

The Challenge of Language and Cultural Identity in Post-Colonial Africa's National Economic Development

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Abstract

Except for a few, most countries particularly African nations that transited from colonial rule to self-governance have imbibed and internalized the language and culture of the colonial overloads across the broad spectrum and tapestry of their social, political, and economic fabric to the neglect and detriment of their indigenous traditional way of life. It is a common sight in most post-colonial African countries who hinges or pattern their developmental goals (efforts) and way of life in similitude to that of their former colonizers; in terms of mannerism, dressing, demeanor, belief system; jettisoning everything indigenous, and even language. This has created a hybrid, and what we called 'the engrafted' cultures. This has created a kind of a dilemma (lacuna) for the Post-colonial leaders who are juxtaposed and hamstrung in-between traditional cultural norms and values, as well as linguistic forms (ties) of their forefathers vis-à-vis that of the previous colonial overlords. This paper is an attempt at exploring the challenges and dilemmas confronting many African nations in trying to forge (shape) a national consciousness and identity through language, culture in post-colonial African nations.

Key words: language, culture, identity, post-colonial, challenges, dilemma, development

J.E.L. classification: F5, F54, I125, Z1, Z13

1. Introduction

The linguistic and cultural identity of most African countries has been a subject of debate by mainly African, African-American, and Caribbean writers of African descent (Franz Fanon) in which the liberals, intellectuals; have over the years highlighted and reflected in their writings, songs, paintings and symposia held in various fora aimed at forging a unique identity that is iconic and truly indigenous, taking cognizance of the African traditional kinship ties, value systems, language and cultural norms as an integral part of this projects. This was collaborated by the Kenya writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo (cf. Kachuru 20026, 76) in one of his writings when he affirm that many African countries during and after colonial rule are being categorized/identified not only by outsiders but also by themselves on the basis of the colonialist languages of Anglophone, Francophone, lusophone and Hispanophone which they speak. For Ngugi specifically harped on the domineering and emasculating effect of the English language on African thought-process and its cultural embodiment of every western.

It is important to emphasize that the importance of the traditional value systems, particularly languages, which have undergone transformation substantially at various stages of development during the colonial period. This was so because the colonial authorities, who were, hitherto, apprehensive of the possibility of real or imaginary that the indigenous leaders could hide behind this facade for nationalist agitations and activities that are inimical to the colonialist interest, treated them with disdain.

While many African nations worked and fought assiduously to gain independence and self-rule, yet even after independence their government institutions are governed on the basis of their colonial masters' legal, political and social system; in terms of policy articulation and implementation.

Colonization not only reshaped the political map of the world but affected the social and cultural values of many nations. Colonialism as a system has undoubtedly left a very deep psychological and cultural scar that will take years and conscious, but concerted effort to reassert and establish a truly indigenous identity by the victims to heal. It is a known fact that the language and way of life of a people are inherently associated with salutary effect on the identity of such personality, and ultimately permeate the whole fibre of the entire community.

African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ayi Amah, Sly Koromah, Ngugi Wa Thiongo and many others have consciously and deliberately espoused and reflected this identity in virtually all their writings; mainly because they were baptized in the crucible of colonialism with its totem signs, scars, and vestiges of oppression, slavery, discrimination visibly 'tattooed' in our souls, etc. Colonialism as a legacy left a deep psychological and cultural scars in the psyche of the colonized, and this will undoubtedly take years, anchored on conscious and deliberate reassertion to establish a truly indigenous identity based on traditional African value systems by the victims. Through their scholarly works they were able to highly the devastating effect of colonialism on the rich cultural, social, and political tradition of the indigenous people in the new nations which have been lost; and to also draw the attention of the world to the cultural mutilation, pillaging, and distortion of the colonized.

Chinua Achebe (2000), the international award-winning novelist, captured the dilemma of the African nations when he said "*Until the lions produce their historians, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter*". While the search for a truly nationalistic but linguistic, cultural, and national identity remains a challenge, the imperativeness of infusing and institutionalizing traditional, linguistic, and cultural identity into a national life not only holds sacrosanct but a recurring decimal in developmental efforts for most if not all post-colonial African nations.

This has been a dilemma for virtually most postcolonial African nations which have spurred a new thinking, a sort of paradigm shift; and has emboldened the resolve of post-colonial intellectuals, leaders of liberation movements, freedom fighters, trade union activists and political leaders to adopt policies that are geared towards a cultural renaissance and reawakening of a new identity in order to chart a new course for their people.

