THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN PROMOTING THE NIGERIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is already falling prey to the dictates of Westernization. As a result, there is a high level of alienation in our cultural realms. As agenda setters, the Mass Media have many roles to play in promoting the cultural heritage of Nigeria. Both the 1979 and the 1999 constitutions of Nigeria mandate the mass media to ensure that government protects, preserves and promotes certain cultures. This study aimed at examining the role of the mass media in promoting the Nigerian cultural heritage. it concluded that the mass media should salvage alienated cultures by guiding Nigerians to love their cultures against Westernized standards and avoid misleading reports on issues of Nigerian ways of living.

Keywords: Mass media, alienation, culture, westernization

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the British intrusion, urban areas existed in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1980). Africa and Nigeria in particular already had advanced cultures relative to their environment before their contact with the Europeans. A few Yoruba towns had a population of between 20,000 and 70,000. Corroborating the above record, Rodney (1992), noted the account of the Dutch when they visited the ancient city of Benin in Nigeria, in the 15th century. According to the Dutch,

> *The town of Benin seems to be very great. When you enter into it, you go into a great broad street not paved which seems to be seven or eight times broader than the warmoes street in Amsterdam… the kings palace is a collection of buildings which occupy as much space as the town of Harlem, and which is enclosed with walls. There are numerous apartments for the princes, ministers and fine galleries, most of which are as big as those on exchange in Amsterdam. They are supported by wooden pillars encased with copper, where their voices are depicted and which are carefully kept clean* (Rodner, 1992).

But these were preserved orally and later in the print medium, no efforts were made to preserve these in the electronic media after the arrival of these media. When placed in the same historical context, historians assert that Nigeria, and Africa in general, achieved developments comparable to that of Europe if not better in the said century, it is also a known fact that, Nigeria achieved great strides in development in her own way before contact with Europe and before

she was integrated into the capitalist agenda. There was remarkable political organization as well as socio-cultural development in Nigeria before her contact with Europe contrary to the white man's view that Nigeria had nothing to sell except slaves. According to Dyson (1998):

> *It was largely through Hausa that goods of the Yoruba Part of the country went Northwards into parts of the Western Sudan and across the Sahara to North Africa*

This was arrested by colonialism otherwise Nigeria would have made great discoveries. Nigeria manufactured her own agricultural tools, her own type of gun and other weapons before her contact with Europe. Example of well organized polity existed in Nigeria. Inhonbere (1989) avers that they (colonizers) abolished our history, assaulted our Institutions and denigrated our culture. Before the coming of Europeans to Africa, Africans made use of arts and crafts to showcase or demonstrate people's artistic genius and power of creativity. This is done through molding of clay or carving of wood in order to preserve their culture. In Nigeria for example, we have the Ife and Benin bronzes, the terracotta beads of Ife, the Nok culture and the Igbo-Ukwu arts. As we all know, culture unites, gives a people an identity mark, a sense of direction, and makes a society grow and progress.

The idea of african Arts and crafts came into being because there was a need to keep or preserve a semblance of a ruler, a head or picture of past people who may have contributed immensely to African development, or a warrior or a hero. A sculpture can be carved or built in order as a memorial of those personalities. Today, a visit to most African countries reveal numerous of such rich and diverse African Arts and Crafts displayed in Museums and Arts council and in many strategic places displaying the rich African - cultural heritage from one generation to the other. Before the arrival of Europeans Africans used their blacksmith in making hoes, axes, cutlasses and ploughs. These African arts and crafts were never heightened inthe media. The European media were rather interested in documentaries that promoted their ideals. The main objective of the study is to analyse varying degrees of alienation that have be-devilled our cultural and educational heritage as a nation as well as highlight ameliorative measures the mass media can take to reverse this unfortunate trend. According to Elaigwu (2005),

> *Ideally, the mass media should perform certain functions in reaction to challenges of nation - building … media - men also have another role, that of providing historical contexts and perspectives for the masses. Featuring articles in papers, documentary series on television and radio and others help to give invaluable historical contexts to current society, especially as more people have access to media outputs such as, radio/TV, newspapers and other printed matters. The building up of a sense of nationhood can only be effectively done in historical contexts, as mistakes of past become assets of today, and success of today become incentives for tomorrow.*

ALIENATION IN CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Jenkwe (2002) asserts that the contemporary process of education is similarly perceived to be an alienated because "education" is treated as a "a thing" and no longer a mode for the expression of life of a given people. This notion is graphically expressed by Kelly (1972) when he says:

> *Our educational institutions.. . are organized on the model of the industrial factory with the learning experience fragmented into courses, subjects, and the like which are "learned" at preset times….the main purpose of the educational system is to prepare people for jobs, both by giving them skills which will be useful on the job, and perhaps even more important, getting them used to being on time, working during present periods of time, and engaging in activity for the sake of earning external rewards. During this process, learning, an intrinsically interesting activity becomes transformed into a boring task done for grades, gold stars, and other extrinsic rewards.*

The outcome of the situation described above is non-fulfillment at the level of the individual in his quest for the understanding of life. This means that he experiences a moral and spiritual debasement rather than the upliftment that the educational experience should engender. Science, for example, has become an alienated cognitive activity because its goals and products are separated from its subject, which is man, and even from the producer the scientist himself.

In the area of language and communication, for example, there has occurred a schism between the oral form of poetry and "art poetry" or written poetry that co-existed with day-to-day language as is the case in our contemporary situation. Though Jenkwe (2002), pointed out that

> *As long as poetry took its life from popular speech it enjoyed the strain of health and strength and suffered the limitations that characterize an uncultivated plant;…the difference between poet and people was quantitative, not qualitative. But poetry moved away and lost its integration with daily life; and with the coming of print and education it passed beyond the reach of all but specialized performers and literate audience.*

One would notice from the foregoing that even the advent of literacy has had the alienating effect of dividing language in "specialized" and "popular" types. On the African continent in particular "linguistic alienation" is deleterious because it has introduced a wedge between the elite who have acquired the languages of the former colonialists and the largely illiterate masses. One major effect is that education and administration are conducted in European colonialist languages, while in day-to-day social intercourse, it Is the indigenous languages that accounts for virtually all communication, leading to dire consequences. As Irele (1981), has observed:

> *There is a kind of double system of alienation for the African implied in this situation. For the educated African, in particular, there is a*

continuing estrangement from the wellsprings of the traditional culture implied by an educational system that is carried out in the European language, and doubled by the impossibility of a successful assimilation of the culture of that language on anything like a meaningful scale.

ALIENATION

The term "alienation" is a topical and an ubiquitously used concept in modern thinking, appearing as it does in several philosophical discourses, social sciences disquisitions, and in imaginative works of literature. Jenkwe (2002) state:

This wide applicability of the concept is also, perhaps, reflected even in the fact that there is no commonly agreed - upon definition of it. It is defined in the Encyclopedia of philosophy (1967) for example, as the act or result of the act, through which something or somebody else becomes alien (or strange) to somebody or something else.

Kaplan (1976), on the other hand, defines the concept as a condition in which an individual becomes estranged from the World around him and as a result, experiences disharmony culminating in a feeling of unfulfilment. While Breed (1971)defines it as the unresponsiveness of the world to the person, which subjects him to forces he neither comprehends or directs. He explains further that subjectively, to be alienated is to experience a sense of not belonging, and to feel that one's efforts are without meaning.

From these foregoing, one easily notices the polyvalent nature of the concept it imports depending on the tilt it is given in a particular context. All the same, the core of the words meaning is clearly the idea of the one becoming estranged from ones surrounding and activities, to the extent of no longer feeling a sense of belonging either in the environment or in the activity that one is engaged in. Since "alienation" manifests itself in many forms, scholars have sought to classify these manifestations, as a way of understanding further, all its nuances. According to Sarup (1978):

Marx discusses many types of alienation: religious alienation, one could say, was when God had usurped man's position. Philosophical alienation was when philosophy was merely speculative, concerned only with abstractions; pure thought which reduced man and history to a mental process. There was political and economic alienation also. They also contained the common idea that man has forfeited to someone or something what was essential to his nature. In all these different forms some other entity obtained what was proper to man-the right to be in control of his own activities.

As indicated in the above quoted passage, "alienation occurs" in small realms of human endeavour - in economic relationships, in the philosophical interpretations of life in politics, in the social life of the people and so on. This

is because as stated earlier once there is perceived gap between what a thing "is" and what it should "really be", it means that there is a situation of alienation. Other forms of alienation includes: Self alienation (or Ontological alienation - a situation in which a person becomes a prey to his lust and starts living a life of irrationality. Alienated Love can be noticed in the innate desire within most human beings to conform to social ethos; while Metaphysical alienation is an offshoot of the conditions of modern life. Modern man has increasingly felt himself powerless in the face of disasters and forces such as wars and pestilences. However, in this present study we are mostly concerned with alienation in culture.

