The Issue of Culture in Culture & Development
What is or is not Culture

• Something that only Africans have? No!
• The same as tradition? No!
• A collection of customs? No!
• About the past, and not the present? No!
• Something that some have but others do not?
• Is it about performances staged for public entertainment? Not exclusively that!
• Is it the opposite of science? No!
• The opposite of modernity & modernisation?
What Lord Macaulay told British Parliament about India, 1835

‘I do not think we would ever conquer ... [India], unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own they will lose their self-esteem, their national culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation’

http://www.chelationtherapyonline.com/anatomy/p156.htm

[- Culture] => [-Self Esteem] => [+Subdued People]
Popular Views on Culture

Some people see culture as old traditions and customs. There is tradition in culture and there are customs too, but there is more. We certainly cannot understand what is going on in society if we do not take into account the life of yester years.

Culture is about the past, the present and even the future of society.

Culture is no one’s monopoly.
E.B. Tylor portrays culture as:

"that complex whole which includes knowledge, morals, religion, customs and habits or any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society".

The World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT, 1998) adopted the following definition:

“culture is that whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social groups. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs”
Frequently cited definitions of Culture: E. B. Tylor (1871)

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“From their life experiences, a group develops a set of rules and procedures for meeting their needs. The set of rules and procedures, together with a supporting set of ideas and values, is called a culture.”
Steve Biko on Culture

“A culture is essentially the society’s composite answer to the varied problems of life.”
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Amilcar Cabral’s Definition

“Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies[…] if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.” (Cabral 1973:41)
Who was Amilcar Cabral?

• Revolutionary socialist leader of the national liberation movement (PAIGC) that freed Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde from Portuguese rule.

• Cabral was assassinated in party coup plotted by the Portuguese and others.
Frantz Fanon’s Definition of National Culture

“A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.” (Fanon 1963:233)
Others Accepted Views of Culture

• It is the way a people think, feel and believe.

• It is a convenient shorthand for an ill-defined entity which might be described as ‘a way of life’.

• Culture is the totality of a people’s way of life. It embodies the distinctive achievements of communities and people, their identities and aspirations.
A Totality or Complex Whole

• Implied in the idea of a totality or complex is that culture involves all the components that we could possible imagine as being of importance socially for any society’s life.

• Furthermore these aspects are inter-linked in an intricate way. You could compare this to a fabric and its strands of thread.

• This is the case where some trad. African communities are concerned.

Ex: The trad. African family has many aspects: the social, moral, linguistic, religious, political, economic etc.
Some identifiable components of culture

**Economy** (goods and services: production, distribution and consumption). The predominant mode of livelihood can identify a people culturally as pastoralists, **Agriculturists** (millet cultivators, rice cultivators), **Hunter**-gatherers the Pygmies of Congo Forest & San of the Kalahari), **Trader** for the Dyula of West Africa, etc.

The **religion** of the society has to be included in the definition of culture. You cannot fully comprehend African culture if you did not take their religion into account.

**Political**: Culture includes the society’s political norms and behaviours. Again some societies are identified by their political norms and institutions.
Entertainments: Also of importance are the forms of entertainment (dances, music, games, drama etc.). A people’s music, drumming and dancing.

The languages that people speak are crucial to definition and identification of their culture. A number of ethnic people are known by the terms that refer to their languages.

Technology: Just like the other components, a society’s technology and sciences are relevant to its cultural identity, hence its material culture, as archaeology tells us.
Implications
For culture knowledge systems, belief systems, behaviours and practices, etc are implied.

It is therefore incorrect to think that
1. Culture has nothing to do with economics or politics.
2. Or that Culture and science as mirror opposites.

Material and Non-Material Aspects
• Culture includes material and non-material components: The material aspects symbolize and manifest the culture.

• Norms, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions etc. are non-material and they are critical and therefore count towards assessment of a people’s culture.
Environment:

‘When the last plant dies, the last person dies’

Societies exploit environmental resources for their livelihoods. They may not be wholly dependent on the physical environment but are influenced by it;

The culture too can influence the environment and this is why we should all take environmental degradation and pollution seriously. The environment seems to influence traditional African cultures more than is the case in European and so called Developed countries.
Culture vrs Nature

Culture is man-made and from this perspective it is to be distinguished from nature which is not usually perceived to be directly the result of human activities.

i.e. A birthmark vrs. ‘tribal’ mark

A tribal mark is deliberately inflicted on a person for therapeutic or cosmetic reasons, or even for ethnic/clan identity etc. We account for the tribal mark in the context of a people’s culture or belief systems but we do not usually give the same explanation to the birthmark.

• Because culture is not a natural product, people are not born with their culture. They acquire it as members of their society.
Culture and Patterns

Culture can also be seen in terms of patterns or regularities in behaviours and norms and in the resultant products. Kluckhohn says culture is "a way of thinking, feeling; believing..." and goes on to remark that that culture -

.. consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts...
If culture refers to patterns and regularities then these are regularities that apply usually to a society, community or a group of people.

- Clyde Kluckhohn observes that culture is the main factor permitting people to live together as a society. The implication here is: a society needs its culture if it is to endure for long. Academicians have their culture and so have soldiers, politicians etc.

- The Individualistic or Idiosyncratic: If there is a regularity that pertains to just an individual then it is not necessarily cultural.

- However, if behaviours that initially are perceived as only distinctive of an individual have eventually been adopted by members of a society or community then they no longer are just idiosyncratic, but cultural.
What is cultural is also learnt and shared

The sharing is made possible by transmission or learning. This can be done in several ways:

- **Participant Observation**: you watch and listen to what is done and you learn to do things the way others do them.
- **Structured Teaching**, as in the classroom.

**Inter-Generation**: Vertical Transmission can be from one senior generation to another.

**Intra-generation**: The peer group may transmit certain aspects of the culture; professional and occupational groups too transmit norms to new members.

**Inter-Cultural Borrowing**: Cultural traits may diffuse when one society borrows from another.
Sanctions: incentives, rewards, penalties

What helps in the transmission of culture and the conformity to norms are the sanctions that society wields. These may be positive or negative. People who do the right things are rewarded but wrong-doers may be penalised - ridiculed or satirised or not taken seriously.

E.g. **Marriage**: If society expects every adult would be married, then those who marry will be considered as ‘responsible’ people and will be listened too in council, but those who do not might be considered as weird and irresponsible. This fact can compel many adults to marry, even if they do not feel like it.
Culture is Dynamic

Culture changes and does not remain static. This may be due to many factors.

- Changes in *demographic profile* of society.
- *Environmental* and *economic* changes.
- *Contact with other* societies: wars, trade, colonization etc. can lead to borrowing of new habits & norms and abandonment of old practices.
- Changes in the *technology* etc.
- **Globalisation** is responsible for many changes that African societies are going through now.
Culture? Does the picture tell us anything about Culture?
END

THANKS For Listening