

## Culture, Personality and Society

---

By

DR. P. B. BADEY

*Institute of Foundation Studies,  
Rivers State University of Science and Technology,  
Port Harcourt, Rivers State  
Nigeria*

### **Abstract**

*Culture, personality and society are inseparable. One cannot be divorced from the other. Indeed it is this intrinsically interwoven relationship that explains the significance of Anthropology as a field of study. This paper examines this relationship and explores how they pattern the behavioural phenomena of man and the socialization process. It further examines the place of habituation as an educating process and concludes that personality is a structured feature of society.*

### **Introduction**

Anthropology has two sorts of significance. On the one hand, it collects, classifies and analyses knowledge about human beings, how they live, and what they make. On the other hand, it questions some of the most basic ideas of the contemporary world, brings comparative insights to bear on them and makes us more aware of what we are by confronting us with what we are not. As Kluckhohn (1949), once put it, it would scarcely be a fish that discovered the existence of water. In other words, de Tocqueville insights into America could never have been made by a home-grown observer.

It is the purpose of anthropology, as well as all the rest of the humanities and social sciences, to make us aware of ourselves and our society and, thus, transform our self-awareness into knowledge and security. It is the method of social anthropology to reveal folk systems of understanding by the creation of analytical systems of understanding.

Anthropology is like history or science, an attitude that consists in developing a stereophopic view of human activities and human ideas by means of concepts that have been discovered in the processes of translating key organizing ideas from one cultural idiom into the language of another culture, usually your own thus, making these ideas in some degree, available to all. Anthropological theories, like the theories of physical

scientist, or indeed like the interpretation of historians, may go over board, but the anthropological attitude, like the scientific attitude of which it is a model is here to stay. (Jaja 2008).

### **Culture, Personality and Society**

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, a significant achievement was the ability to distinguish culture from race and from language. This concept had been inherited from the pool of Western civilization and the unabated repetition of mixtures of linguistic, biological, and behavioural characteristics.

Confusion still exists in the interpretations and understanding of culture, personality, and society. Personality is being used even by renowned scientists to give a false genetic basis to cultural factors (Muller, 1962). Many social scientists still compound the confusion by saying that since culture and society cannot be “objectively” separated into two categories, they are the same thing.

Observations show that the problem of distinguishing race, language and culture is the same thing as the problem of distinguishing culture, personality, and society. The two problems can be solved only by a direction of the criteria used for a classification. It should be clear that race is a summary of biophysical phenomena; culture itself a summary of behavioural phenomena and a summary of specific patterns of behavioural phenomena. The three concepts deal with different characteristics or the activities of people and since all people have manifold characteristics, then race, language and culture, may vary interestingly and independently of authors. Different notes of association of the three are scientifically explored. Personality, culture, and society have been difficult to differentiate since, each of them deals with a different aspect of the same thing.

It should be noted that the problem is not the human individual but rather, a more difficult entity: social behaviour which demands at least, how human beings relate to one another and so stand at the basis of society. Further, it demands common knowledge; and mutual expectation of a common culture is essential. Social behaviour also demands people who can interact with some degree of dependability and as seen from the stand point of such individual, is one aspect of personality.

People, as a matter of fact, will be “Socialized” and “acculturated” to use two jargon for “taught the manners and technology”. To succeed in bringing about this situation, the child participates in social relationship and learns techniques and ideas. The children themselves become the medium or idiom in which both personality and social relationships are expressed. They are the culture.

---

*Culture, Personality and Society* - Dr. P. B. Badey

---

### **The Inter-relations of the Concepts**

The point is that culture, society and personality are not empirically separable from each other, so that in social relationships, we must have culture as a pointer with which to express them, and we must have personalities that handle the culture and play the roles in the social relationships. No matter with which we begin, the other two are necessary dimensions. Only analytically can a separation be made. Let us take electricity as an example of what we can use to compare culture and personality. If we check the dictionary, we will see that electricity is very difficult to define – so indeed is the flow of social and cultural reality. In order to define electricity, to measure it, and hence to control it, some scales which must be established, must be known. It was necessary to create a concept like “volt” which has, by itself, no meaning. The interesting thing is that “volt”, by itself, has no meaning at all excepting that it is brought forward with other concepts like Ampere. Before a volt has meaning, the corresponding notions of Ohm and ampere must be brought forward.

A volt of electricity measures force. An Ohm measures resistance. An ampere measures current. A volt then, is the electromotive force necessary to create one ampere of current when steadily applied to a conductor with a resistance of the Ohm.

The social situation can be seen in analogy to the electrical situation. Social reality, social events – exist. Social reality flows on in time (itself a cultural idea), it is difficult to define. If we look at situation we must create artificial units. Out of this social flux we must separate an analytical unit called a “Social relationship” a social relationship is played out between two persons in a fence but certainly not between two total persons.

