


Literature and Society in Nigeria: Engaging Cultural Policy for Effective Management

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ABSTRACT

This study is on literature and society in Nigeria and the need to engage cultural policy for its effective management. It examines the potency of the cultural policy of Nigeria in strengthening the social, economic, and cultural value of literature in the development of society. Cultural policy, being government instrument of cultural management, becomes important in deepening the social importance of literature within ethnic nationalities in Africa whose tradition birthed the author and his or her creative work. It emphasized cultural policy power to promote the use of African or Nigeria indigenous languages for literary benefits and development. The research method is an analytical approach towards engaging indigenous language in African or Nigerian literature. It concluded that literature will do best in Nigerian society if cultural policy is enabled to contribute to the management of its practice and advance the fortune of literary artists with intent promote indigenous language benefits in Nigerian.

Keywords: *Nigeria, literature, cultural policy, management, Africa, society.*

Introduction

Literature and society have been together since the evolution of society. Literature began in its oral form in every ethnic society. The various ethnic groups in Nigeria that streamed into a

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nation were not exempted from oral heritage, which was virtually the only means to preserve oral heritage in their ethnic nation. At that time, communal art was managed by tradition, and it was assumed to be sacred to the extent to which it was important to the people. The streaming of ethnic nationalities into nationhood took ethnic literature along; this automatically constituted a national pool. This pool was still independent in the days of the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates of Nigeria. At the advent of Western education by the colonial masters and missionaries, it became obvious that some subject contents were not useful to us; this was reviewed in addition to the call for indigenous knowledge. In all subject areas except those that were very critical, indigenous knowledge was exploited, and literature benefited mostly because it had an already existing pool of raw materials, which was the folklore of the people. Besides, literature has always drawn from the culture of society to recreate and represent it.

As the culture of a society is not static, so is the literature that comes from each society, which means literature and society interact over time. The level of literary and social interaction was so high in the wake of independence, but this interaction between literature and Nigerian society today has been weakened by the tactical negligence of government responsibilities, perhaps because literature constitutes a means through which literary artists mobilize the masses against bad governance. It is on this ground that the cultural policy of Nigeria, though it recognizes literary creativity, has not strengthened it with the desired support so as to get the desired result. This is a major concern of this paper, which intends to rescue the necessity of engaging cultural policy in strengthening literary business in Nigeria towards achieving stout literary success.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework on which the argument engages cultural policy in support of literary pursuit is very important, particularly at this time, because it will help to address the cluster of issues that surround literary management with the aid of cultural policy, which is purely a political instrument of cultural management. The choice of the role of cultural policy in the management of literature, particularly in this case, is apt because literature itself is political. It is on this premise that Ngugi wa Thiong'O, whose theory forms the nucleus of this theoretical framework, states that "Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics" (xi). This is true because writers tell stories with a prospect that could develop the

mind; this is because the mind is a central place where every issue of life is silently attended to until the thinker opts to voice out. The development of the mind strengthens its ability to attend to issues, irrespective of the issue, particularly political issues. This political exigency of the colonial era on which African writers bask, even as they tow the same line with Western writers, contributed to the issue in discourse.

One would wonder how in the course of striving to depict African literature, if it was in the author's mother tongue, that would have been the beginning of playing full African politics in literature. However, beside their mother tongue, they borrowed the Western tongue to express thought, creativity, and ideals that were conceived in the African mother tongue; this is what birthed the second mother tongue. This is why this study is hinged on this theory.

Literature review

Literature and society have an inextricable nexus, which has been extensively attended to by critics in the past and in contemporary times. Within this discourse, many critics have seen literature as a social tool for society's development. This is because "the consensus is that literature should be socially relevant" (Oladokun 7). In this context, the social relevance of literature is more pronounced within the mind, with its impart on societal development. However, the process of imparting knowledge to the mind and society is poorly pushed to achieve objectives. This is why it is important for the government to assist through cultural policy provision. No doubt, although efforts have been made, it seems not to be enough to the point that it can be imparted. Sometimes, the effort made is a mere policy statement that is not implemented, partly implemented, or implemented against the people it intends to serve. It was of this view that "the imparted formal literature could have been truncated by the low- literacy level of most African countries, which one hopes will be improved upon sooner or later" (Oladokun 8). It is better if it comes sooner because this is the most outstanding problem, and it is the most expected point where cultural policy should fit in to address the pending impart it is expected to have on society.

