

The Science of Culture: Implications for Social Science Inquiries into Contemporary African Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses culture as a unit of analysis within social science inquiry, and its more systematic treatment as a dynamic, idiosyncratic model for human development; one whose logical arrangement of interpretative “deep structural” cosmological and ontological axioms of existence for collective organization and functioning configures the scope and nature of overt social behaviors and praxes (including symbols, language, customs) and informs a general plan for living that guides individual behavior and group praxes. This behavioral approach allows for a richer elaboration of culture by clarifying its cosmological, ontological, and psychological foundations and influences on its nature and role in the formation, organization and functioning of human aggregates. In addition, it offers an examination of the theoretical implications for social stability of antithetical deep structural axioms that fragments an erstwhile teleological social existence into an assortment of disjointed cultural symbols and rituals ripe for commodification. And, through it, the contemporary phenomenon of globalization -- and the neoclassical economic paradigm that grounds it -- is found to engender an idiosyncratic, market-based model of reality and for living that is neither a commonly shared human conceptualization nor universally desired pursuit.

Key words: culture, cultural studies, African studies, traditional African culture, African praxes

La ciencia de la cultura: implicaciones para las investigaciones de las Ciencias Sociales en el fenómeno africano contemporáneo

RESUMEN

Este artículo discute la cultura como una unidad de análisis dentro de la investigación en las ciencias sociales y su tratamiento más sistemático como un modelo dinámico e idiosincrático para el desarrollo humano, modelo cuya disposición lógica de axiomas interpretativos de “estructuras profundas” cosmológicas y ontológicas (axiomas de existencia para la organización colectiva y su funcionamiento) configura el objetivo y la naturaleza de conductas y praxis sociales abiertas (incluyendo símbolos, lengua, costumbres) e informa un plan general de vida que guía el comportamiento individual y las prácticas colectivas. Este enfoque conductista permite una rica elaboración de la cultura aclarando sus fundamentos cosmológicos, ontológicos y psicológicos, y las influencias en su naturaleza y papel en la formación, organización y funcionamiento de conglomerados humanos. Además, ofrece un examen de las implicaciones teóricas para la estabilidad social en axiomas antitéticos de estructura profunda, los cuales fragmentan una previa existencia social teleológica dentro de un arreglo de símbolos y rituales sociales fragmentarios lista para la cosificación. Y, a través de ello, se propone cómo el fenómeno contemporáneo de la globalización —y el paradigma económico neoclásico que lo sustenta— engendra un modelo de la realidad y del vivir idiosincrático basado en lo económico, modelo que no es ni una conceptualización humana comúnmente compartida, ni un objetivo universal deseado.

Palabras clave: la cultura, los estudios culturales, estudios africanos, praxis africanos

“[I]t seems that we are at last coming to the realization that without some account of the normative principles, some fundamental consideration of value norms and ultimates, no philosophical system can hope to differentiate itself from descriptive science or present a functional, interpretative version of human experience.” -- Alain Locke, *Value and Imperative*

Introduction

The world has become infinitesimally small. Widespread changes in industrial-era political and economic relationships have deepened a global exigency for societal stability through economic restructuring and democratic reforms. However, such post-industrial strategies have increasingly heightened social volatility within increasingly porous national boundaries and the endemic ethnic and religious communities that they circumscribe. The frequency and intensity of conflicts over, competing perspectives on governance and civic engagement, on approaches to processes of democratization, and on allocations of scarce socioeconomic resources want for a more systematic understanding of the relationship between culture, society and its institutions.

Broadly defined, culture, as the basis for human aggregation, encompasses the totality of learned values, norms, knowledge, artifacts, language and symbols that are constantly communicated among an aggregate of people who share

a common way of life. It shapes and structures the individual and aggregate patterns of interaction that predicate the overall organization and functioning of a human aggregation, otherwise termed a society. The *meaning* of culture ranges from an idealist perspective emphasizing a noumenal “spirit” informing distinct ways of life, to a materialist perspective that is distinctively discernible social processes (Williams, 1982). Similarly, the *sense* of culture as the active cultivation of the mind ranges from a “developed” state of mind, to processes of intellectual development and the means for such processes (e.g., the arts). Griswold (1994) notes that this understanding of the meaning and sense of culture results from an 18th century humanities approach that privileges an opposition between culture and civilization, and a 19th century social science behaviorist approach that emphasizes a harmony between culture and civilization.

