

The Problems and Prospects of Culture in Nation Building: The Nigerian Example

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Abstract. Culture is regarded as the way of life of a group of people living in a particular community or society over a specific period of time. Data for this study were collected from secondary sources; through internet materials, journals, textbooks, seminars and commentaries. Results from this study revealed that before venturing on a national or global assignment, it is probably necessary to identify the cultural differences that may exist between one's home country and the country of business operation; where the differences exist, one must decide whether and to what extent the home-country practices may be adapted to the foreign environment. This study therefore recommends and concluded that there is need for entrepreneurs and cultural migrants to learn their client's culture, promote appreciation of cultural differences, be open to trying new things, exhibit hospitality and be accommodating, everywhere and every time.

Keywords: Culture, Nation Building, Nigerians, Problems and Prospects

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Li & Karakowsky, 2001). Culture is also regarded as the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts (Kim, 2017). The word "culture" derives from a French term, which in turn

derives from the Latin "colere," which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture. "It shares its etymology with a number of other words related to actively fostering growth," De Rossi (2017). The concept of culture is among the most widely used notions in sociology. Normally, one can presume culture to be equivalent to higher things of the mind such as art, literature, music and painting. However, in the perspective of sociologist it goes beyond such activities. Culture refers to the ways of life of the members of society, or of groups within a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs, language and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits (Giddens, 2005).

Culture was defined earlier as the symbols, language, beliefs, values, and artifacts that are part of any society. As this definition suggests, there are two basic components of culture: ideas and symbols on the one hand and artifacts (material objects) on the other. The first type, called non-material culture. The symbols, language, norms, and values that constitute a major part of a society's culture, includes the values, beliefs, symbols, and language that define a society. The second type, called material culture. An element of culture consisting of society's material objects, or artifacts., includes all the society's physical objects, such as its tools and technology, clothing, eating utensils, and means of transportation. These elements of culture identified by (Barkan, 2012) were:

1.1 Symbols

Every culture is filled with symbols. Things that stand for something else and that often evoke various reactions and emotions or things that stand for

something else and that often evoke various reactions and emotions. Some symbols are actually types of nonverbal communication, while other symbols are in fact material objects.

1.2 Language

Perhaps our most important set of symbols is language. In English, the word *chair* means something we sit on. In French, the word *chaise* means the same thing. As long as we agree how to interpret these words, a shared language and thus society are possible. By the same token, differences in languages can make it quite difficult to communicate.

1.3 Norms

Cultures differ widely in their norms. Socially acceptable ways of behaving or standards and expectations for behaving. We already saw that how people behave when drunk stems from society's expectations of how they should behave when drunk. Norms of drunken behavior influence how we behave when we drink too much.

Norms are often divided into two types, formal norms. Norms that are very important and usually written down; also called laws and mores. and informal norms. Relatively unimportant norms, often unwritten, those still affect people's behavior. Formal norms, also called *mores* and *laws*, refer to the standards of behavior considered the most important in any society.

1.4 Rituals

Different cultures also have different rituals. Established procedures and ceremonies that often mark transitions in the life course., or established procedures and ceremonies that often mark transitions in the life course. As such, rituals both reflect and transmit a culture's norms and other elements from one generation to the next. Initiation and commencement ceremonies in colleges and universities are familiar examples of time-honored rituals. In many societies, rituals help signify one's gender identity. For example, girls around the world undergo various types of initiation ceremonies to mark their transition to adulthood.

1.5 Values

Values Criteria of what is desirable or undesirable and right or wrong. are another important element of culture and involve judgments of what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. A culture's values shape

its norms. In Japan, for example, a central value is group harmony. The Japanese place great emphasis on harmonious social relationships and dislike interpersonal conflict. Individuals are fairly unassertive by American standards, lest they be perceived as trying to force their will upon others (Schneider & Silverman, 2010).

1.6 The Work Ethic

Another important value in the American culture is the work ethic. By the 19th century, Americans had come to view hard work not just as something that had to be done but as something that was morally good to do (Gini, 2000).

