CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURE IN NEGATION OF THE NOTION OF POPULAR CULTURE

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Abstract

The notion of popular culture polarises culture and grounds the relegation of the cultures dabbed unpopular or low. This paper makes a conceptual analysis of culture and popular culture, with a view to negating the notion of popular culture. Relying on secondary conceptual and theoretical literatures, the paper negates the notion of popular culture and proves it to be misleading, discriminating and a form of otherness. The descriptive analysis demonstrates that the notion has neither pragmatic representation nor semantic meaning signification in the concept of culture. The study concludes that the notion of popular culture is an elitist subjective label constructed to glorify the cultures considered popular along with their elites, while dabbing and relegating other cultures. The popular culture mentality should be corrected and subverted through sustained sensitisation, reorientation and socialisation, so as to make many realise that no culture is inferior or superior to another or the others.

Keywords: Conceptual analysis, Culture, Popular culture, Negation, Otherness

Introduction
Scholarly interest in popular culture has become fundamental in contemporary cultural studies (De Gregorio-Godeo & Ramón-Torrijos, 2017). Fiske (1989a,b), Goodall (1995), Strinati (1995), Storey (2009a,b, 2010 & 2015) and Guins and Cruz (2005), among others, are some of the scholars who exhibit such burning interest in the notion of popular culture, as they preoccupy themselves deeply with it. The notion of popular culture has become closely associated with the concept and practice of culture as well as cultural studies. Barker (2002; 2003) agrees that the notion of popular population, which poses resistance and meaning contestation among cultures, is central in contemporary cultural studies. For Barker (2003), the notion covers 'other concepts, ideas and concerns like articulation, culture, discourse, ideology, identity, power, representation and text' (p. 42). These are obviously what characterise or ground the notion popular culture.

This study seeks to show that the notion of popular culture generates issues in cultural studies and mixed feelings among peoples of different cultures. This is because it introduces dichotomy, separation, superiority tendency and disposition from peoples belonging to the cultures popular christened to those persons belonging to the so-called unpopular cultures. Bennett (1998) has rightly noted that the concept of popular culture 'is virtually useless, a melting pot of confused and contradictory meanings capable of misdirecting inquiry up any number of theoretical blind alleys' (p. 1). Also, Bennett (1998, p. 27) observes that these days, 'work in cultural studies is characterised by an interdisciplinary concern with the functioning of cultural practices and institutions in the contexts and relations of power of different kinds.' Storey (2001, p. 12) rightly observes that popular culture implies 'otherness'. That is because talking about popular culture implies disregarding those other cultures that are considered unpopular.

In view of the foregoing realities, Storey (2001) avers that 'to study popular culture, the conceptual difficulty has to be examined and dealt with first' (p. 1). Given the difficulty or the contemptuous consideration of other cultures, Storey (2001) emphasises that 'popular culture is in effect an empty conceptual category that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the

context of use' (p. 1). This paper sustains the views held by Bennett (1998) and Storey (2001) above. In what follows hereafter, this paper shall make a brief analysis of culture in relation to the misleading notion of popular culture. The analysis shall also present an expository brief on several theories that uphold popular culture and that promotes cultural otherness among cultures of the globe, which should not be.

Theoretical Grounding
Stuart Hall, a founding father of cultural studies and a prolific theorist of popular culture, managed to bridge the traditional divide between 'high culture' and 'popular culture' (Hall, 1997a, p. 2). He asserts that "'high culture' is 'the sum of the great ideas as represented in the classical works of literature, painting, music and philosophy" (Hall, 1997a, p. 2), while "'popular culture' refers to 'the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of ordinary people" (Hall, 1997a, p. 2). From his views, it can be understood that the notion of 'popular culture' only suits the classification of phenomenal endeavours, such as those mentioned by Stuart Hall. This assertion is given credence to Storey (2001), who rightly notes, 'the most common division is between the study of texts (popular fiction, television, pop music, etc.) and lived cultures or cultural practices (seaside holidays, youth subcultures, the celebration of Christmas, etc.)' (p. 15).

Nevertheless, mentioning 'lived cultures or cultural practices', Storey (2001) implicitly stretches beyond phenomenal reference to human actors in the so-called popular culture world. Frow (1995) holds that "there is no longer a stable hierarchy of value (even an inverted one) running from 'high' to 'low' culture" (p. 1). As such, there is no need for cultural hierarchy of putting up a dichotomy – popular (high) culture versus unpopular (low) culture. Thus, his analysis questions any such distinction between 'high' and 'popular' culture (De Gregorio-Godeo & Ramón-Torrijos, 2017, p. 5). According to De Gregorio-Godeo & Ramón-Torrijos (2017, p. 5),

> In the context of such debates on the high-and-low culture continuum, we may conclude that there seems to be no doubt that the popular has come to acquire a most significant political dimension, which makes it such an essential category within current cultural studies and its mapping of cultures.