It is through this obsolete 19th century theoretical framework that social science attempts to understand contemporary social problems and their root in an irregular array of accumulated and organized symbols that function to influence both individual and group behaviors. This behaviorist approach places significance on the usefulness of symbols and their embedded meanings that shape and influence behavioral patterns to indicate change and stability in group behavior. Historical group interaction and change endow symbols with “*meanings*,” which

are social to the extent that they configure patterns of interaction and reflect collectively shared representations that can be organized on the basis of the various social forms that they embody. The various social forms that “*meanings*” can come to embody include values, norms, knowledge, artifacts, and language, all of which are regarded as elements of culture. Thus, it is through its various social forms that culture imposes historically accumulated and rationally ordered meaning upon discrete experiences of living, and establishes a constant orientation within a context of temporally sequenced, yet geographically diverse social environments.¹

The fact that culture does exist and is associated with behavior, identity and group interaction validates the usefulness of symbols and their embedded meanings to signify change and stability. However, the problem with the behaviorist approach is its inability to move our understanding of culture’s significance to society across so broad a range of group functions unfettered by its narrow focus on ordering behavior by degree and kind. This inability, produced by a heavy reliance on analogy and metaphor to merely indicate geography, classify fetishes, or catalog habituation, befuddles all attempts to understand the socio-behavioral and

¹ Geertz (1973) described culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 89).

psycho-emotional significance of the active and *preeminent* role that culture plays in *determining* processes of behavior, identity and group interaction. So beyond being endowed with significant meaning, little is known about why cultural objects are indeed “cultural”. Consequently, the noble purpose of human aggregation is reduced to the truck and barter of accumulated symbols that degree, kind, and temporality envalue, but empties of their historical conscience, meaning, and collective personality.

This article intends a more systematic presentation of culture, which it broadly defines as a dynamic, idiosyncratic model for human development; one whose logical arrangement of interpretative “deep structural” cosmological and ontological axioms of existence for collective organization and functioning configures the scope and nature of overt social behaviors and praxes (including symbols, language, customs) and informs a general plan for living that guides individual behavior and group praxes. This treatment of culture allows for a richer elaboration of it by clarifying its theological, philosophical and scientific foundations and influences on its nature and role in the formation, organization and functioning of human aggregates. In addition, it offers a theoretical examination of the implications for social stability of antithetical deep structural axioms that disintegrate the teleology of indigenous existence into meaningless cultural symbols and rituals ripe for commodification. And, through it,

the contemporary phenomenon of globalization -- and the neoclassical paradigm that grounds it -- is found to engender an idiosyncratic, market-based *model of reality and for living* that are neither commonly shared human conceptualizations nor desired pursuits.

Emergent Behavioralism

Contemporary social science treatments of culture as an analytical construct presents several problems of conceptualization that are readily apparent in the multiplicity of definitions for it. Anthropologically, culture is that complex whole of capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871). As an ascriptive basis for a variety of civilizational forms, culture becomes organized behavior learned from a social group either through training or by imitation (Jackson, 1993, p. 170); the learned repertoire of every transmissible thought and action (Benton, 1982). A more psychological treatment models culture as patterned meanings and conceptions historically transmitted and expressed through symbols that communicate, develop and perpetuate knowledge about and attitudes toward life (Geertz, 1973), as a social product formed through externalization, objectification, and internalization (Berger, 1969), or simply as “the expressive side of human life” (Griswold, 1994). Conceptualizations of culture shaped by more praxeological considerations depict it as shared understandings that people employ to coordinate their activities (Becker, 1986).

Williams (1982) points out that culture ranges conceptually from an emphasis on a noumenal “spirit” informing distinct ways of life, to distinctly discernible social processes. The sense of culture as the active cultivation of the mind similarly ranges from a “developed” state of mind to processes of intellectual development and the means for such processes (e.g., the arts). For Williams, a contemporary notion of culture references the means of intellectual development that are contradistinct their anthropological and extended sociological interpretations as a total way of life. Presumably, this contemporary understanding of culture results from the convergence of an 18th century philosophical focus on “informing spirit” that is most apparent in specific cultural activities (e.g., rituals), and a later 19th century behavioralist focus on a total social order consisting primarily of integrated social activities. Williams identifies these coincident perspectives of culture as idealist and materialist respectively. Griswold (1994) similarly notes this distinction, stating that this contemporary understanding of the meaning and sense of culture results from an 18th century humanities approach that privileges an opposition between culture and civilization, and a 19th century social science behavioralist approach that emphasizes a more congruous relationship between the two.²

² Interestingly enough, the approach by each to culture differs only inasmuch as there are socially corroborating distinctions between culture as cosmogony (worldview) and culture as the formation, organization and production of signifying systems.

