

# The Instrumental Functions of Cultural Studies and Policies in Contemporary Nigerian Society

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**Abstract**—Cultural studies remains one of the fields of research in the humanities that contributes to the development of the society by aiding the formulation of cultural policies towards the re-engineering of a nation's social behavior. A functioning state benefits a lot from cultural products of cultural studies. Thus for any state, like Nigeria, to reap from cultural studies and policies, its basic democratic institutions should be strong and effective. The theoretical framework for this research is symbolic interactionism proposed by Stryker and Denzin. This is because it enables the understanding of how cultural products are translated into policies that shape the society. In this paper, we demonstrated that Cultural Studies is instrumental to the development cultural policies that take seriously national identity and social integration of the Nigeria society.

**Index Terms**—Cultural Studies, Cultural Policies, Civil Society Organizations and Instrumental Function.

## INTRODUCTION

Culture is humanly produced reality needed for social interactions and development of the society. In functional terms, Alan describes it as a symbolic reference system whereby human beings meaningfully create and recreate the real world through actions and interactions within the society. This symbolic referencing covers language, religion, values, morality, dressing, politics, etc. [1]. Cultural diversity of the Nigerian society is potential blessing for its transformation and development if operational policies are drawn from it with the aid of cultural studies. Bedeviled by non-performing cultural analysis and other factors, Falola observes that Nigeria was one of the troubled nations that entered the new millennium as a poor country according to various global socio-economic indices [2]. This situation is partially caused by politicization of culture for ethnic interests. Under this situation, the government finds it difficult to manage the challenges that are rooted in cultural differences of the nations that make up a state thereby having retrogressive impacts on regional and national development [3].

Cultural forms and practices in Nigeria are variegated and polyvalent. The material contents of cultural studies in this nation-state are rich and complex, *ipso facto*, comprehensive approach to cultural analysis is needed for a better policy formulation, implementation and social integration. This work is an attempt at rehabilitating humanities as useful instruments for social integration and development through the resources drawn from cultural studies and policies. The

research is divided into seven parts: (i) Introduction, (ii) understanding the field of cultural studies, (iii) the social theory of symbolic interactionism, (iv) sustaining cultural policies (v) the trio of Bourdieu, Certeau and Debray on culture and society, (vi) instrumental functions of cultural policies, and (vii) conclusion

## UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Firstly, the academic field of cultural studies is historically linked to the nineteenth century British and French intellectual traditions. Among scholars, there is a general consensus that the British tradition of cultural studies started with the analytical approach to literary texts in view of delineating the politics of culture and the society's evolution. According to Turner, this bottom-top approach to culture was pioneered by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams [4]. The French school took a top-bottom pattern wherein the state negotiated how individuals are introduced into the society via cultural formation summarized as its Republic's motto: "Liberté, égalité, fraternité". These three ideals influence French *weltanschauung*, cultural formation and its perception of cultural studies [5].

Secondly, Suber gives an impressive description of cultural studies from theoretical and analytical perspectives. According to him, on one hand this discipline connotes a theoretical approach to contemporary discourse which employs appropriate frameworks for interpreting the society. On the other hand, it denotes a field of study that is orientated towards the analysis and critique of culture vis-à-vis economic influence and political power [6].

Thirdly, contemporary understanding of cultural studies defies clear cut description or/and definition because of evolution in its meaning. This hermeneutical condition is accelerated by the emphasis on the difference between cultural studies and theorization of human existence which were hitherto viewed as synonymous. Yet, Peters avers that maintaining a link between 'intellectual world' and 'the real world' is crucial to its meaning because "it is not possible to talk about the development of 'cultural studies' within the university without reference to large movements and events outside the university" [7]. Thus, the material contents of cultural studies include people's lived experience and popular culture. Corroborating this, Finnish scholars of culture, Pyykkönen, Simanainen, and Sokka, indicate that cultural studies takes keen interest in popular culture other than arts because it explains how ordinary people participate in and

recreate culture via the bottom-up approach [8].

Fourthly, cultural studies is interdisciplinary in scope. It investigates the changing behavioral patterns among members of the society as they respond to all that affects them. In this regard, Mark and Saarinen suggest that cultural studies lacks its proper boundary because it scrutinizes what happens in other disciplines that deals with human beings thereby serving as an instrument of social transformation [9].

Fifthly, cultural studies take seriously the power of culture to redirect the course of the society. For this reason, Pickering argues that it should balance its epistemic contents with empirical data drawn from the cultural resources of the society [10].

Sixthly, the field of cultural studies is heterogeneous and multidimensional. With these perspectives, it raises its critical voices on every aspects of human life. Therefore, we can talk about the following: cultural studies of Mass Communication, Music, Sociology, etc. It is not out of place to talk of Medicine and cultural studies, Nursing Science and cultural studies, etc. Indeed one can use cultural studies to investigate how technology is shaping contemporary culture. Cultural resources are also symbolic in nature. Hence, it is pertinent to examine how the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism can enhance a better appreciation of this subject-matter.