Practical cultural policy implementation is a political instrument that can aid literature, which is also a political instrument in the views of Lucie Cerna, who asserts that "'introducing, sustaining and assessing educational change is a political process' because it addresses issues of conflict and representation among multiple actors within a given situation and environment".(14). She further argues that remaking the schooling system will require political will of stakeholders to impart significant changes to long-standing institutions. Thus the politics

of policy change and reform is expected to play a substantial part in the whole process. The emphasis that politics affects origins, formulation and implementation of public policy especially when significant changes are involved, broadens reforms possibilities when there is sufficient political will and when changes to a sector are designed and implemented by capable planners and managers (Cerna 14). This is an important fact for consideration by policy planners and implementers, not only in this regard but in every other area that involves policy framework as a tool for action.

Nigerian Literature: A Child with Two Legitimate Mothers

Nigerian literature is a product of Nigerian culture, either of the past, present, or projection into the future that society shall give birth to. A chunk of the content of the past of Nigerian literature was borrowed from the society's folklore. This is not restricted to Nigeria but to Africa as a continent and even to Africans in Diaspora. The story, structure, imagery, maxims, etc., and original language of any African or Nigerian literature are ultimately African, where Nigeria belongs. That means the first mother of Nigerian literature is from Africa. This is because the author who wrote and gave birth to the literature is an African who must have been taught in his mother tongue by his parents, community members, and age group about his folklore, which informed him of the importance of the norms and values inherent.

The communal training he receives from birth to the point the child attends Western school is like the first six months of baby-friendly breast milk feeding to a child because of the strength and immunity it provides. The training culture of the child is to enable him or her to face the challenges of life in his environment and beyond. Any writer of Nigerian descent's training background and environment are deeply reflected in their creative works. In the same vein, the child goes to a Western school to learn and acquire Western education in African environment, which teaches the child expressive skills (oral and written) in Western language though in Africa, even to the disadvantage of the child. It was observed that:

... millions of children continued to be taught in languages they did not use or even understand. She added that the participation of indigenous peoples in designing curricula was still limited, and education still fell short of eliminating prejudice and discrimination targeted at indigenous peoples. The lack of indigenous education, emphasized by a representative of indigenous youth, would continue to set indigenous youth apart from their own cultures. Stressing that education was the key to self-determination, she recommended that educational instruction take place in indigenous languages (UNESCO 1).

The recommendation of UNESCO is a task, but it must be managed with tactics capable of rescuing indigenous people. Otherwise, it will be a blow to the future of the indigenous people.

Though the process is difficult, the child must be taught to persist in the act of learning his or her indigenous language.

The persistence of the child to learn the local language is very important because of its social and economic value. The African Renaissance plan corroborates UNESCO, thus: “African States recognize the need to develop African languages in order to ensure their cultural advancement and acceleration of their economic and social development. To this end, they should endeavor to formulate and implement appropriate national language policies” (Africa Union 17). African countries are quick to formulate policies of some sort, but implementation remains a critical problem. Otherwise, in the advent of becoming a writer without the ability to write in an indigenous language, the writer may move on to write in any other Western language because of its social and economic importance for the purpose of readership value that guarantees Western language tendency. This makes Western language the second mother of Nigerian literature because it birthed African literature in writing and publishing. Western languages have taken over the expression of African literature because no single African language has been developed for effective communication across the African landscape to advance African literature.