This study argues that the idea of popular culture, both in concept and practice, is merely an abstract reality that had been produced and disseminated and instituted by some egoistic elite of several Western societies, in their efforts to put both themselves and their culture(s) above others. They disregarded the evils of otherness. It is against the backdrop of the matters arising from the concept and the practice of popular culture that many theorists of popular culture emerged. Their emergence was necessitated by the need to theorise the subject matter of popular culture, with a view to making clarifications and proffering intellectual solutions to the issues at stake.

In what captures the stance of this study that some egoistic elite are the creators of the so-called popular culture, which does not exist in reality, Fiske (1989a) points out that "the powerful construct 'places' where they can exercise their power— cities, shopping malls, schools, workplaces and houses, to name only some of the material ones" (pp. 32-33). These expressions unveil some realities about popular culture. Fiske (1989a) goes on to note that "the weak make the places temporarily theirs, as they move through them, occupying for as long as they need or have to" (p. 33). According to Fiske (1989a), 'a place is where strategy operates' (p. 32-33). Again, these ideas are apt and factual. It is in view of the falseness of the notion of popular culture that it has been brought under critical examination and intense criticism in contemporary times, following the emergence of cultural studies. Theories of popular culture are deeply concerned with the criticism of the notion of popular culture, which negates culture in its wholesomeness.

The Concept of Culture
In discussing popular culture, it is imperative to define the concept of culture. The uneasiness of defining culture most appropriately is what had prompted Eagleton (2000, p. 1) to say that 'culture' is one of the two or three most complex words in the English language.' Although culture is variously

defined, the many definitions point to the most popular definition, which has it that culture is the total way of life of a people (Evwierhoma, 2007; Anyaegbunam, 2005; Allimi, 2005). Culture is affirmed to be indeed the totality of a people's way of life within a given period of time (Mbah, 2018; Robert et al., 2016; Evwierhoma, 2007). It includes the way people eat, worship, interact, and perform socio-economic, political, educational and diverse activities within such a society (Evwierhoma, 2007). It determines and affects a society's systems, such as government, economy, technology, enterprises, arts (e.g. music, literature, sculpture, etc.), religion, customs and artefacts (all material objects) (Evwierhoma, 2007; Robert et al., 2016). Capturing the aforementioned in a simple single sentence, Mbah (2018) says that culture refers to the values, norms, and beliefs of a society.

For Irono (2005), culture is the acquired knowledge that people in their environment use to interpret their world and generate social behaviour. Clearly, this definition highlights why some people feel that their cultures are popular and more prestigious than those of the other people. Contextual interpretation of all that constitutes culture is a ground for the notion of popular culture, which in subjective in all regards of such considerations. Irono (2005) agrees that culture is also a system of knowledge of behaviour, actions and other ways of living among a people, which differ considerably from those of the other peoples. Irono (2005) mentions that the differences are why Americans and Indians differ in their values, laws, behavioural patterns, and ways of eating and cooking, dressing, and interpreting realities and substances of existence. That is, culture is dynamic.

Hall (1997a, p. 2) has defined culture as 'whatever is distinctive about the 'way of life' of a people, community, nation, or social group.' This definition,' he notes, 'has become known as the 'anthropological' definition of culture' (Hall, 1997a, p. 2). He adds that "alternatively, the word can be used to describe the 'shared values' of a group or of society, which is like the 'anthropological' definition, only with a more sociological emphasis" (Hall, 1997a, p. 2). It should be noted from the above that his emphasis on the importance of 'ways of life' and 'shared values' (Hall, 1997a, p. 2) make it clear that the notion of 'popular' has no realistic place in cultural studies. He strongly emphasises the idea of culture as an exchange of meanings among individuals, which has little or nothing to do with being popular or unpopular. By implication, the notion of popular is an indication of subjective generation of biased meanings concerning cultures by individuals belonging to the cultures considered popular.

Ezeanyika (1999) has defined culture as 'what includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society' (p. 32). By this definition of culture, one still realises that the idea of popular is not imbedded in culture. The phenomena emphasised by the definition are knowledge, belief, customs, traditions, skills and society. It follows that the cores of culture are both society specific and general respectively, as in values, norms, customs, traditions, worldviews, ethics, aesthetics, laws, ethics, morality, religion, language, government, etc. It is in view of the foregoing that Emenanjo (2000) has defined culture as the totality of the ways of life, evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which 'give order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and models of organisation' (p. 5). He says that 'culture offers people a configuration of meanings and behavioural norm' in ways that influence or regulate their perception of reality and identity (Emenanjo, 2000, p. 5).