As analytical units, culture and society originate in an 18th century intellectual curiosity over the structure and functioning of human aggregations and their post-mediaeval transformations. In stark contrast to its contemporary treatment, culture evidenced no clear conceptualization by early social scientists beyond intimations of necessarily intricate ligatures that bind individuals to a social aggregate.³ Culture would elude formal discovery until its emergence from 19th century inquiries into historical and behavioral determinants of human configurations and their influence on the disintegration and eventual collapse of political and subsistence modalities endemic to mediaeval Europe. With the advent of mercantilism, later to mature into industrial capitalism, and neoteric perceptions of history as a human construction, inquiry into the determinants of societal growth and change held as its principal question the fate of “modern” society, its diversification as crucial for comprehension, moral and utilitarian objectives as key determinants of agency, and manifold analytical perspectives as essential for consolidating universal laws and particularistic investigations.⁴ Historical differentials in societal configuration and functioning would further frame perfunctory searches of human aggregations for superintendent

principles of change, stability and growth.⁵ While those impetuses responsible for mediaeval social transitions are certainly historical considerations of import, the fact that these transitions stemmed from extensive reevaluations of heretofore inviolate cosmological and ontological notions that buttressed the seemingly auto-destructive nature of human aggregations appears the more significant consideration. Because human aggregations historically tend toward dissolution and collapse as its internal dynamics steer it away from the Platonic ideal, are there immutable natural laws to which they inhere that predispose this historical characteristic? Is this historical characteristic merely the malevolent outcome of human agency subject to natural laws? How might knowledge of superintendent societal laws and their functioning be acquired, and what insights can it lend to obviating the historically inevitable? Eighteenth and nineteenth century pursuits of answers to these questions shaped and hewed out philosophical and theoretical frameworks that oriented and conditioned systematic explorations into societal dynamics and the extirpation of principles presumed to govern them.

From a post-feudal shift in cosmogony (worldview) away from mediaeval theo-

centrism and toward a human determinism grounded in the anthropocentrism of revived classical humanism emerged the discovery of both social reality and society as “the extensive and most inclusive ground of human activity.” Ross observes that a largely Christian interpretation of the nature and functioning of God and the metaphysical world made a mediaeval understanding of history intelligible not in terms of autonomous human agency, but in terms of an ascending sequence of sacred events that man enacted.⁶ Presumably, human existence naturally devolves from “the ideal, rational forms” as human agency, being of supernal construction, manifested Nature’s predisposition for randomness. The paradigmatic shift away from this mediaeval perception of human aggregation and toward an understanding of history as a human construction propelled forward by a continuous procession of qualitative human actions framed explorations into the anthropocentric nature of social reality, the laws to which it adheres, and the relationship between atomistic behavior⁷, aggregate “particularisms”, and societal progress. Mediaeval cosmological assumptions that once supported a static, ordinal hierarchy of human existence so ordered by Divine Providence would eventually be invested with the

³ For example, although both Durkheim and Tönnies identified culture as likeness, common beliefs and custom, common rituals and symbols, the former saw them evolving into powerful, natural forces of coordination and solidarity and the latter into defragmenting forces of social disunity and purposelessness.

⁴ See Ross, 1992. p. 9.

⁵ The transition from feudalism to modernity similarly piqued a coincident interest in the nature of morality as the conceptual basis for society shifted from an integrated aristocratic and sacerdotal class within human aggregations stratified by Divine predisposition, to a highly individuated collectivity of rational persons each self-possessed of natural rights, powers and potentialities.

⁶ Ross (1991) further notes that the mediaeval view of history, along with a residual ancient idealism, limited understanding historical change.