Chinua Achebe (1966) captured this dilemma of the post-colonial African nations when he stated that "*I wanted the novel to be a denunciation of the kind of independence we were experiencing in postcolonial Nigerian and many other countries in the 1960s, and I intended it to scare my countrymen into good behavior with a frightening cautionary tale*"

The endless potentials that language brings, qualify it to capture the versatility of man and validate that language is intrinsically a sophisticated pattern of communication that is in a constant state of transmutation.

Customs and traditions globally metamorphose on basis of distinct options; and lingua franca, being an indispensable part of culture, too transmutes with the metamorphization of culture.

2. Literature review

It cannot be re-emphasized enough that language and culture are inherently concomitant therefore can impact on the identity and personality of an person; and in the long-run a whole community or nation. In their quest for a new linguistic and cultural identity, post-colonial African nations are psychologically and politically poised at investing in recreating a 'new' people, a 'new' nation by charting a new course of rebuilding the past, deciphering the present and outlining new perspectives for the future generations to come. The newly heralded identity being contemplated will be the crystallization of dream, and with essential attributes and characteristics fused into a 'colorful' tapestry of a national life ruminative of the lingua franca, literature, governmental organs, and academic, technological, and cultural institutions.

Despite the anglophilization, francophilization, spaniardization as well as portuguesization, many former colonies are beginning to take cognizance of the importance and benefits of the use of autochthonous languages and traditional cultural beliefs in stimulating and unifying the citizenry. They are questioning the negative and destructive effect of the use of languages and the imbueement of the culture of their former colonial master's in daily and official communication as well as in the conduct of government business and everyday life.

2.1 Language

It is only natural that language which is a thread of culture should be the fulcrum and the focal point of this discussion; because language represents a key identifying and uniting factor. I perceive language in this context not only as a legitimate means of communication within a community or nation but also as an important spiritual, social, political symbol of the nation. It represents the bridge between the culture and identity of the people that define them.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, Language can be described as a orderly way of exchange of information or affections using standardized symbols, remarks, motions, or ensign with assumed significant. Collins Dictionary on the other hand describes language as an orderly exchange that comprises of a set of utterances and recorded signs which are passed on from generation to generation by the persons of a specific nation country or territory for conversation or inscription

Language can be defined as a interconnected structure of human interaction, either spoken or recorded, incorporating the use of words in a standardized and prescriptive way and also a system of social intercourse employed by a specific nation or community. Language is used in intersocietal conversation among people. These of course encompasses emotions, thoughts, and sentiments, expectations; and is characterized by a sound that has structure and connotations within a given context of every community; based on shared rules which act as a vehicle of transmitting same to other people, based on the ascribed moral codes.

One of the essential characteristics of language is the truth that it is a social being. Ndimele (2015) affirmed the meaning of language when she stated "Language is the fountain of human existence and power. Language is used in the household, in religion, in learning, in conduct of business affairs, in health, or the work setting, in friendship, or diverse interactive social milieu. In her work (Ndimele 2008:3) states that language does not operate and function in isolation.

According, to Ndimele (2015) language provide the vehicle by which the customs and tradition of a people are used to regulated human affairs and exercise controls over our behavior. In O'Grady et el (2011:1) they expressed the real essence of language when they said, language is at the epicenter of all human affairs. It is not just an integral part of our being, but it portrays and defines who we are as a people. It is unimaginable to think of a scenario in human existence where social interaction in the field of academic, music or any human activity taking place without the use of communication without language. We as humans express our inner feelings, pains, happiness and euphoria through language. It is employed as a means of transmitting knowledge, send information, and also in transmitting customs and traditions to each successive generations in a given community.

Since antiquity, researchers, academicians, writers, scholars, technicians and experts that span across various educational and scientific groups, make us of language to document and pass on their inventions and findings and how these findings affect us. Language is therefore a system used by a given group to interact and disseminate. It makes for congenial communal living and good neighborliness'. The importance of the centrality of language in any community cannot be understated. It is germane to a purposeful and meaningful life and progress.

2.2. Culture

Culture on the other hand can be defined as an integrated system of mental elements (beliefs, values, worldview, attitudes, norms), the behaviors motivated by those mental elements, and the material items created by those behaviors. According to Senghor (1964), the Senegalese poet, who went on to be the president of Senegal, said that culture is quintessential element of advancement and progress. In Wardhaugh (2010) Culture is all a person must know to function in a particular society. The heritage and customs of a society is their peculiarity since it bestow on them a quintessential traits and also offers them the acknowledgement they rightly earned. It is their fundamental distinctive hallmark that set them apart other societies and counters. And is equally applicable to other subgroups.