1.7 Artifacts

The last element of culture is the artifacts .The material objects that constitute a society's material culture, or material objects, that constitute a society's material culture. In the most simple societies, artifacts are largely limited to a few tools, the huts people live in, and the clothing they wear.

Barkan (2012) therefore concluded that the major elements of culture are symbols, language, norms, values, and artifacts. Language, he said makes effective social interaction possible and influences how people conceive of concepts and objects. Thus, major values that distinguish the Nigerian people include individualism, competition, and a commitment to the work ethic.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Oyelami (2016) noted that there's no single culture in Nigeria, and the multiple cultures present are very dissimilar. However, there is what can be seen as a sort of universal belief and behaviours. These behaviours are not exactly unique to Nigerians but in some way they are magnified in a typical Nigerian. Some of these beliefs are listed below alongside what can be termed their negatives.

- Too much emphasis on respect for older people regardless of a situation (Not necessarily old people bit anyone who is older than you even by just 2 years). This creates some psychological problems.
- This automatically creates a nation of people who are fearful and not exactly confident due to having been brought up by fear. I.e. I'm older than you so you have to do my bidding else you get severely disciplined.
- This fear creates other problems in the community including loss of empathy, back stabbing, belittling people and sheer anger.

- The belief that money is everything and you can only get it by not only going to school but by also being the best in class and bringing home the best result. Failure to do this may result in your older siblings or parents breaking out the belt to beat you or just verbally berate and make you as useful as a porous stone.
- Overtly belief on the power of a God. Some people will even be deathly sick but instead of going to hospital they go to church. This is actually funny due to the fact that majority of people are learned over there, but they still believe a god will come down from the skies to provide jobs, make them rich, heal them etc.

After all being said, the people in Nigeria are actually fun and welcome visitors with open arms, in fact they are known for their hospitality in West Africa. Nigeria is a nation that contains over 250 different ethnic tribes. Each tribe has its own distinct culture and set of traditions although some cultures bare some similarities they are not all the same.

Another issue is the culture of entitlement, many people in Nigeria seems to believe that they are entitled to something, whether its remittance from abroad, the friend of Mr. X to give them a job, or Mrs. y to pay for their children's school fees. Things become even messier when a woman is widowed and her husband's family pretty much step and claim everything without leaving anything for his own offspring(There's no single culture in Nigeria, and the multiple cultures present are very dissimilar. However, there is what can be seen as a sort of universal belief and behaviours. These behaviours are not exactly unique to Nigerians but in some way they are magnified in a typical Nigerian. Some of these beliefs are listed below alongside what can be termed their negatives' (Oyelami, 2016).

3. General and Specific Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate the contemporary challenges of culture on national development.

The specific objectives were to:

- identify the major problems of culture in building a united and peaceful community
- assess the consequences of un-controlled cultural diversity on nation building

- examine how best culture can be managed to ensure the sustainable development of all interests within the study area.

4. The Study Area

Geographical and Political Settings of Nigeria

Nigeria is located in Western part of Africa on the Gulf of Guinea and has a total area of 923,768km² (356,669 sqmiles), making it the world's 32nd largest country (after Tanzania). It is comparable in size to Venezuela, and is about twice the size of California. It shares a 4,047 kilometers (2,515 miles) border with Benin Republic. The highest point in Nigeria is Chappal waddiat 2,41 9m (7,936ft). It extends from approximately latitude 4°N to 1 4°N of the Equator and Longitude 3 °E to 1 5°E of the Greenwich meridian (Filani, 1995). The main rivers are the Niger and Benue which converge and empty into the Atlantic Ocean through the Niger Delta.

Nigeria officially called the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a Federal constitutional republic comprising thirty -six states (36) and its Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The country is located in West Africa and shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean. The three largest and most influential Ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In terms of religion, Nigeria' is roughly split half and half between Muslims and Christians with a very small minority who practice traditional religions (www.onlinenigeria.org 2017).