It is well to factor the person by these relationships and to call each factor a “role”, from this, we can say that a relationship exists between two roles and that each social person made up of many roles reentering in a single individual. A social relationship takes place in a medium of “culture”. It is good to remember that the totality of the medium is the culture. We should note that social relationships are the “current” of social reality, culture is its “force” and personality is the “resistance”. As in the case of electricity, it is possible to add still new view point. From the above it is necessary for us to note that culture, social relationships, and personality must be inter defined. Just as a saying goes that ‘there are different ways of killing a rat’, so there are different ways of looking at the same thing.

### **Habituation and Education**

In every culture and in every civilization, stingy people in terms of holding back what should help education to develop, hide the information that would have brought a positive change. Information like babies must learn to develop his or her potential. They can grasp (a new born baby can support its own weight by its grasp), but probably have to learn to utilize the capacity. They have to be taught to suck for sometimes, learning takes a minute or two but for others, as much as a day or two. Some children are brighter than others and the difference begins to show very early in

life. It is one of the characteristics of human beings that even their children remain helpless for a very long period.

Horses can walk and run a few hours after birth. Goats can run just after three days. Apes mature in about a third of the time it takes human beings to mature. And even elephants whose period of gestation is almost twice that of human beings and whose life span is only a little shorter, are self sufficient within about three years. Under animal conditions, the human being requires ten or twelve years to become self-sufficient; under most conditions of culture some fifteen years or so; especially under our own system.

Human beings whether they are a few days old, a few years old, or decades old, have many needs because of the mere fact that they are animals. Some of these needs if left unfulfilled will lead to the death of the animal. They must be fed, they must have a certain environmental temperature and they need, at least, a certain animal contact with others. If human beings are left without human contact, they die even if their other needs are well attended to (Spitz 1949).

Babies, being helpless, have their needs fulfilled for them. In the course of the fulfillment of these needs, the way in which the need is fulfilled comes to be almost as important as the fact of fulfillment. Children grow and their needs expand but by the time they attempt to fulfill these needs by themselves, they have become adults and their habits are well established. Babies change several times during maturation but some times, the need to change and the capacity to change are developed into habits. The change means that it is possible to change habits without which any sort of “progress” or social change would be quite impossible. It should be noted that the habits that are acquired by youngsters are part of the culture in accordance with which they are brought up. Strictly, in one sense, the habits are the culture, if all the habits of all the people were changed, the culture would have changed.

There are however, two ways in which culture can be “internalized”. One is by habituation and the other by purposeful education. In Nigeria, children are taught to eat with clean hands where as their counterparts in the Western World are taught to use fork (a most clumsy instrument until you have mastered it); (Jaja 1996) but they are not thought food preferences in the same purposeful way (although they may be taught, very purposefully indeed, what not to eat).

In habituation, human beings learn those aspects of culture that are not regarded in the culture as specifically learnable techniques. In Education they are taught – specifically learnable techniques. Education is usually defined as the directed learning processes, either formally or informally carried out. The purpose here is not to make pedantic distinction between these two aspects of education. It is merely to point out that human beings learn a great deal more than is specifically taught. People pick up habits, without questioning them, because that’s the way it is done (Jaja, 2008).

Both of these processes – habituation and education make it possible to live in the society in which we are born or in which we find ourselves. This means that man’s primary needs are provided by those whose neglect would cause his death when he is habituated and educated. The habituation and education themselves set up secondary set of needs for the primary needs to be cared for in certain ways.

### **Habituation and Educating Agents**

Education may be carried on by any number of agencies. These agencies range from family to community.

The Family: This is probably the most important educating agency to every society. In some societies, part of the job is taken over by professionals when the child is about six years old. Even in societies that lack any sort of formal schooling, the family may be assisted by other elements of the society, when the child reaches about this age. Some times, children are sent to their grandparents because grandparents are thought for one reason or another to be the best formal instructors during certain periods of a child’s life (Jaja 1996). In other societies, a child goes to his father’s sister because it is thought that the parents themselves may be fond of the child as to be too/overly indulgent to insist on adequate training for coping with the challenges of life and society. Some societies formalize age associations that organize children to teach younger children.

Lastly, the community, as a whole may act as a habituating and educating agency simply by withholding its approval from people who do not behave “properly” or by rewarding behaviour that is esteemed. The community may be to its members what Pavlov was to his dogs. Let me explain this further. Pavlor was an individual that trained dogs. Initially the dogs were wild and unruly but over a period of 6 months they loved to obey him, even to join Pavlor in drinking beer. The dogs became accustomed to the time for walks, eating and beer drinking. At a point when Pavlor came late for the beer drinking, the dogs stole beer from another person. In the end the individual learns to do what the community expects and even to like it, just as one of Pavlor’s dogs stole a beer that belonged to a different master.