Within the nucleus of the argument, the two mothers have a legitimate right of ownership. This is because the first mother gave birth to the culture and everything associated with it, but its social-economic, political, and even artistic value could not have been seen if not for the second mother, who gave birth to the language that projected the work to the world at large. Ideally, the work was not known in its original language, except to people of that language, even if it was known in the first mother’s language within its small community. This is the position of Nigerian literature, with the exclusion of those written in our mother tongue. Nigerian literature or African literature is written in English or French, which is the Western language that has the power to popularize the work. However, its original owner and language are the Nigerian or African community that originated the story or idea. But the latter has no power to popularize it beyond its domain so as to have the expected socio-economic and political impart. It should not come as a surprise, then, that the “‘transformative powers’ of the arts should have pride of place in the current cultural policy discourse.” (Belfiore 5). The cause of this problem is that two cultures gave birth to the author: the culture that gave birth to him and the culture that educated him or her. These ostensibly reflect in the author’s creative works. Therefore, in a simple judgment, Nigerian literature is a child with two legitimate mothers because both mothers gave birth to the child in the same way but with different blood, and this is not common

to Nigeria alone. The different languages in this context stand as different cultures. What is important at a child's birth is culture, which the upbringing of the child is dependent upon and language conveys culture. Both Western and African languages brought Nigerian or African literature forth, and the West popularized it among both Nigerians and not Nigerians, which the Nigerian or African language or thought that originated it could not do. The analogy of two mothers in Nigerian literature was deliberately coined because it is the mother that connects the mother tongue, which is often used to describe ethnic language usage. Indigenous African or Nigerian languages are mother tongues that should be used for Nigerian or African literature, rather English, French or other Western languages are used.

Nigerian Literature: Cultural Policy to the Rescue

In the same vein, the importance of Nigerian literature in Africa is estimably high considering the number of authors in the various literary genres of drama, poetry, prose, etc. These literary works have opened our culture to the world. In an attempt to manage this monumental achievement in the literary world by Nigerian authors, a cultural policy was put in place. However, at the height of this achievement, the argument of the dual motherhood of Nigerian literature is silently contentious as one of the major problems. This heightens the need to reclaim the 'Nigerian child' given birth to by another mother. Conversely, the reclaiming process requires cultural tact because no mother willfully wishes her child away. More so, the birth of Nigerian and African literature has been known to be conceived by African or Nigerian culture and given birth to in the international community by Western culture. Therefore, one of the safest means of reclaiming the child with two mothers, otherwise known as African or Nigerian literature, is through Nigerian cultural policy. The cultural policy of any nation expresses the mandate of the people through government's intervention to promote, protect, preserve, and present national culture. It is on this ground that the Cultural Policy of Nigeria in paragraph 6.2.1 Literature states:

The state shall preserve and present oral tradition, folklore, poetry, drama, essays, novels, and short stories through the theatre, film, video, and audio tapes in written form and popularize them by promoting them in Nigerian languages and promoting them through the school system, language centers, writers workshops, book development councils, the media, etc. (Nigeria 76).

In spite of the fact that African or Nigerian literature is the assumed child of two mothers who can legitimately hold on to it as owners, its importance to Africans, the black world, and

international knowledge society elates the socio-political and academic egos of Nigerians and Africans.

This aspect of the cultural policy reflects the intention of the Nigerian state toward oral tradition, folklore, poetry, drama, essays, novels, short stories, etc.; these constitute Nigerian literature. The intention of the cultural policy is lofty and highly estimated to be the best; though pro-cultural management; it needs review and implementation so as to meet current societal demands. However, the implementation of this aspect of the cultural policy has the potential to lift African or Nigerian literature out of the motherhood predicament it finds itself in if sufficiently managed. At the moment, the implementation of this aspect is market-driven, and its expanse is determined by the demand forces of the market. This constitutes one of the major problems for ethnic language literature. The market for it is usually very small, and as much as the writer and the publisher look forward to profit, the size of the market becomes an issue of economic concern. If this is the primary concern of developing ethnic literature, then the future we sought for ethnic literature in Africa or Nigeria may not come. However, it is important that we develop ethnic literature in Africa because “Literature catalyzes the procurement of social action due to its thought-provoking nature. It exposes critical, often controversial issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and political fraud in society, which can have a powerful impact across multidiscipline” (Taufiq 1). This is a critical area for cultural policy to manage: the development of the ethnic literature market and its expansion through translation. For instance, the National Library Bibliographic Department has only a place for relationships with literary artists. This comes from the public service department of the library. It is to “sensitize publishers, authors, and booksellers on their roles in creating a sustainable reading culture” (National Library 363). Beside this is the porous piracy law, which is not Catholic enough in contemporary times. To the governments in Africa, literature seems to have little relevance; hence, nothing should be done about it, but literature is a vital instrument that drives morality and ethnic philosophy into global repute.