MASS MEDIA AND CULTURE

Defleur and Dennis (1981) define mass media as a device for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication process. It can be looked at as not only mechanical devices that transmit and sometime store messages (television, camera, radio, microphone, printing press) but also institutions that use these channels to transfer messages. Uyo (1981) explains that the mass media can be categorized as two classes:

Print Media: Newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, direct mail, curricular, billboard, script writing and any technical device that carries messages to the masses by appealing to their sense of sight.

Electronic Media: This as subdivided into (a) Radio and Audio recordings that appeal to the sense of sound, (b) Television - motion pictures and video recording that appeal to both the sense of sound and sense of sight, (c) The Internet, Podcasts, faxes and text messages.

Baran (2002) defines culture as the learned behaviour of member of a given social group. Anyaegbunam (2005) says culture indeed does underline our very existence as a people, or any other people for that matter. It pervades every facet of our life. Yet culture remains a very elusive concept. To many of us culture means many things. At a reduced level, culture is regarded as those aesthetic aspects of our society. These include our dance ensemble and its choreography, our folklores, our mode of dressing, language, food etc. At a more sublimated level, culture is a generalized perception of a people's application or disposition to a given contingency or challenges. According to Babawale (2005) it is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as members of society. In the same vein, Kluckhon (1963) conceives culture as the total way of life of the people, the social legacy that the individuals acquires from his group.

THE CULTURAL NORMS THEORY

The Cultural Norms Theory forms the theoretical framework for this paper. Folarin (1998) points out that through selective presentation and emphasis on

certain themes, the mass media create the impression among their audience that such themes were accepted norms of the society. This makes members of the society to pattern their own behaviour along the ling of such media presentations. The Cultural Norms theory resembles the Agenda Setting Theory which suggests that the mass media direct discourses in the society by emphasizing some certain issues. The theory presents a clear description of the relationship between the mass media and culture. However, it portrays the media as all-powerful. For instance McBride (1981) argues that communication is powerful, but not all powerful communication is most effective when its impact is strengthened by other social factors and the messages conveyed and are already reflected in public opinion or in emerging interest. This implies that media impact on our lives is not total but reinforced by other social factors in society. The Cultural Norms Theory, in spite of its inadequacy offers a valid explanation of the relationship between the mass media and culture.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA

According to Sambe (2005), the mass media is mandated by the Nigerian constitution of 1999 (as amended) in its fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy (article 21), to ensure that: The state shall protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian culture enhance human dignity consistent with the fundamental objectives. This shows that the media is saddled with the task of making government to protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures. It also shows that government is conscious of the fact that certain cultures of the country are for the furtherance of human dignity, and are universally recognized. Through their coverage of cultural festivals, traditional dances, exhibitions of local arts and crafts, folklore and vernacular discussion programmes on radio and television as well as publications in magazines, the mass media play a role in the enforcement and transmission of culture.

The role is heightened by the mass media's ability to, analyze and interpret issues that manifest in the form of news, features editorials and documentaries. The media, notes McBride (1980), promote the dissemination of cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the heritage of the past, as well as the development of culture by widening the individual's horizontal, awakening his imagination and stimulating his aesthetic needs, values and creativity. Emenyeonu (1992) in Sambe (2005), corroborates the view that through their coverage, the mass media help to promote heterogeneous cultural groups thereby correcting any misconceptions, and building a sense of pride in the citizen. The mass media he notes also help in cultural exchange, as for instance people in Nigeria adopting western styles of dress, feeding and education.

In a similar vein, Akpan (1987) asserts that transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next involves shaping values, motions, traditions, customs etc. and passing them on from generation to generation.

This is the teaching function of the mass media, responsible for keeping community members together. They can teach community members to have respects for a common set of institutions, similar customs, traditions beliefs, attitudes and ways of life. These postulations underscore the value of the media's role as noted by McBride (1980) that the media have such a powerful socializing effect that they could tell their audience how to think and behave. Gerbner (1973), asserts that the television among other media has acquired such a central place in the daily life of people that it dominates our symbolic environment. The media transmits cultural artistic products with the aim of preserving the heritage of the past. Communication has therefore been institutionalized in our society. McBride (1980) affirms this when he notes that communication which is institutionalized within traditional and public institutions existed is super-imposition. Communication in the form of the transmission of norms and customs is an integral part of every society as it serves as the transmitter of norms and values of the culture society lives on, which to a large extent, determines its existence as a society.