#### THE SOCIAL THEORY OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

The material subject of cultural studies is human beings living together in particular historical context. Here, language is the primary means of social communication. With its symbolic formulations, language is the foundational instrument for social interaction and organization of the society. Stryker enunciates symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework that seeks to establish a bridge between social structures and individual persons, thereby sustaining movement from the micro level to the macro level of the society and back to the micro level for better organization of the society [11]. In the society, social structures like institutions, public offices create and sustain meanings that promote wellbeing and human flourishing. These social structures are products of social environments and interactions at micro and macro levels.

Social structures and positions are symbolic representations of the desire for order, peace, and progress in the society. Symbolic interactionism explains the trajectory of cultural dynamics both at the micro level and macro level. Therefore, symbolic interactionism throws more light on the reciprocal impacts generated by interactions among human beings at the micro level (family) and macro level (society) which necessitates social roles within every social system. There is an integrative relationship between cultural studies and symbolic interactions. Cultural studies connote critical analysis of how cultural attitudes aid social interactions and how their outcomes are channeled into statecraft. Furthermore, Denzin avers that symbolic interactionism enhances social interactions in a symbiotic manner through cultural forms such as artwork, music, popular culture, literature, etc. [12]. Consequently, the feedback from these social interactions at the micro and macro levels will guide the formulation of cultural policies.

#### CULTURAL POLICIES AND ITS SUSTENANCE

Cultural policy is a state-craft that remains instrumental to the cultivation and reproduction of social imaginations which orientate and direct the affairs of the society. This blueprint for cultural transformation normally goes unnoticed and sometimes forgotten as the public ritual for society's public order [13]. Cultural policies propose systems of interaction that are aimed at regulating the society, ensuring its stability and flourishing. Therefore, the programs formulated through cultural policies should promote national identities of the nation-state enshrined in its constitution, and they also adapt cultural identities that have been overtaken by civilization or challenged by technological advancements [14]. In a multi-cultural nation-state like Nigeria, language styles that appeal to every ethnic group is crucial to the dissemination of cultural policies. For this reason, cultural policies should address common interests of the society such as religion, education, ethnic and social integration so that civil harmony might be promoted [15].

But social policies are lame without strong democratic institutions that guard national interests and prevail over particular partisan agenda. Cultural policies need the collaborative efforts of democratic institutions for their transformative powers to be concretely felt in the society. In contemporary cultural context, neoliberal demagogues have become 'quasi' institutions and formidable socio-economic power brokers that are reorganizing the society and culture in an unprecedented way. Thus, cultural perceptions are being constantly reshaped by the market-force controlled by media moguls and the likes [16]. Sometimes, the government seems to be helpless before these demagogues and is thereby forced to negotiate with them.

Any nation-state that desire stability and growth must encourage and sustain cultural policy research. This research should be done in collaboration with other relevant institutions so that the missing agenda in cultural studies might be brought to the fore [17]. With policy oriented cultural studies, the interdisciplinary approach to culture will be strengthened. Therefrom, grant should be given to institutions and public service departments for longitudinal research on variety of themes that promotes governance and national integration. Let us now turn to the trio of Bourdieu, Certeau and Debray in view of assessing how they shaped the French cultural policies with their contributions to cultural studies.

#### THE TRIO OF BOURDIEU, CERTEAU AND DEBRAY ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The stabilization of French national identity around its Republic's motto: 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité,' sustained its institutionalization of cultural studies. This would not have been possible without strong and efficient democratic institutions and cultural policy research unit directed by Michel de Certeau under the oversight of the Ministry of Culture [18].

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French Sociologist and Social Theorist who wrote extensively on cultural capital and

political education. He popularized rational approach to cultural studies. Bourdieu saw culture as man-made instrument that directs the evolution of the society. He collaborated with the French Ministry of Culture on how theatre, cinema, museum and arts could direct and shape national identity [19]. He equally criticized the Ministry of Culture's humanization of the world with the elites' culture as lopsided. This is because culture is not only the product of the elites; the people of the lower class have values that could equally benefit the so-called educated people [20]. This understanding of culture as non-monolithic can benefit the multiethnic Nigerian context.

Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) was a French Cultural Theorist who took seriously the voice of those at the margins of the society in matters concerning cultural production, consumption and reproduction. According to Certeau, the event of May 1968, the labor union strike that grounded economic activities in France demonstrated that the voice of those at the margins must be heard. Furthermore, according to him, this event showed that cultural formation and reformation is not always from the elite to the masses. Through the strike action, the masses spoke and initiated a process that gave birth to laws that govern the relationship between the masses and the elite with regard to labor culture thereby controlling similar in the future [21]. This kind of engagement is fruitful where democratic institutions are strong and Nigeria will face an enormous challenge here.

