ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a country reputed for its rich and diverse cultures from the multi-ethnic nationalities that make it up. Indeed, the diversity of traditions and cultures are evidenced in the nation’s more than four hundred and seventy (470) tribes. It is in the bid to ensure that each cultural entity is preserved, projected and promoted, that Nigeria has a cultural policy. The cultural policy is decidedly synonymous with the arts and artists since the arts and artists mainly generate the bulk of what materially, at least, constitutes culture. Of course, culture is derived from material and immaterial products all which are products of the creative ingenuities of artists. It is in line with this reasoning that this paper is written, to determine to what extent the Nigerian Cultural Policy has attended to the needs of the arts and artists, with particular emphasis on the performing arts. The performing arts in every culture make up the major part of such Culture’s creative and entertainment industry hence this paper is embarked upon to determine to what extent the policy has accommodated the needs of the performing arts. This is done through a detailed analytical assessment of the cultural policy. Recommendations are then made based on the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Policy, Performing Arts, Entertainment, Industry, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus;
Let no such man be trusted. (Merchant of Venice Act V. Sc. 1)

To paraphrase Shakespeare, the man that has no culture nor is not identifiable with any cultural traits is unfortunate and not worthy to bear the tag of human being. For culture, like sin, is the thing we cannot help doing. It is a reflection of who we are, what we do or say, who or what we live with, how we die, how we live and how we are treated in death etc. it consists of the totality of all a man lives or dies possessed. Thus, a man without culture can
be said to be a barbarian, uncultured. Even then, barbarianism is a cultural trait of barbarians! So, culture is all encompassing.

**DEFINITION**

Culture has many definitions. For Edward T. Hall, (1973), culture is the silent language. It is communication. So, even without verbalizing one’s feelings, one is communicating culturally. This is because culture covers both verbal and non-verbal aspects of our lives like clothing, movement (gaits), attitudes and all those observable aspects of human life. “Culture, furthermore, takes root in a society when a way of life, when patterns of acquired behaviour, when routine acts of daily life are staunch into habit,” (65). Nnolim, quoting a source, says further that, “culture tends always with the men of a system, of discipline, of a school,” 64). So, culture is synonymous with good taste, with what is good and acceptable.

For Acholonu, the former Special Adviser to the president (Obasanjo) on arts and culture, “culture has two faces”. On the one hand condition, and no other hand, it is process. As a condition, culture defines the people; as a process, it x-rays the dynamics of change and evolution in the collective consciousness of the group (6). Acholonu notes that culture is a peculiar trait by which a people are known and determines how they are treated. It is a vehicle for evolution, being dynamic, it is tradition, conservative as well as has the capacity to create and recreate itself. In defining culture from the communication perspective, The MacBride Commission says:

The interdependence of culture and communication is even more pronounced. Particularly if the term “culture” is used to mean the entire achievement of human creativity-“all that man has added to nature”- if it is seen to embody everything that raises human life above the animal level and to embrace all aspects of life and all ways of understanding. (30)

Olukoju, citing Nurse, says that “there are at least four contested definitions of culture.” These, according to him, are:

- A developed state of mind (when we say, for example, “s/he is a cultured person”),
- The processes of this development (with reference to “cultural interests” or “cultural activities”; or, Wallerstein’s distinction between “production cultures” and “consumption cultures”,
- The means of these processes (“the arts” or “humane intellectual works”)
- “A whole way of life” or “a signifying system” which provides a lens through which society or a social order is reproduced, experienced, communicated or explored (3).
On her part, Isidenu (2017) sees culture as “the quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is exceptionally good in arts, human development, other expositions of human achievements, ideas, customs, social behavior of a society regarded collectively,”(165). She goes further to cite Li and Karakowsky who say that “culture is a way of life of a group of people, the behaviours, beliefs, values and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next,” (165). By implication from the above source, it means that culture is a product of conscious and unconscious occurrences or attitudes exhibited by an individual or a group.

The above definitions make culture an all important aspect of human existence. This is because the definitions insinuate that culture is visible in anything that is not natural, that does not come to man directly from his creator, like air, natural light-daylight, sunlight, moonlight and stars; water and other natural resources. Indeed, these natural resources become part of a people’s cultural heritage, a gift from nature. To conclude this definition of culture, it is imperative to know how the Nigerian cultural policy formulators see culture. The Cultural Policy for Nigeria notes that culture is not a return to the custom of the past; rather it embodies the attitude of a people to the future of their traditional values faced with the demands of modern technology which are essential factors of development and progress. It goes on to define culture as: “The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours.” (Cultural Policy, Pt. 1 Sect. 1. 189).