The name Nigeria was taken from the Niger River running through the country. This name was coined by Flora Shaw the wife of Baron Lugard, British Colonial Administration, in the late 19th century. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the eight most populous countries in the world, and the most populous country in the world which the majority of the population is black. It is listed among the "Next eleven" economies, and is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The economy of Nigeria is one of the fastest growing in the world, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projecting a growth of 9% in 2008 and 8.3% in 2009. It is the second largest economy in Africa, and is a regional power that is also the hegemony in West Africa.

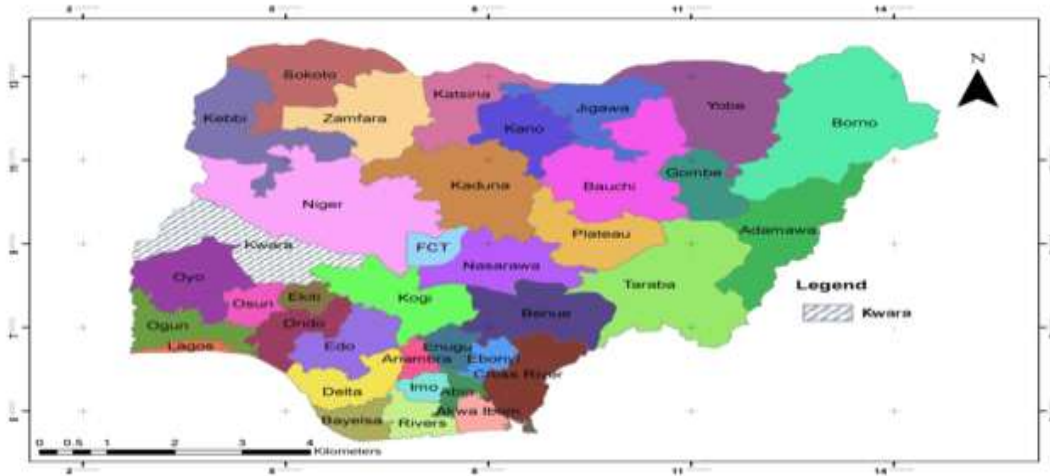


Figure 1.1: Map of Nigeria
 Source: Kwara State Office of the Surveyor General, 2018

5. Conceptualization and Literature Review

The Marxist Political Theory is applied to this study. The reason has been that, the approach scientifically studied the societal cultural values in its totality and takes into consideration, the inter-connection of culture, resources and human relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the sub-structure (problems) and the super-structure (prospects). Political culture of human relationship and control is concerned with the social laws of interaction (Lange, 1974:7).

The Marxist cultural approach is a holistic, historical orientation, which is used for the analysis of social formations and their contradicting relationships. It mainly focuses on the cultural laws which govern the production and distribution of resources benefits among individuals and groups at different stages of development of society (Iwarimie, 1991:50). Put differently, the approach is seen as the window to understand the cultural norms and values, which govern the political and resource life of the society. It explains the relationship between what man produce and how he benefits from the surplus resources produced or available. The approach shows, how the various parts of the society are used as instruments of the ruling class cultural domination, and as mechanism of oppression of the subject class in terms of human interaction and general way of life.

Cultural studies has evolved through the confluence of various disciplines anthropology, media and communication studies, literary studies, education, geography, philosophy, sociology, politics and others. While some have accused certain areas of cultural studies of meandering into political

relativism and a kind of empty version of "postmodern" analysis, others hold that at its core, cultural studies provides a significant conceptual and methodological framework for cultural, social and economic critique (Lewis ,2008).