Chartier (1988) has defined culture as 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life' (p. 102). This definition reflects those of the above noted scholars. It does not have any place for popular versus unpopular. It highlights the place of language in creating notions, such as 'popular culture', in the course of expressing cultural conceptions, internalised knowledge and symbolisms. These are said to be 'inherited' (Chartier, 1988, p. 102). It follows that the notion of popular is inherited socially, communicatively and contextually, but not naturally or biologically. That is, the members of the so-called popular cultures are socialised to believe and share the subjective thought or stance that their cultures are popular, while the others are unpopular. Thus, the feeling that the popular ones are superior to the perceived unpopular cultures follows up sustainably.

Culture, beyond Concept to Practice
The embodiments of culture, which all definitions of culture capture, both material and non-material, are learnt by both individuals and groups through the process called socialisation. Socialisation is the process by which children and adult learn from others, which starts from early days of life and continues all throughout life unless affected or cut short by natural or artificial (human) forces like mental or physical handicap, epidemics, death or so (Robert & Dibie, 2015). Socialisation refers to the process in which people learn skills, values, knowledge, motives and roles (cultures) of the groups to which they live (Afen-Akpaida, 2008). As Afen-Akpaida (2008) rightly observes, 'socialisation is a society's principal mechanisms for influencing the development of character and behaviours and preparing the humans to function in social life' (p. 52).
Besides, culture is learnt rather than inherited biologically. Children learn their culture through observations and interaction with the environment (Afen-Akpaida, 2008). In doing these, they consistently observe what their culture considers right and wrong (Afen-Akpaida, 2008). Humans learn through direct experience (situational learning), observation (social learning), and symbols (symbolic learning). For cultural anthropologists, cultural items, ranging from dress to technology, sexual practices, dietary habits, and so on, are enormously diverse. The reason for this situation is that the culture of one group differs from that of another, based on different values, beliefs, norms, and other characteristics. Socialisation is culturally relative in that different peoples (i.e. cultures or peoples of different cultures) differ in their established ways of socialisation. This process of learning takes effect early in life, as a child and an adolescent (Afen-Akpaida, 2008).

The second phase stems from the increasing complexity of society with its corresponding increase in varied roles and responsibilities, which one experiences throughout life time (Arnett, 1995, Afen-Akpaida, 2008). Socialisation is carried out or made manifest by several agents. The agents of socialisation are grouped into five basic categories by legions of scholars, viz: the family, the school, peer groups, the mass media, and religion (Arnett, 1995; Coates & Wagenaar, 1999; Afen-Akpaida, 2008; Onoguere & Osa-Edo, 2008; Onyeachu, 2008; Kanu, 2006). As Afen-Akpaida (2008) has noted, there are seven types of socialisation viz: primary, secondary, anticipatory, developmental, and reverse socialisation, socialisation and self and family interaction and parenting issues.

The Concept of Popular Culture
The term 'popular culture' is said to refer broadly to qualitative and quantitative aesthetic or life practices (Arnold, 1963; Olick, 2014). It is concept in cultural studies and discourses that point at certain cultures to be above or more prominent to the others. It is a conceptual connotation for otherness in all that concerns culture. Barker (2003) has described popular culture as 'an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of enquiry that explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning' (p. 437). This point highlights how the notion of popular culture came about. As Olick (2014) points out, theorists have consistently used the concept of 'popular culture' to specifically designate a particular form of common culture emerging only in the contemporary era. In this sense, popular culture is tech-based and mass-produced and -consumed, unlike folk culture and high cultures.
As Olick (2014) notes, 'Pop Art blurred in the 1960's and demolished distinctions between high and low, exalted and ordinary, pure and prosaic' (p. 4). It is observed that 'supportive theorists of this movement dismissed the possibility of distinguishing between highbrow and lowbrow, attacking those who maintain such distinctions as elitist' (Olick, 2014, p. 4). As such, it is quite clear that the concept of popular culture is a subjective label for cultural differentiation and superiority tendency and disposition. The rejection of popular and unpopular demarcations or categories later led to a sustained movement against the notion and practices of popular culture in American universities and spread across to those of most other parts of the world. The paper does not only fault but rejects the notion of popular culture, for all cultures are equal and remain neither superior nor inferior to one another.