From the cultural policy point of view, culture entails whatever man has contributed to the work of nature in order to make life and nature to be adequately suitable for his needs. These definitions can suffice for our purpose in this exercise as they capture the nucleus of what culture means.

A policy on the other hand is a set of plans, guidelines, even theories formulated by a government or an organization to guide and protect an aspect of its life. An online dictionary defines policy as, “a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes…. A statement of intent, and is implemented as a procedure or protocol,” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>pol). It also notes that “policies are generally adopted by a governance body within an organization.” Thus, the cultural policy for Nigeria is a set of proceedings designed by the government or its relevant agency to preserve, protect and promote its cultural milieu in the interest of its past, present and future generation. It is intended to be a guide to proper decision making and implementation regarding Nigeria’s culture. The performing arts which are made up of the creative and entertainment aspects such as musicians, writers, artists, actors, directors, dancers, etc, believe that they are the generators of culture and as such their interests and concerns should be taken care of adequately by the Cultural Policy. This paper sets out therefore, to find out to what extent this has been done by Nigeria’s Cultural Policy.
THE NIGERIAN CULTURAL POLICY: SYNOPSIS

The Nigerian cultural policy is a working document of the federal republic of Nigeria designed for the benefit of the Nigerian people. It is divided into three broad parts with each part having its own sub-headings. The first part consists of the cultural policy and methods of implementation. Part two entitled “Focus of implementation” has the following areas of coverage: Education, The Arts, Tourism and mobility of people, mass media and general focus. The last part, part three, titled Administration and finance has just one section and that is Administration and financing of culture.

Part 1: Preamble

In this introductory part of the policy, culture was defined, its constituents were outlined and it was established that culture is at the culture nucleus of a nation’s success and its negligence would lead to failure. Here also the scope of the policy was delineated emphasizing areas of government participation. This segment also contains an eight point objective of the policy as consisting of the following.

   a) The policy shall serve to mobilize and motive the people by disseminating and propagating ideas which promote national pride, solidarity and consciousness.
   b) The policy shall serve to evolve from our plurality, a national culture, the stamp of which will be reflected in African and world affairs.
   c) The policy shall promote an educational system that motivates and stimulates creativity and draws largely on our tradition and values, namely: respect for humanity and human dignity, for legitimate authority and the dignity of labour and respect for positive Nigerian moral and religious values.
   d) The policy shall promote creativity in the fields of arts, science and technology; ensure the continuity of traditional skills and sports and their progressive updating to serve modern development needs as our contribution to world growth of culture and ideas.
   e) The policy shall enhance national self-reliance and self-sufficiency and reflect our cultural heritage and national aspiration in the process of industrialization.

(Cultural Policy 1:3:1-5).

Still on the permeable, the fourth section of it outlines the methods of policy implementation in a four point approach comprising of:

   a. Preservation of culture
   b. Promotion of culture
   c. Presentation of culture and
   d. The establishment of administrative structure and the provision of funds for its implementation.
It then went on to explain in some detail each point outlined above and the responsibilities of each arm of the government towards its implementation. With these issues properly tackled, the preamble ended. The next part is part two which is entitled: FOCUS OF IMPLEMENTATION. This part two of the cultural policy is by far the main body of the policy. It covers several areas with specific goals. The areas border on Education, Curriculum, Total School Environment, Libraries, Archives, The Arts, Literature, Performing Arts. Under performing arts, there are three point objectives such as:

1. The state shall preserve and present Nigerian music, dance and drama on film, video and audio tapes, slides and in written form, etc.
2. The state shall establish a national troupe of Nigeria whose repertoire shall draw their materials from drama, dance, and music.
3. The national troupe of Nigeria shall be part of national arts theatre. It also covers such areas as Fine arts, Crafts, Tourism and mobility of people within Nigeria; national parks and sites, monuments, museums, halls of fame, and light and sound shows-son et Lumiere, galleries and craft centre. Under theatre as a sub-heading in part two, it was said that:

I. The state shall promote the establishment of theatre which shall be sources of education, leisure and entertainment to the people through presentation of concerts, revues, musical, operas, plays, film shows, etc.
II. The state shall promote mobile and non-mobile theatres and the continuity of indigenous manifestation like puppetry and itinerant players.