In Nigeria, for instance, we have over 140 million people according to the National Population Commission (2006), with over 250 ethnic groups. And if our citizens are adequately informed, they would be better positioned to appreciate national objectives, thereby making it difficult for mischievous foreign powers to westernise the country. Supporting the view, Amadi (1986), says:

> Nigeria is a political unit created by Colonial Britain. It's a country made up of numerous "tribes" with differences in religion, language, custom and tradition, all of which have had a deciding influence on our outlook.

Not surprisingly, tribal and local interests often take presidence over national ones; after all, we are informed by Onwumere (1980), that a nation without any cultural parameter will be incapable of promoting its philosophy, norms and cultures, to the outside World. Thus, the media stand as a formidable arbiter of taste and purveyor of popular culture because of their inherent power to manipulate the subconscious of our people.

MASS MEDIA, ALIENATION AND CULTURE

The task of salvaging our culture as a nation is enhanced if media plays its major roles in the implementation of cultural policies and in helping to democratize culture. This is because the media performs the role of agenda setting in society. The press has many roles to play in cultural development of a society. For our purpose, eight of such roles are identified: First, the media has the responsibility of guiding the society to avoid the mistakes we continue to make in Nigeria and the rest of Africa in addition to our being colonized culturally and religiously by other cultures, a mistake which has allowed the effects of scientific and technological culture of others to become the way we

behave. This is because we have not cared to use these cultures of general application to develop our own responses to them; this has tremendous negative effects on the mental development and behaviour of our people.

The press must avoid misleading reports on issues of cultural alienation in the music arena. According to Sambe (2005) in the music arena, the salient lessons and messages embedded in our traditional music are either getting lost or dying gradually due to their abandonment and the modern craze for foreign music. The media has not done enough to enforce our cultural values, through music as well. Today, youths are more interested in foreign music than in Nigerian local music. Nigerian artists cannot compete with their foreign counterparts due to indiscriminate media exposure or coverage.

The media owes the obligation of highlighting perennial existential problems of moral failure that have be-devilled the Nigerian society in recent times. These moral issues pertain to those values that were cherished among Nigerians in the recent past, but which have now been supplanted by the imperatives of the new-value system introduced through colonial contact and its subtle influences in the fields of education and religion. The media must promote the peoples' culture. The strength of the media lies principally in it's the capacity for wide transmission of information within a society and across borders. The media therefore has the obligation of emphasizing the importance of culture to society. It must stimulate societal interest in culture to society.

The press must as a matter of duty, begin to accord culture adequate reporting. The style and content of the media show a lack of interest in cultural reporting except for a few cases. The present interest seems to be on political, economic and social issues. The media must be at the vanguard of condemning the problem of nudity among our youths. Sambe (2005) affirms the position. In terms of dress codes, many ladies for example go about almost naked and in the name of fashion. The Television cannot run away from the fact that by parading social values of the West for economic reasons at the expense of our culture, it has drawn the latter backwards.

The media has crucial role to play in reporting on oral poets. Our present day society is already falling prey to the dictates of westernization. As a result, our oral literature is viewed by some people as anachronistic and moribound. There is no aggressive effort even by journalists for its encouragement, recognition, let alone preservation. Oral poets like Doctors, pilots, engineers, journalists, teachers etc play very important roles in preserving the Nigerian cultural heritage by integrating the cultural aspects of their various fields into pratice. There is the problem of our decaying mother tongue. In contemporary Nigeria, many youths have replaced their Mother tongue with the English Language which is a borrowed language from our Colonial masters, while others have become so conversant with the ever popular English lingo, the pidgin English. If care is not taken, perhaps in the nearest future, English Language will take the place of our mother tongue. This ought not to be so

because the Mother Tongue is our heritage and we should therefore guard it jealously and whole- heartedly. Better orientation need to be given to the youths on the benefits of preserving our mother tongue and passing it to generations yet unborn. Perhaps, if any orientation should be given, where else will It come from if not the mass media?

CONCLUDING REMARK

Alienation manifests itself in many forms. These includes: religious alienation, philosophical alienation, political alienation, self or ontological alienation, metaphysical alienation etc. However, the concern here was mostly with cultural alienation. Consequently, it has been established that there is indeed alienation in Nigerian Cultures. The mass media is mandated by the Nigerian Constitution of 1979 and 1999 to ensure that government protects, preserves and promotes certain aspects of our cultures. Bearing in mind that certain cultures of the country are for the furtherance of human dignity and are universally recognized. Therefore, the crucial role the media should play in salvaging our alienated cultures include: guiding Nigerians to love their cultures as against westernized cultures; avoid misleading reports on issues of Nigerian music industry. It is obliged too to condemn problems of moral failure among the Nigerian youths and to promote the use of indegenous languages.

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