Although most anthropologists try to define culture in such a way that it separates human beings from other animals, many human traits are similar to those of other animals, particularly the traits of other primates. For example, chimpanzees have big brains, but human brains are bigger. Similarly, bonobos exhibit complex sexual behaviour, but human beings exhibit much more complex sexual behaviours. As such, anthropologists often debate whether human behaviour is different from animal behaviour in degree rather than in kind; they must also find ways to distinguish cultural behaviour from sociological behaviour and psychological behavior. (Rogers, 1983)

Cultural studies is a field of theoretically, politically, and empirically engaged cultural analysis that concentrates upon the political dynamics of contemporary culture, its historical foundations, defining traits, conflicts, and contingencies (Simandan, 2010).

6. Methodology

This work is basically an evaluative study as the subject under review is a contemporary issue. Descriptive analytical approach method of data collection was adopted. Data and literatures for this work were obtained from the analysis of the views, comments and opinions in books, articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers, internet materials, as well as speeches and addresses in seminars,

conferences, workshops and meetings. It was essentially a library research. Qualitative method was therefore employed in the analysis and presentation of the information collected.

7. Results and Discussions

Hofstede (1997) in his research work on layers of culture posited that people even within the same culture carry several layers of mental programming within themselves. Different layers of culture exist at the following levels:

- The national level: Associated with the nation as a whole.
- The regional level: Associated with ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- The gender level: Associated with gender differences (female vs. male)
- The generation level: Associated with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- The social class level: Associated with educational opportunities and differences in occupation.
- The corporate level: Associated with the particular culture of an organization. Applicable to those who are employed.

8. Measuring Cultural Differences

A variable can be operationalized either by single- or composite-measure techniques. A single-measure technique means the use of one indicator to measure the domain of a concept; the composite-measure technique means the use of several indicators to construct an index for the concept after the domain of the concept has been empirically sampled. Hofstede (1997) has devised a composite-measure technique to measure cultural differences among different societies:

Power distance index: The index measures the degree of inequality that exists in a society.

Uncertainty avoidance index: The index measures the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain or ambiguous situations.

Individualism index: The index measure the extent to which a society is individualistic. Individualism refers to a loosely knit social framework in a society in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. The other end of the spectrum would be collectivism that occurs when there is a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups; they expect their in-groups (relatives, clans,

organizations) to look after them in exchange for absolute loyalty.

Masculinity index (Achievement vs Relationship): The index measures the extent to which the dominant values are assertiveness, money and things (achievement), not caring for others or for quality of life. The other end of the spectrum would be femininity (relationship).

9. Reconciliation of Cultural Differences

Cultural Awareness:

Before venturing on a national or global assignment, it is probably necessary to identify the cultural differences that may exist between one's home country and the country of business operation. Where the differences exist, one must decide whether and to what extent the home-country practices may be adapted to the foreign environment. Most of the times, the differences are not very apparent or tangible. Certain aspects of a culture may be learned consciously (e.g. methods of greeting people), some other differences are learned subconsciously (e.g. methods of problem solving). The building of cultural awareness may not be an easy task, but once accomplished, it definitely helps a job done efficiently in a foreign environment.

Discussions and reading about other cultures definitely helps build cultural awareness, but opinions presented must be carefully measured. Sometimes they may represent unwarranted stereotypes, an assessment of only a subgroup of a particular group of people, or a situation that has since undergone drastic changes. It is always a good idea to get varied viewpoints about the same culture.

Clustering Cultures:

Some countries may share many attributes that help mold their cultures (the modifiers may be language, religion, geographical location, etc.). Based on this data obtained from past cross-cultural studies, countries may be grouped by similarities in values and attitudes. Fewer differences may be expected when moving within a cluster than when moving from one cluster to another.

Determining the extent of global involvement:

All enterprises operating globally need not have the same degree of cultural awareness. Figure 2 illustrates extent to which a company needs to understand global cultures at different levels of involvement. The further a company moves out from

the sole role of doing domestic business, the more it needs to understand cultural differences. Moving outward on more than one axis simultaneously makes

the need for building cultural awareness even more essential.