Other sub-headings in this part include festivals, Mass media- Radio, Television, Newspapers and sub-section, called general focus, such areas as religion, Nigerian language, foods, dress, traditional medicine, economic development, and environmental planning were treated and that concluded part two of the policy. Part three which is administration and finance covers how culture can be administered and financed on the basis of three tiers of government- federal, state and local government, each with its own specific responsibility properly delineated.

These are the issues covered by the cultural policy in a brief summary. Having therefore, summarized the cultural policy, it becomes necessary at this point to attempt to identify the needs of the Nigerian performing artistes and therefore discuss through a review of the policy how its implementation has met or failed to meet such needs.

It must be pointed out however that the Cultural Policy falls short in the area of its failure to consider how to relate with the outside world, especially Nigerians/Africans in Diaspora. As Abubakar Sokoto Mohammed has said, “there are numerous Black and African political and cultural communities outside the African continent that are usually referred to as Africans in the Diaspora. This phenomenon was a product of slave trade and colonialism,” (153). Having identified four groups of African Diaspora, he complains of the absence of any form of teaching African history outside Africa. This is not good because these people in Diaspora need to be aware of their history and the Cultural Policy should make provision to
establish links with them. Citing Ola Balogun in the same article, Mohammed submits as follows:

The key factor about the manner in which Nigeria is perceived outside our shores is ignorance. It is altogether surprising how little people actually know about Nigeria, even in other African countries. In most cases of course, they heard certain things about Nigeria, but in general, what they have heard range from lurid tales about armed robbery and corruption to exaggerated stories about the Nigerian way of life. (155).

This is a clear case where artistes should be engaged to address this serious oversight. In as much as tourism makes provision for people coming into the country to appreciate our ways of life, its promotion aspect should take the culture to the outside world via cultural exchange or diplomacy as the case may be. There should be a provision in the Cultural Policy on how to make conscious and deliberate efforts to carry the entire Black race along. The reason is that as Peter Tosh sang in his song, “No matter where you come from, as long as you are a Blackman, you are an African.”

THE NEEDS OF THE NIGERIAN PERFORMING ARTS/ARTISTS

Undoubtedly, the needs of the Nigerian performing arts are as verse as the professional interests of the artists from each segment of the performing arts- writers, dramatists, actors, actresses, musicians, etc. these people have their unique needs at two levels at least. That is, at the individual level as human beings and at the professional level as artistes in a given category of art or discipline. However, the attempt to identify these needs and see to what extent the cultural policy has addressed or failed to address them will be done in an umbrella or collective approach. This will help to ease the exercise as it were. To this end, the Nigerian performing artiste is faced with the under listed needs:

Among the things that the Nigerian performing artistes need is an environment free from harassment. In other words, freedom of expression is essential. This is because artistes come in various shades of radicalism and temperament. The government in power must ensure that artistes are not persecuted as a consequence of their work through bans, seizures, confiscation, imprisonment or physical assaults and molestation. Apart from an environment free from harassment, there is also the vexed issue of physical environment. It does not benefit the artistes and the people when government doles out huge sums of money in the name of encouraging Nollywood practitioners. This writer has suggested elsewhere the need to have an identifiable environment called Nollywood. Just as we have the National Theatre, the government can also procure land (all land belongs to government, anyway), preferably somewhere in the east, and erect befitting structures there. Such place would be designated Nollywood and buildings would be built to specification with film production and all it entails in mind; these buildings can then be rented or hired out to production companies who would pay according to the preset agreement. This would also help film producers who do not have the facilities to start their own production outfits. This would go a long way to properly position the industry. It would be far more preferable to doling out huge sums of
money that would end up not being accounted for. It would also be another landmark like the National Arts Theatre and settle once and for all the physical and psychological existence of Nollywood. Nollywood practitioners would be better off with this arrangement because there is no place called Nollywood as I write.

Again, there is need to protect their works from all sorts of infringement on their artistic rights. To ensure that a sound copyright law is in force and that piracy is a criminal offence. By way of structures there should be cultural centres at all levels of government—federal, state, and local government even through autonomous communities. The idea of a cultural centre at every autonomous community financed at the state and local government levels is important. This is because culture is the root of all other segments of life—political, social and economic. A people’s culture affects how they run their government, how they handle their budget and how they interact. Thus, to preserve culture, it should begin from the grassroots, at the autonomous community level.