Between Nigerian literature and cultural policy: Impasse of the Rescue in Society

The major impediment to the rescue of African or Nigerian literature is the crisis of policy implementation—the poor or non-implementation of the cultural policy even with its good intentions. This is the worst impasse when it comes to cultural policy implementation, which should be avoided because it is better than having no cultural policy in place. Most often, non-implementation helps to sustain what the government intends to manage as the problem

continues. For instance, learning in Nigerian homes and schools is very much dependent on the use of English, even if that aspect could be better handled in an indigenous language. More so, English users are encouraged through awards when they write or speak it well. Whenever a child speaks incorrect English, the child is mocked and ridiculed. It is not because they do not know the importance of indigenous languages and their importance to the people, but because they want to associate with Western civilization, in spite of its threat to the development of indigenous languages, which, according to the World Bank, “it has improved primary education and enrolment by using local language as a means of instruction in West Africa” (2). This is not visible in any instance because of the very scanty evidence. To check this abnormality is one of the essences that the cultural policy is deliberately meant to achieve. As soon as it is implemented, it will refocus the abnormality by instructing prospective writers to use their indigenous language in discussion, writing, learning, speaking, etc. According to UNESCO,

...millions of children continued to be taught in languages they did not use or even understand. She added that the participation of indigenous peoples in designing curricula was still limited, and education still fell short of eliminating prejudice and discrimination targeted at indigenous peoples. The lack of indigenous education, emphasized by a representative of indigenous youth, would continue to set indigenous youth apart from their own cultures. Stressing that education was the key to self-determination, she recommended that educational instruction take place in indigenous languages (1).

When children are taught English, they are expected to read and write in English, which may not be their indigenous language. Even when they become writers, the language they were taught becomes their language of thought and expression. In spite of the lofty advantages of indigenous language for indigenous literature development, increasing participation by the indigenous people remains very important. But the cultural policy recognition of major languages by the government in multilingual nations like Nigeria is another high-level hindrance to the development of the non-classified major languages of indigenous languages that could have negative impact on Nigerian literature, and this has had a negative impact on the development of indigenous literature. UNESCO has posited that “new ‘places of belonging’ are needed to cope with the fears and hopes arising from changing cultural landscapes in the era of globalization. This would imply rethinking identity politics (linguistic, religious, indigenous, etc.) with respect to human rights (8). Another major factor is parents’ apathy toward the use of indigenous languages for interaction with their children. This is a major

problem with urbanization, and it is most common in mixed-culture housing estates, schools, barracks, and mixed-housing layouts.

This is heavily supported by cross-cultural marriage involving different ethnic groups with different languages. Parents are the best teachers for indigenous language, as no teacher is trained to teach the non-recognized languages apart from the three recognized in Nigeria for instance. The impasse is weighty, and it should be factored as a challenge into cultural policy for review.

In most West African states, efforts have been made to address the problems of literature and language within their cultural policies. The Cameroonian Cultural Policy recommended “that the term ‘national languages’ be adopted to designate our so-called vernacular languages as opposed to the two official languages, and that these national languages be studied at our educational institutions, as well as the written literature in those languages” (Bahoken and Atagana 52). The Cultural Policy of Ghana, in Paragraph 5.2. (e) Development and Promotion of Culture, adopted “develop, promote, and propagate Ghanaian languages through the production and publication of literary works and the use of Ghanaian languages in educational institutions and at official and public functions” (Ghana 18). The Gambia Cultural Policy states in item (f): “Ensure education content embodies Gambian values and life-long education through the use of national and other languages” (Gambia 6). It is not impossible for other cultural policies not to have addressed the problem of language in the same manner as their cultural policies in Africa. This is because language is the stronghold of every other aspect of a people’s culture. Corroboratively, Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski, quoting Simon Sheikh, states, “Where the word institution is understood as norms, values, language tools, procedures, and methods of dealing with and doing things...” (16). Attending to language issues within the content of cultural policy is not a problem, but implementing it to the fullest is the most critical to solving the pending problems on hand. The music policy of Kenya, citing constitutional provisions, holds a resounding position on cultural provision for literature and language, among others.