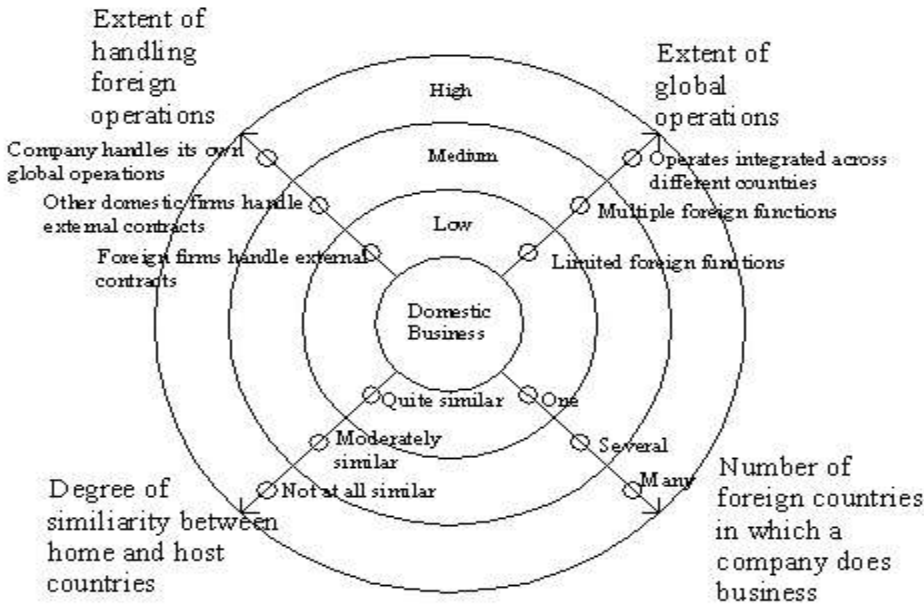


Figure 1: Cultural Awareness and Extent of National/Global Involvement
 Source: Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw Hill.

10. Recommendations

In view of the findings in this study, it will be of great benefits, if the following recommendations are given serious attention and consideration.

Learn a few key phrases: Because clear communication is essential for effective functioning, it is necessary that each of your employees understand what your clients and customers need. Depending upon the number of clients or customers with whom you work and the amount of diversity, it may not be possible for you to learn all the languages, but learning a few greetings and key phrases can go a long way.

Learn your client’s culture: Taking the time to research or inquire about another’s culture can go a long way to make them feel comfortable. Learn about the things your clients and customers like and value: their food, their customs and protocol, business practices and what they do for fun. Since there is a host of information available online, you can easily discover the basic tenets of their culture. Because of your extra effort, the people with whom you work will feel appreciated and will be more apt to recommend you and do business with you in the future.

Promote appreciation of cultural differences: Set aside a special day where you ask a few employees or co-workers to share aspects of his or her culture or a client’s culture with everyone. Make it fun. Ask the

employees to give a “Lunch-and Learn” presentation featuring the foods, ceremonies and other aspects of that culture. This will not only promote socialization, it will give each person the opportunity to learn about and appreciate one another’s culture. Also, you can invite your employees to write a feature article in your newsletter or internal communications about a particular culture.

Be open to trying new things: While traveling to visit clients in other countries, be open to trying new things like the food at least once. Even if you don’t like something, you will be appreciated for making the effort. If you are allergic or prefer not to partake in something (like drinking alcohol) do not compromise your own values, however, to accommodate theirs. You are permitted to respectfully decline. The idea is not to create boundaries, but to build bridges and open the door to cultural differences.

Be Accommodating: If your employees, clients or co-workers have cultural requirements, like prayer times or religious holidays, accommodate their needs into your work schedule. You would certainly want someone to respect your culture if the tables were turned.

Regardless of your business type, keep an open mind. Know that your way is not the only way. You don’t need to change your culture or convince others to change theirs, but rather, find common ground where

everyone can understand each other and respect and embrace cultural differences.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, culture provides important social and economic benefits. With improved learning and health, increased tolerance, and opportunities to come together with others, culture enhances our quality of life and increases overall well-being for both individuals and communities.

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