Regis Debray is a French Philosopher and Critical Theorist who promoted the thoughts of Andre Malraux on the relationship between rational thoughts and responsible public policy as well as the institutionalization of culture [22]. Debray argues that since cultural heritage is not recorded in human genome, political education is a viable instrument crucial to the enhancement of cultural ecology and sustaining cultural memorial in a democratic society. Therefore, university director of arts must develop means of transmitting cultural resources to future generations [23].

In the Nigerian context wherein investment in cultural studies research and public education is inadequate, civil society organizations (CSOs) are becoming effective partners for social integration. CSOs are non-state action groups with the collective interest of protecting the non-statal public realm as well as influencing state politics and policies for the good of the people [24]. The *modus loquendi* of CSOs is a critique of governance in advanced and developing democracies in view of promoting social interests and public good [25]. Generally, where democratic institutions are weak, civil society organizations can strengthen the instrumental functions of cultural policies.

#### INSTRUMENTAL FUNCTIONS OF CULTURAL POLICIES

Instrumental functions of cultural policies are concerned with the pragmatics of cultural studies. It shows how the praxis of cultural critique benefits the people in the society. Functionality is relational and operative term or concept that assesses the connection between thought (organism) and real world (environment). This is one of the contributions of American pragmatism to psychology of actions [26].

First, the leitmotif of cultural policies is problem solving strategy that should enhance social integration and development. In Nigeria where democratic institutions are

weak, the workability of cultural policies can be increased by partnership between Departments of Cultural Studies and Civil Society Organizations or Non-Governmental Organizations that are focused on the promotion of culture and good governance. Adeyeye avers that, in Nigeria, these CSOs are locally metamorphosing into self-help groups (SHGs) that are filling up the developmental gap created by failed public governance. Since they are augmenting public governance, these groups should be taken seriously and structured for more service delivery in indigenous communities [27].

Second, cultural monuments are heritage that embody history and identity of a nation. They are cultural treasures that may not necessarily generate financial capital. Even if all arms of government agree that any of them should be sold, interest groups and persons, unions with civil liberty sensibility have the cultural right to peacefully oppose such dysfunctional and culturally retrogressive policy. Thus, Mr. Dare Durosimi, the Lagos State Chairman, Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers' Union of Nigeria (RATTAWU), led a protest against the decision by the Federal Government of Nigeria to sell the National Arts Theatre, Iganmu Lagos [28]. This is an instance where the people kicked against anti-cultural decision of the government.

Third, empowerment of Society for Humanities/Arts in Nigeria can promote the pragmatic value of cultural policies. In collaboration with civil society organizations, their members can initiate litigation against the government whenever its cultural policies do not serve the interest of the nation. Similarly, by force majeure, civil society organizations and scholars of culture can enquire from the government departments official documents on the contents of its cultural policies concerning education, cinema, entertainment, etc. Unfortunately, the politicization of access to information and other difficulties constitute bottle necks to retrieving these details from government offices [29].

Fourth, the practical functions of cultural policy can be maximized through organized public education at all tiers with the help of cultural critics. From what Bourdieu, Certeau and Debray have done, it is our submission that cultural critics and analysts can help the Nigerian government in the civil and political education of its citizens.

#### CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the contributions of cultural studies to the development of the Nigerian society abound. It provides the society with 'cultural prophets' who make known to all and especially the governing class the cultural barometer of the nation. In a multi-cultural society like Nigeria, these 'cultural prophets' and critics need to be immune to ethno-religious biases that blur honest assessment of the nation's cultural pulse for the good of the nation.

The contributions of scholars from the field of cultural studies can help the government to develop workable cultural policies for social integration in Nigeria. Thus for a long term approach to perennial socio-cultural or socio-religious problems, government should encourage these scholars to carry out longitudinal research projects that are motivated by national interests and need for social integration. These researches can come out with suggestions that will correct

some of the societal ills and also redirect the people's consciousness concerning our common aspiration a nation-state.

Cultural studies and policies are instrumental to social integration of any society. But the weak democratic institutions in our country constitute operational albatross for cultural studies scholars and policy makers for country. The achievements of advanced democratic societies in area of cultural rebirth and social integration promoted by the inputs from painstaking cultural research should encourage scholars of cultural studies in our country in their advocacy for a better Nigeria. Bourdieu, Certeau and Debray did not have a smooth sail as regards collaborating with the government on cultural nurturance of the French society. So, cultural studies scholars should not be discouraged by structural setbacks found in the Nigerian context.

Nevertheless, cultural policies function as instruments that direct the pragmatics of cultural studies. In view of this, civil society organizations should partner with scholars and critics of culture in and outside the academic institutions for the purpose of assessing the impact of government policies on culture. Collaborative efforts like this will serve as feed-back to those concerned with cultural development and social integration of the Nigerian people.

Finally, stakeholders in Nigerian political education should be interested in people-oriented governance. This entails, *inter alia*, getting adequate feed-back from those who are governed. The field of cultural analysts from the field of cultural studies is well equipped with the principles and theories needed for coherent interpretation of how Nigerians perceive governance and social integration. This will assist those entrusted with governance to focus on policies that will promote prosperity and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

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