The United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization, (UNESCO 2010) which deals with the promotion of cultural acceptance across the global and ensuring child's access to education described culture in an encompassing context to mean a comprehensive intricate but unique supernatural, tangible and sentimental physiognomy that characterizes a community or subcultural group. It encompasses the social activities or pastimes, scholarships, style of living. It also includes basic rights of every person, ethical values, heritage and philosophy. It presupposes that customs and traditions that imparts on humans the capacity to do a self-evaluation.

It goes further to asseverate that it is culture that distinguished from other living things, that are capable of thoughts, endued with sense of right and wrongs; including consciousness of virtuous obligation. Culture enables us as humans to perceive, appreciates and imbibes moral principles that help us to recognize the endless possibilities available to man.

Culture in its truest sense provides us the instrumentality to convey our thoughts, feelings or emotions. It also offers man a platform for self-consciousness of our imperfections and inadequacies, and self-assertion. Culture help us extend the frontier of knowledge, seeking fresh interpretation to the dynamics of life and existence through which barriers are broken and obstacles are overcome; while new frontier are explored and extended

In a UNESCO 1966) working document on the essence of global cultural collaboration it espoused/stipulates that the most remarkable addition from this announcement is unequivocally is the safeguarding of the nobleness and equal distinction of all culture as stated in Article 1(17) and (1). Without exception, every culture is honourable and it is held in high esteem, and should be appreciated, cherished and safeguarded. (2) Every cultural subgroup is entitled and owe itself the responsibility to advance its culture unencumbered. (3) In their bounteous, interesting array but heterogeneous culture, and because of their inter-mutuality, all culture are regarded as a shared legacy of humanity.

It is interesting to state here that Article (V) of this declarative narrative about culture will later have a universal ramifications on the global concept of culture; which is the advancement of culture, the heterogeneity of culture, shared bequeathal; and so on and so forth. The UNESCO document for the first time pioneered the meaning of global cultural collaboration, which was deliberately institutionalized as deserving and obligation for every region; and such awareness and know-how should be aggregated by all.

In the closing Article (XI) the document states unambiguously that the implementation of the entire principles enunciated therein should be anchored on the twofold pillars of God-given rights and civil liberty. Invariably since its declaration it has been a topic of discussions in conferences over the years. .

In the work of Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952:357) they defined culture as comprises image, both definitive and inferential; of and for manners learned and disseminated through signs, encompassing the peculiar accomplishment of humanity, manifestation/representation in objets d'art. The indispensable locus of civilization encompasses conventional but antequely copied and chosen concepts particularly their associated and derived value and traditional methods. Conversely it could be regarded as an aggregates of performance And on the other hand it act as a stimulus for additional performance

Hoebel (1972:6) who was an anthropologist described culture as the assimilated network of enlightened conducts and manners which are exclusively peculiar to that group of people, and which is not hereditary as a result of kinship, basically not based on kinship ties.

Tylor (1871) emphasized that, culture is that intricate all-inclusive, comprising scholarship, conviction, past-times, principles, rules of behavior, legal codes, and other abilities that be acquired, and universally accepted by people in that given community and are propagated and pass on to each successive generation. Linton (1945) states that the culture of a community is the lifestyle of its people the aggregation of their imaginations and practices acquired and commonly adhered to, eventually passed on from century to century. According to him culture is crafted and modeled for existence, adhered to by everyone in that community

2.3 Identity

What is then the meaning of identity within the cultural context of an individual in a given society? Because language acts as transmission of culture, it can rightly be said that language becomes the umbilical cord to the birth of a culture.

It becomes the lightning- connecting rod of a sort between culture and identity. Inferably and predictably within this context, one could say that Cultural Identity can be defined as the complex connection of values, customs, traditions, beliefs, behaviors, and way of speech that an individual identifies with; both within themselves and as part of an entire community of shared commonality, fostering a high sense of coercion and belonging within a given society.

Culture is assumed and is embedded in every facet of spoken and unspoken language and this is expected to be pass on either through established structures/system or unconsciously. As pertaining to cultural identity of a person, this dissertation defined the term ethnic cultural identity as the complex connection of values, customs, traditions, beliefs, behaviors, and ways and mannerism of speaking of a person.

Cultural Identity reinforces the believe that each culture is incomparable and inimitable configuration of utility and ultimately in the long run help in the emancipation of the citizens. Cultural Identity can be likened to a thread that binds, hold and glue members of a given community, which ultimately promotes interdependence and peaceful coexistence. Culture is interactive and dynamic, rejuvenating and constantly recreating itself in order to survive and thrive; like a living organism.