An unrecognized artist is an unhappy artist. Therefore, provision should be made to ensure that each artiste is encouraged through sponsorship via endowment funds, patronages, tours, art workshops, seminars and conferences/conventions etc. also, each segment of the arts should have a professional body that is registered. This body should have its own structure both to run the affairs of the body and to showcase the works there from. For example even though the national theatre is there, there is also MUSON centre which is exclusively for musicians notwithstanding that other artistes use it on occasion. Further to this the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), has secured a piece of land at the federal capital territory, Abuja, on which to build an art village, a recreation and retreat for artists but the federal government is surprisingly a clog in the wheel of its progress.

More than even the government, artists need a practicable cultural policy. This is because they are more at home with culture being the major preservers, promoters and creators of culture. The Nigerian performing artiste also needs to be properly remunerated; he needs to have access to foreign exchange to enhance his free mobility within and outside the nation. An artiste is a cultural ambassador. Provided therefore, he does not abuse the privileges there from, he should be given a free hand to move about. There is also the need for national, state and communal festivals which will be sponsored by the appropriate arm of government to enable artistes showcase themselves and their work. From these festivals will emerge specific cultures and artistes from the various regions or states who will once in a while engage in international cultural exchange for the benefit of the artistes and the nation.

Again, documentation is necessity in the life of a performer. Thus, through publication of literary works, novel, poetry and drama; and recording of oral literature and performance via audio and audio-visual means-films and television, the artiste perpetuates himself and his generation. Thus, the existence of theatres, Archives and Museums is an inevitable method of cultural propagation and preservation.

Also, the protection of works of art is important to the artiste. There should be regulation to protect and recover lost works of art. Closely related to this is the need to immortalize heroes of the nation in every aspect of human endeavor; those who have meritoriously distinguished themselves in the service of the nation. This can be done through the erection of monuments, commissioning of their biographies to be written or documentary
films done on them. Needless to say, these works are to be done by Nigerian artistes in relevant areas. Good examples of this are the monuments of the founding fathers of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Herbert Macaulay, Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, etc., and that of Sam Oparaji as evidence of his life spent in sports (football), while serving his nation. These images help to encourage artistes to do more, aware that they too would be remembered when their time comes.

The newspaper has been defines as a nation talking to itself. In this regard there should be newspapers and academic journals devoted to the arts for reviews and assessment. In this light such publications as the Nigerian Magazine should be revived in order to document works of art. It has been reiterated that the existence of a national theatre should not deter the existence of art councils in the state nor recreational centers in the various local governments and autonomous communities or for that matter stop the relevant professions in the arts from having their own professional structural outlets for their own purposes. At this point therefore, it is pertinent to stop here and attempt an assessment as to how the cultural policy has addressed or failed to address these needs as enumerated above.

THE NIGERIAN CULTURAL POLICY AND THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION

As there is no aspect of our lives which is not prone to cultural dent, there is equally no part of same not affected by politics in culture. But the focus here is how the political interests of certain persons and bodies or even the nation as a whole have affected negatively or positively the implementation of the cultural policy.

Before going further to discuss the implementation of the national cultural policy, a policy which came into existence in 1988, it is instructive to refer once again to Acholonu, a one-time special adviser to president Obasanjo, in her keynote lecture to the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), delivered at the Grand Hotel, Asaba, in November, 2002, fourteen years in which the cultural policy has existed and been supposedly operated. She began her lecture thus:

The theme of this year’s ANA Convention is: Literature, Gender and National Development. However, before delving into the body of this theme, it would be useful to illustrate the role of culture in national development, literature being an aspect of culture. This is particularly strategic for me, being the Special Adviser on Arts and Culture to the president of a country where culture is seen as a useless pastime and a national joke. (5) (emphasis, mine).