Beyond the Concept of Popular Culture
The symbolic production and exploration of meanings through signification of practices constituting culture are ways of understanding the notion of popular culture beyond conceptual conception of it. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall conceives representation as being 'an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture' (Hall, 1997b, p. 15). He

adds that 'it does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things' (Hall, 1997b, p. 15). For de Gregorio-Godeo and Ramón-Torrijos (2017), the signification is possible with 'image and visuals being indeed a major medium of cultural representations' (p. 8).

Basically, this paper argues that popular culture transits from concept to practice as some cultures in modern and post-modern times unceasingly and uncontrollably exert untold influence on other cultures that they have subdued overtime as a result of the mis/deeds of their elites. From concept to practice, the notion of popular culture displays otherness in forms of superiority, subjugation and demarcation. The resistance to the so-called popular cultures results in culture clash or conflict, as the 'popular' and the 'unpopular' remain in serious conflicting contestation. Ordinarily, people resist the implied messages of mass-produced culture through continuous selection and interpretation. The emergent new media culture is a form of popular culture, which remains resisted by some people(s).

The digitalised and globalised contemporary society is unceasingly accentuating culture imperialism, as cultures of the most industrialised nations of the world dominate and silence those of the developing nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Uche, 1988). This situation is affirmed to be traceable to industrial revolution, colonialism, neo-colonialism, the era of the development of industrial-military complexes and post-industrialism, among other historical factors (Uche, 1987 & 1988). To that end, basic issues of cultural identity and mass communication have been explained with the various rationales offered by cultural triangulation model (Uche, 1987), cultural synchronisation (Hamelink, 1984), and theoretical framework on cultural context for the international study of youth and music formation and interaction (Robinson, 1986).

It is observed that 'identity construction in visual culture is a complex and ongoing process' (Stokes & Price, 2017, p. 162). Cultural identity is a part of a person's identity or their self-conception, which directly concerns nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. This is to say that cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual members of a group and of the group to which the individuals belong or share same cultural embodiments (Nwode, 2022). Be it as it may, as Olick (2014) notes, 'distinctions among kinds of culture are matters of social relations, not intrinsic aspects of the works themselves' (p. 4).

Again, in the realm of culture, threatened elites developed qualitative distinctions to dramatise and defend their exalted status (Olick, 2014). They thereby created the notion of popular culture for the superiority and power using language. They used their intellectual and aesthetic cultivation or creation to consistently show off. As Olick (2014) argues, old elites engaged in different processes of cultural entrepreneurship, founding art museums and symphony societies in which to entrench their cultural values in ways that defend their social status. In the process of doing so, they created conditions for the autonomy of high cultural values, which even led to the initiatives of educating the masses on the lines of their constructions. In practice, the elitist arrangements further led to the separation of high art from popular culture, and elites gained even more status from their association with the arts (Olick, 2014). That is because the criteria of excellence got objectified in purportedly impartial institutions (Olick, 2014).

The same processes were in place and at work in the political sphere of society. Politics has a bearing to and situates in culture. For example, then through the French Revolution, aristocratic elites articulated a political theory to shore up their declining fortunes. They institute a debased democracy (i.e. the system of the rule of the people), which was nothing more than merely submitting to an undifferentiated and unknowing mob. The elites tactically emptied and incapacitated the masses and put up laws and systems that were aimed at exonerating themselves while indicting or victimising the masses. In other words, laws were made to protect the interest of the elites, the same people who pretend to be protecting the interests of the masses. Stability and orderliness got threatened with events as well as nature of the things put in place. Olick (2014) points out that the endangered masses were made gullible and susceptible to demagogic elitist manipulation, particularly through the new media.

Conclusion

This paper has concisely discussed popular culture. The discussion involves looking at concept, practices, theoretical postulations about and issues of popular culture. To offer an insight to the meaning or conceptual concern of popular culture, the study also discusses the concept of culture along with the process of acquiring culture in society. The study shows in its arguments and those of some other writers that popular culture is misleading and discriminatory in concept and practice. It is an elitist formation or framework meant to express and show power, language politics, hegemonic and self-exalted construction for class differentiation. In fact, popular culture is not just a form of otherness in concept and practice but also a sustained label for culture and ideological hegemonies.On the whole, this study submits that realistically, popular culture is an abstract culture in the mental faculty of the elite involved in perceiving and showing that there is a popular culture that supersedes 'others' (i.e., other cultures) that are considered unpopular by the dubiously discriminating elitists and their followers. Nevertheless, beyond the elitist constructed popular culture is that brought to place by globalisation and new and old media, which is an emergent culture that has no specific people as its owners. In other words, media and technology based popular culture is the culture of no meaning people. Therefore, the masses should be sensitised and reoriented against the false teachings of proponents and followers or defenders of the notion of popular culture.

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