

Can the arts market promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue?

Providing answers to the topic's question also poses additional questions like 'what is culture?', 'what is cultural diversity?' and 'what is the relationship between culture and society?' Proffering answers to these questions may not necessarily follow a particular order. But permit me to refresh our memory of an assumption of the definition of culture - which we all know (an assumption) it is not just appreciation the work of art, food, literature or music neither is it the colour of the skin of a particular race. Rather culture is a reflection of human behaviour and beliefs, a way of life. It encompasses knowledge, belief, customs, morals and laws that binds a community together through habits acquired overtime.

Whereas cultural diversity refers to the unique gift of recognition of different culture and cultural values that are distinct but exist alongside each other with mutual appreciation and respect. Its importance was classified 'as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature' in the preamble to the Convention on Cultural Diversity by UNESCO which further states that, '...to preserve cultural diversity as a living, and thus renewable treasure that must not be perceived as being unchanging heritage but as a process guaranteeing the survival of humanity; ...prevent segregation and fundamentalism'.

On another note, reflecting on culture and society I agree with the view of the scholar, Edward B. Tylor in his book, *Primitive Culture*, he asserts that "*culture and society are not necessarily the same thing. However, they are inextricably connected because culture is created and transmitted to others in a society. Cultures are not the product of lone individuals. They are the continuously evolving products of people interacting with each other. Cultural patterns such as language and politics make no sense except in terms of the interaction of people. If you were the only human on earth, there would be no need for language or government*". Therefore intercultural dialogues even within the same ethnic race exist as co-sustenance for us to assert the link between culture and society.

Beyond these definitions however, while talking of arts markets we are referring to products of arts; be it in films, stage productions, artefacts, poetry, puppetry, and dance among many others but not excluding sporting activities. These are all arts products that one way or the other are express in different cultural ways and at the same time because of the diversity of culture in expression, it is an establish fact that the richness of each product varies

and appreciation differs. That is the beauty in cultural diversity and main reason why we need to counter the homogenising effects of culture in the face of globalisation.

With these preambles therefore, how is the arts market promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue? We may not dwell much by trying to justify how arts market promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, we can proceed to cite examples in practical terms on how arts market can and is promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Most of the examples we will give may not be new to you but we are then going to situate them in the context of our discussion.

The second Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, FESTAC '77 held in Nigeria which brought together all Africans both in the continent and diasporas.

The festival provided an unusual forum that brought to light the diverse contributions of Blacks and African peoples to the universal currents of thought and arts. It also provided an opportunity for recounting the achievements of our ancestors, contemporaries and their invaluable contributions to the enrichment of world thought and ideas.

More than anything the festival helped in debunking erroneous ideas and beliefs regarding the cultural and spiritual values of the Black and African race. It also made people aware that our culture were not only pre-historic objects placed in museums to be cleaned and displayed occasionally but also to fit them as a living thing containing and portraying the values and beliefs of our people

In the same light, the novel by the great African American author, Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, this is based on his family's history of how his great grand fathers were taken to America as slaves from The Gambia in West Africa during the slave trade era. *Roots* which has been translated to over 37 languages after its publication in 1976 is viewed as a mythic saga of African American history, portraying the ways in which enslaved Africans endured suffering and fought for their place in American society. It has earned a place among the popular classics of American literature and remains a profoundly influential and well-loved book. It was adapted into a popular mini-series, and became one of the most-watched television programs in American history reaching a record breaking of over 140 million viewers.

Roots which appealed to readers of various cultural backgrounds generate different emotional feelings: to the African American, the story inspired pride

and a greater understanding of the past; for other ethnicities, it provided an opportunity to look at an American family's immigrant past. Above all, the work of Alex Haley has also been credited with increasing public interest in genealogy drive in which people try to know their roots.

In Nigeria, the more piercing reference point till today is Hubert Ogunde's stage production. *Yoruba Ronu* (meaning Yoruba think), in the 1960s which made the government of the then Western Premier, Chief Ladoke Akintola to be so uncomfortable that the play was banned in the western part of the country. The play which was simply a satire was influenced by the political rivalry between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Ladoke Akintola during the first republic. The playwright urged the Yoruba people who mostly populated the south western part of Nigeria to think seriously about political brigandage, carpet crossing, sabotage, betrayal, operation 'weties' (destruction of properties of fellow Yoruba race). The art was used therefore to promote dialogue even within the same ethnic group.

In our host country for this summit, South Africa, product of arts play significant role in the eventual demolition of the apartheid regime by bringing to forefronts the evil inclination of apartheid. Some of the plays and musical productions like *The Island, Woza Albert, Ipi Tombi, and Sarafina* in the pre-apartheid era can be viewed as cultural resistance productions. The kind of attention those productions either within South Africa or the rest of the World contributed in no small way in pulling down of the apartheid structure. These productions apart from promoting dialogue were also means of highlighting the cultural diversity in the South African society as a small reflection of the African continent.

In fact, it has been said that the resistance culture against the apartheid regime in South African aided the appreciation of South African music. Partly because in most of the productions music became an integral part of the resistance movement and in essence people find better expression in musical form. Upon opening up of the country to the rest of the world after the demolition of the apartheid structure, it was not strange anymore to purchase South African music and cultural accessories for use and better appreciation.

We can continue to site practical examples in the works of Fela Anikulapo Kuti and Bob Marley in the messages that are preached in their lyrics which are now worldwide acknowledgement of promoting intercultural dialogue.

In retrospect, the arts market will and can be used to promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue insofar as human beings continue to exist as

an integral part of the society. It must be noted within this context however there are arts market purely for arts sake which do not promote cultural dialogue. An example is the irresponsible portrayal of Nigerian people in a film called '**District 9**' by a Hollywood director, Peter Jackson. The film denigrated a whole nation as criminals, cannibals, ritualists and sexmaniacs (especially with non-humans). The portrayal of a multi-ethnic race in this light is certainly a warped imagination of Peter Jackson's view of Nigerians and this kind of film cannot and will not promote intercultural dialogue.

In essence, it must be noted and stated clearly that most works of arts are not necessarily conceptualise to promote cultural diversity or dialogue (except commissioned works to specifically address the issue). An artist set out primarily to create an inspired work to express his views which may depict cultural beliefs and understanding and hence promote cultural dialogue. We must make a distinction between an academic exercise in which works of arts are been reviewed as promoting cultural diversity or intercultural dialogue and an expression of arts that in concept and execution promote such.

In conclusion, we still need to put more efforts or concentration to building a more vibrant and enduring arts sector in the continent in other to maintain and improve on its role as a promoter of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

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