### **Culture as the Idiom of Personality**

Kluchohu and Murray (1949:35) once wrote that ‘every man is in certain respects like all other man, like some other men, and like no other man’. This mens that some determinants of personality are universal; every person is born, learns to use his body for movement, explores his environment, and learns to protect himself. Every person experiences hunger and sexual desires. Also, all men must adjust to the condition of being social animals which means learning to live in groups; they must do so in terms of some culture or other and hence, have to learn to gratify at least minimally, the expectations of others. All persons experience illness.

Other similarities are more limited. All of us are, in some ways, like some men who are part of our social and cultural environment and different from those in other environments men living in different societies, by means of different cultures. Finally, there are unique qualities in every personality. The concept unique qualities are of course, dependent on physical nature or social conditioning.

Children, when they are born, are without culture and hence are without personality and almost without social relationships. The very fact of birth, maybe described as the termination of a biophysical relationship and in the usual course of events, its replacement with a social relationship. Social relationship then, expands with maturation; new culture is demanded in which to respond to other people so that the relationships are possible. The acquisition of that culture is important to the growth of the personality. Culture as it is acquired with the growth of personality becomes the medium of that personality. You cannot swim without water, because water is the medium of swimming; you cannot paint a picture without paint, since the paint is the medium for expressing the message of the picture. We can now see that the difference between culture and personality is the same as the difference between the medium and the content of picture. They are at one level the same thing. At another level, they are distinct because they have been viewed with completely different purposes and techniques.

### **Basic Responsibility and Modal Responsibility**

The experiences shared by all men and the aspects of the personality shared by all men are best brought out by comparison of the behaviour of men to the behaviour of other animals. As universals, they are of minimal interest to anthropologies (although some anthropologists would disagree with this statement because they are primarily interested in the fact that in some regards, men are the same the world over). On the other hand, the eccentric elements are also of little interest to anthropologists because anthropologists deal in cultural generalizations that can be made about groups of people.

The primary field of the anthropologists interest in personality concerns that part of the personality men share with other men of their own culture, but which they do not share with all other men. The yardstick is that certain ways of habituation and education are associated with certain features of personality.

The type of groups in which children are taught their culture leaves an indefinable mark upon them. Equally, the basic values of the subject matters leave an equally permanent mark. The framework of a house can be seen in the finished building, if you know how to look for it. In the same way, the techniques and ideas that children learn have a lasting effect on the sort of adults they become.

Each set of cultural norms and social institutions produce in men and women a characteristic type (or types) of personality structure. The sort of their personalities that

is shared by a large proportion of the people of a single society is usually called the “Basic personality”. Basic personality is ‘a structure of articulated personality characteristics and processes attributed, non-statically to almost all members of some culturally, bonded population’ (Wallace, 1966:106). The emphasis is that basic personality has been placed on the population, and that it is “a structure”, with “characteristic and processes” always correlated with one another. Some anthropologists have called each structure a pattern.

The term “Modal personality” is also used for the same general phenomenon but is arrived at in a different way. It is usually handled statically with the various characteristics of the structure elicited by personality.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the concept culture, noting the varied definition given by anthropologists. Attempt has also been made to explore the impact of culture, personality and habitation, noting that culture personality and society cannot be separated from each other. Indeed all three must be merged together to holistically make meaning.

Based on the discussion above, it is hoped that the promotion and substance of Nigerian culture intensified by the family, school and other relevant bodies. Moreover, cultural groups in Nigeria and any society for that matter should produce and distribute books, films audiotapes, videotapes and pictures that would educate children on the norms and help mould their personality and by extension society.

### **References**

- Beathe, J. (1964). *Other cultures*. London: Cohen and West.
- Ichuckho I. & Murray (1949). *Personality and culture*. Sussex, England.
- Jaja, J. M. (1996). The cultural historian and the role of inculcation of Nigerian culture in school children *Journal of technical and science education* (5) 1 & 2.
- Jaja, J. M. (2001). Libation: Its cultural value in Opobo in the Eastern Niger Delta of Nigeria. *Ogele Journal of social sciences and humanities* 1, 7 and 9 pp. 96 – 104.
- Jaja, J.M. (2009). Cultural dynamics and globalization in multi-ethnic Nigeria. *European journal of scientific research* (5(4) p. 50 – 54.
- Rosamund Billington, et al. (1991). *Culture and society*. Publish British Sociological Association.
- Spitz J. (1949). *Confusion and concern: The social the in social science*. Chicago Inc.
- Wallace J. (1966). *Concept analysis*. Melborne New York.