One is almost tempted to stop at this point because Acholonu, being a writer herself could not possibly be exaggerating. However, it is necessary to substantiate her position or otherwise. No doubt, the cultural policy is a well conceived document, covering every relevant aspect of our lives and recognizing the fact that everything we do is steeped in culture. Thus, every people have culture. Even the wastefulness of a people such as ours can be termed a culture of waste.
The politics of implementation which surrounds the cultural policy among others revolves round favouritism and quota system. In the area of favouritism, sycophancy is favoured over merit and against those who are perceived to be critical of the government. For instance, notwithstanding his international recognition as a reputable musician, no government of Nigeria ever patronized or sponsored Fela Anukulapo-Kuti in his life time. On the issue of quota system, rather than concentrate on merit irrespective of where it is domiciled, they pander to the quota system which requires patronage along tribal and or, ethnic lines. Worse of all, the problem of interpretation of the policy is tilted towards the tastes of certain individuals in positions of authority. Umukoro writes of several workshops and seminars in which good resolutions were made by committees set up for that purpose but which were scuttled by selfish interest. According to him:

Unfortunately, the ministry of culture, which should have been the very midwife of the strategies, sabotaged them simply because they had certain interpretations of what the cultural policy is saying as opposed to what the consensus was. Little wonder many of the provisions of the policy are still being suppressed and kept from seeing the light of the day. A typical example is section 10.3.1 which supports financing of cultural activities through a national endowment fund to which government, organizations and individuals shall contribute, (Umukoro 234).

Umukoro went further to illustrate this tale of woes with examples of decree 52 of 1991 which established the National Endowment Fund for the Arts (NEA) and how it has been trailed by perennial tale of unsuccessful attempts to launch it in line with the recommendation of the policy under section 10.3.1.

Government’s lack of interest in culture and in the cultural policy is illustrated by the Obasanjo civilian regime and its determination to privatize all the national icons including National Arts Theatre and the only surviving national newspaper, Daily Times, which by the way, is now extinct, as a result of this negligence and indifference. Indeed, just recently, a video went viral on social media, lamenting the fate of the tapes from the 1977 First Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC’77); how the cultural wealth of Black Africa was rotting away in the belly of the archives at the National Theatre. Those tapes ought to be revisited and updated into the latest appropriate media and circulated. They would generate internal revenue not only for the country but would provide the much needed finances necessary to put the National Theatre back on its feet and restore it to its lost glory. Above all, all the countries of the world which featured and took part in the festivals would naturally love to see their contributions and those of other countries after so many decades. It would serve as cultural memorabilia as well as help preserve their culture in the case of those nations which may have no archival and storage facilities.

Another problem of the performing arts and their practitioners arises from ignorance or fear of not being able to meet financial obligations. This is because even when there are other avenues for government intervention in the promotion of culture and its affiliates, practitioners are either ignorant of such provisions or simply skeptical of government’s sincerity. Writing on the relationship between the National Council for Arts and Culture
(NCAC) and the Nigerian Film Industry, (Nollywood), Abdulahi (2015) submits:

Not many players in the film industry are aware that the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), going by the contents of Decree No. 3 of 1975 setting it up and as amended by Decree No. 5 of1987, is mandated to participate in the film industry by being given the charge “to promote the development of music, traditional dancing, drama, opera, cinema, film, photography, folklore, oral tradition, literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, town planning and general arts, woodwork, embroidery, weaving and similar crafts.” (6).

There is no doubt that if practitioners are aware of this decree and apply the knowledge, it would be germane and productive not only to the film industry, Nollywood, but would immensely enrich the entire cultural landscape of the nation. The present attention and global recognition being accorded the month-long annual Calabar Carnival, also known as Africa’s largest Street Party, which opens from the 1st of December to the 31st of same, is a boost to the cultural and tourism aspects of Nigerian culture. The Cultural Policy should be updated to accommodate new tourist discoveries and efforts should be made to encourage those who work in the culture industry because it is one of the first points of contact to international visitors as well as to those whose first contact with the country is through the media.

CONCLUSION

The importance of culture and cultural policy in the life of a people and a nation is not a matter to be trifled with. Part of the mess to which Nigeria and Nigerians have fallen into stems from the negligence of culture and the lack of properly articulated method of cultural policy implementation due mainly to selfish interest of well-placed individuals. This is so because a properly articulated and implemented cultural policy will also make provisions on how to handle corrupt officials. The Nigerian policy makers and stakeholders should borrow a leaf from the organizers of the Calabar Carnival/Festival which is presently making lots of economic impact on the internal revenue of the state annually. It is a veritable tourist magnet and if the organizers maintain their present vision, the future of the carnival influencing others like Abuja and other states would be assured.

Finally, The Cultural Policy has not satisfied the needs of the Nigerian performing arts; nor for that matter, the needs of Nigeria and Nigerians as a nation and as a people. It is therefore suggested that the policy be revised, upgraded and updated to accommodate the flaws which it presently contains.

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