Conversely, Cultural Rights as propounded by UNESCO recognizes and affirmed the linkage between culture and development which was derived from the Article 27 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: I stated inter alia that every human being is entitled to conveniently engage and take part in the cultural life of wherever he lives , to derive happiness from the cultural entertainment and partake in the rewards of technological breakthroughs and innovation. These rights are concomitant to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations as stated in Article 15, particularly in Article 15.1.a. where it is expressly mentioned that anybody deserves a place and should be involved in the cultural lifestyle of the community where he resides

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Origination (UNESCO) have been at the forefront in promoting the centrality of cultural rights as pertains to overall development in any nation. The concept of Cultural Right is till at its infancy with limited research work on it.

It is pertinent to mention here that diversity in culture categorizes a hybridized community or nation, with a gamut of traditional, communal and cultural determinant, giving rise to a tinge of heterogeneous distinctiveness, that makes culture a 'mixed-multitude'. However, the downside of it is that this scenario give rise to a kind of a forgotten identity of a sort, according to Mattleart (2010, 232) "discriminatory interdependence"

Consequently, the inter-relationship linking language to one's personality as well the evolvement of identity and dissemination of ideas and information in intercultural contexts is still less understood. That is why the need to communicate across cultures is less appreciated and is being taken for granted globally.

According to the United Nations approximately around 175 million people lived outside their home country at the turn of the century and this figure is expected to double within the next 30 years (United Nations 2002).

Therefore, if language is inherent in culture and cultural identity (Rovira 2008, 66), this implies the cultural identity of a large number of people is greatly under peril. The fact is that limited studies have been conducted on identity works in relation to language and culture. In fact, researchers are still trying to understand language and communication developments within cultures. And, aside from self-reports or a priori analyzes, how can one very and authenticate the assertion that language is inherent in cultural identity? Little wonder that the Loss of language or transmogrification due to a post-colonial condition is often viewed as a loss of culture and identity.

3. The African Identity Dilemma

Instituting and establishing a truly African identity is a huge jigsaw puzzle, considering the facts that many African countries are made up of many ethnic groups and nationalities; all competing for supremacy, at best on the basis of equality. A country like Nigeria that has over 450 ethnic groups with distinct and peculiar linguistic categorization, present a serious dilemma in choosing a nationally acceptable language that can be used for social intercourse as well as in conduct of government business. The colonial legacy that created a feeling of mistrust and of playing one tribe against another has created a huge challenge for many post-colonial African nations. The identity crisis which has been stoked in the heat of colonialism has altered and created a competitive identity which makes it difficult to forge an identity that can be uniquely national and peculiar; which can be harnessed for development; without a clash of multiple but different norms and traditions. This we have seen played out politically with ethnically based parties across many African nations. More often than not appointment of people to office are made not on the basis of meritocracy but ethnically, religiously and nepotistically inspired, given rise to corruption, poverty and insecurity.

4. Research methodology

The research methodology chosen for this paper is basically intellectual in form, perusing, scrutinizing and collecting material from printed, electronic books and journal articles that are transcendent various disciplines; encompassing anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and linguistics.

This study is a modest attempt at trying to revisit the unique Africa past in retrospect so as to help the postcolonial African nations reconstruct and fashion out a pragmatic and realistic Cultural Identity in a dynamic global environment that is culturally becoming fluid.

5. Findings

The result and findings of this research brought to the fore the imperativeness and reemphasized the centrality of language as a harbinger of culture in any society, which is a *sin quo non* for the sustainability, survival and continuity of a people and/or nations. Culture on the other hand connotes the label that gives meaning and identity of a people. The result of this research has also thrown open the complexities and dynamism of culture, which tends towards 'hybridity' of cultural in forging a unique identity in postcolonial African nations.

6. Conclusion

Drawing from the facts presented in this paper, it is the considered view of this researcher that establishing a truly unadulterated African identity in post-colonial is pragmatically a herculean task due to many factors.

In the first place, Colonial legacy of racism, slavery and discrimination bequeathed and left a negative impact on linguistic and cultural traditions and identity, institutionalizing an 'engrafted' identities among Africans nations. It is expected that such a legacy will leave a negative impact on cultural identity, creating an ambiguous identities among Africans.

The English, French, Spanish and Portuguese languages has long taken root and used as a language of communication and government business at inception, uniting a plethora of ethnic nationalities that make up the citizens of these countries; each nationalities with its own distinct linguistic and cultural ties, peculiarities and traditions.

Adopting one language among the various tribal and ethnic nationalities will create whole new problems with its own limitations that far outweigh the use of colonial language for government business and communication. With all the pro and cons across the divide, it will be more pragmatic to allow both languages and of course the engrafted cultural identity to coexist side by side, since culture itself is dynamic; constantly evolving, particular will the current globalization due the internet and telecommunication.

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