Article 44 provides for the protection of language and culture and states that every person has the right to participate in the cultural life of the person’s choice and that a person belonging to a cultural or linguistic community has the right, with other members of that community, to enjoy the person’s culture and to form, join, and maintain cultural and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society (18). This is an important agenda that the African Union should

pursue in the cause of promoting African languages. Although it seems impossible, an enabling environment can enable its actualization.

Findings

It was revealed that the cultural policy of Nigeria had excellent intentions to manage the country's literature as it indicated, however, the intention was not adequately managed due to the silent ethnic superiority struggle and undue political swing. Therefore, the rescue intent of the cultural policy could not be fully achieved. Prior to this development, early Nigerian writers already wrote in their foreign mother tongue, which is English or French, not in their language of origin, which is any of the Nigerian languages, so as to have an English translation. This is the point of birth of the child with two legitimate mothers. The child has been sustained by selective language teaching in Nigerian schools, a poor parental attitude toward ethnic language learning, a lack of resilience on the part of the author to first write in his language and translate into another language, and a lack of enough market demand to sustain local language writing. It then implies that the situation should be reviewed in light of the listed recommendations.

Recommendations

The intent of the cultural policy of Nigeria in this circumstance is to ensure that literature in society fulfills its purpose for Nigerians and the world. However, the dichotomy has been that this seems impossible due to factors emanating from inadequate or nonexistent implementation of cultural policy in this regard. Therefore, to ensure that literature fulfills its purpose in society for Nigerians, this study noted that the following must be followed:

The most pressing need for cultural policy is commitment by the stakeholders: the government, researchers' authors, writers, readers, etc., and the ethnic and knowledge communities. Commitment becomes a primary requirement because it has the force that will drive the spirit of implementation.

The cultural policy provision should be implemented to the letter, thereby creating room for indigenous language publication that leads to English or other language translations. This will resolve the issues of double motherhood in Nigerian and African literature and in all other ethnic literature in Africa.

Parents must take the initiative to teach their children their ethnic or indigenous languages.

As part of cultural policy implementation, students should be encouraged to learn their ethnic languages in schools, and teachers should be trained to handle it.

All middle education examining bodies should conduct examinations for local languages and award grades.

Children should be encouraged to learn their ethnic languages through award-winning programs and competitions.

The use of indigenous languages at home and in schools should be encouraged. To this end, Adefuye has proposed that “one of the most significant approaches through which Nigeria can advance its image and relationship is to promote the positive aspects of what is distinctively African or Nigerian, whether it is music, artwork, clothing literature, or food” (27). Literature is our concern at this instance, and if these recommendations are attended to as they should be, then what is distinctly African or Nigerian shall be adequately positioned to promote Nigeria.

Conclusion

The separation of a child from the mother is often very difficult. In the case of Africa, the separation of literature from any of the Western languages that present it is going to be most difficult. This is because it's even more difficult now to engage African local languages in the writing of literature because of youth apathy towards what is African, as they derive joy from what is Euro-American to the detriment of African ethnic culture. Added to this is globalization, which is flocking youths to the middle of contemporary events that are purely Western. Previous African writers have already written in English or French; for them, it's already too late for the elderly to learn how to eat with the left hand because they have already written African literature with the assumed right hand and relegated theirs to the assumed left hand for no fault of theirs. However, the African Renaissance comes with a mission that promises reward; thus, African States should prepare and implement reforms for the introduction of African languages into the education curriculum. For instance, Nigeria has recently passed a bill to enforce the use of indigenous languages in basic schools to a level before using the English language. To this end, “each state should extend the use of African languages, taking into consideration the requirements of social cohesion and technological progress, as well as regional and African integration” (Africa Union 17), if implemented. What is the way forward? The way forward is to move backwards, remarrying our culture, which means our languages should matter because it holds the value of our culture. This is because the sustenance of that marriage is heavily dependent on our understanding of our culture, which the cultural policy is intended to help us manage. This is where cultural policy implementation comes into play as an important tool that can help dying languages in Africa.

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