur as well as the general public on the right and proper thing to do. Inasmuch as movies universally tend to thrive on “sexitainment”, they can also provide “infotainment,” enlightenment and generally educate the populace on the proper cultural values to adopt provided those who do it have the right values themselves.

The importance of using movies to teach, educate and preserve our cultural values is underscored by the fact that these movies serve to reconnect people to their roots and their past. For instance, “Africans in the Diaspora appropriate the movies as a form of memory rejuvenation. They are reconnected to the life that they had left for the new world,” (Eghagha 2007:73).

We are aware that change is a constant in the life of man. But a people do not change to the point that a returning traveler fails to recognize his home. This is what obtains or will happen when our movies adopt the new cultures and abandon our own. It is tantamount to the removal of the old landmarks so that the new environment retains no vestige of the old one thus making the people to lose their way.

CONCLUSION

The paper has looked at culture as a source of human sustainability and perpetuity. Without culture, a people lose their identity and relevance hence their humanity. Thus, culture should be preserved in all its branches. Besides, inasmuch as culture is conservative and change is innovative, change should not occur or be made to occur to the point of displacing established tradition and culture. When such happens, there is culture shock, which over time, leads to culture-shift and finally, to acceptance of the abnormal as the norm, especially where those who should hold fast and teach, turn around to aid and abet such acts. Africa would be the loser especially as our youths accept Western values and norms/culture without fully understanding them

In their modes of dressing, manners of speech, language and styles of addressing elders; in their hairstyles, in their relationships, etc. they tend to think that Western culture is better, even superior to that of Africa. For instance, the robust girls one notices on the streets appear to be accidental in comparison with the efforts they put up to be slim just to measure up to Western definition of beauty! There is, therefore, need for all stake holders, especially movie makers to emulate the Igbo culture which:

has been fortunate to strike a balance between the two. While recognizing the necessity of technological development which I have metonymically called tool-fashioning, the culture also recognizes the need for imaginative development through creative story telling; whether in the past or present of Igbo life, story telling holds a prominent place among people and affords them the best chance for defining and enhancing their humanity. (Onuekwusi, 2013:16).

There is no doubt that, technology through the video film, has taken over the modern story-telling, which itself is an embodiment of cultural essence of a people. It is, therefore, expected

that the video films should epitomize the best in a people's culture rather than denigrating it. And they must do it because an outsider cannot do it for them. Our culture is our life and whatever affects it, positively or negatively, impacts on us as a people. It goes without saying then that every effort should be made not only to preserve our culture, but to propagate and show-case it to the entire world and if possible, ensure that the world recognizes, accepts and respects it as our hold on our piece of earth. It is unique to us. It is our right and pride, as a people and members of the human universe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having noted from the foregoing, that culture is like the air we breathe and that its significance aligns with the relevance we attach to life, the following recommendations are hereby, made:

- The ministry of culture should be made to realize its importance in the overall entity called Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.
- Arising from the above, the various ministries of culture in Africa should ensure that culture is given its rightful place among all the entities that make up the continent.
- The various bodies whose business relate to entertainment and information, notably, Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN), Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON), National Communications Commission (NCC), Censors Board, Nollywood and its constituents, among others, should do an in-house cleansing before any music, film, radio/TV programmes, etc. is released to the public.
- A good image of the country is the responsibility of all stakeholders, therefore, parents and all personality moulders should try to be role models to the youth and children in their dressing, language, the kind of music they play and movies they watch, etc.
- Acculturation, (a process whereby a given culture succumbs on contact to a more advanced one) is good, but it should not be done to the detriment of core values/norms of indigenous culture and tradition.
- Language and costumes constitute a significant percentage of any culture, thus, care should be taken on how they are handled or introduced into extant practices of a people, etc.

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