⁷ To be understood as social agency informed by what Ross (1991) terms the civic humanism ideal wherein humans realize their full potential through political activity or participation.

spatial-temporal dynamism of Lamarckian evolutionary differentiation. With the old covenant “God” conceptually expunged from chaotic and capricious Nature, human aggregations would assume an orderliness and predictability so imposed by historicist and scientific approaches to understanding temporal and cross-national variations in civilization that redefine aggregations in terms of secularized human existence subject to the vicissitudes of an autonomous physical environment. Through these post-mediaeval interpretations of reality, differentials across human aggregates would reveal dissimilarities in environmental circumstance and adaptive behavioral responses varied by indigenous ontological perceptions of a collective destiny that a residual mediaeval cosmogony would persist to influence. Trepidation over a presumed inherent propensity for internal dissolution into barbarism or moral decay⁸ further influenced perfunctory examinations of human aggregation, binding them to coincident interests

⁸ Ross (1991) notes that 18th century liberalism is alleged to have created a social and moral fragmentation that produced political chaos, social disorganization, and labor exploitation by allowing a condition for deviation from the traditional conception of social order. The social aggregate either functions or dysfunctions in accordance with “morality”, which pertains to atomistic behaviors and their congruence with the prevailing interpretations of reality. This would later provide a basis for nominalist (rational) – realist (physiocratic, organicist) distinctions in epistemological and methodological approaches to social inquiry, as well as a preoccupation by some early American sociologists (viz., Albion Small, Lester Ward, et.al.) with social control.

in the nature of morality and its role in historical determinism.

Variations in historical terms used to denote significant relational configurations evidence distinctions predicated upon differentials among classes of social interaction. Thus, linguistically, Greek and Latin perceptions of significant configurations within human aggregates differentiated social interactions between free and bound persons. Christians eventually came to be included in widened Roman and medieval conceptualizations of significant relational configurations which ironically neglected distinguishing between “society” and “state”. German *gesellschaft*, Dutch *maatschappij* and English society further widened more extensive and more inclusive conceptualizations of significant relational configurations as they were contemporaneous vernacular terms initially denoting spatially confined relational interactions. The notion of society evolved from a mere adumbrated “sphere” existing side by side traditional aristocratic and sacerdotal formations so stratified and fated by Divine predisposition to elucidate an aggregation of highly individuated rational agents self-possessed of natural rights, powers and potentialities. Concomitant this conceptual refinement was an emergent conflation, both in correspondence and affectation, of its significance for evaluating civilizational progress with the behavioral import of the relational *ligatures* that bind individual rational agents to the functioning of the human aggregation. By the 19th century,

hierarchical mediaeval distinctions in relational interactions would persist to moor internecine struggles for status and power between aristocratic and bourgeoisie social formations to both an emergent nation-state structure and a cosmogony of material evolution. Upon the advent of the French and German revolutions, the notion of society would acquire an egalitarian significance befitting the historical transformations in European social configurations from exclusivist state-estate relations to free and equal associations of men unfettered by endowments of nobility.

Explanations of mediaeval social transitions into “modernity” necessitated the emergence of an analytical construct for understanding and evaluating the civilizational legitimacy of human aggregations that was conceptually grounded in patterned societal phenomena. Arguably, post-feudal reconstructions of mediaeval cosmological and ontological perceptions of human existence invested transitions of contemporaneous aggregations with “modern” ideas about his environment, his behavior as it is conditioned by that environment, and the impetus for such behavior. The notion of society would come to be conditioned by this cosmological shift in apprehending the environmental context in which processes of human aggregation occur; one that would later substantiate a realist-organicist theoretical approach to explanations of their associative and functional patterns of bio-social subsistence. Moreover, the

ontological re-discovery of humanism and its substantiation of a nominalist theoretical approach to associative and functional impetuses would further condition the conceptual contours of society as relational configurations that fulfill the basic biosocial needs of the aggregation.

Social Science Usage

Social science examinations of society, its problems and their basis in culture typically employ a behaviorist approach to explain a presumed mutual affectation between atomistic behaviors and aggregate organization and functioning. The utility of culture for social science research seemingly rests with its significance to the nominalist variant of a positivist methodological locus from 19th century discourse on “modern” society. As an analytical framework, behaviorism provides a nominalist perspective to understanding the shared subjective meanings that people use to coordinate and integrate their social interactions, and to interpreting culture’s array of general provisions for and overall function within human aggregations. Thus, its explanatory efficacy for the relationship between culture and society stems from the intellectual disputes over cosmological and ontological assumptions underlying various conceptualizations of society that conditioned methodological distinctions in investigations of societal change.

Conceptually grounded in post-medieval physiocracy, influenced by the neo-He-

gelianism of Wundt, Dilthey and Dewey, social behaviorism views behavior as a system of purposive, intersubjective actions whose integration of sensory and motor functions enables human adaptation to environment. Society as human aggregation is presumed to be *sui generis*: antedating the individual, originating his self-perception, and shaping his overt social behavior to fit its preexisting organization and functioning. What appears to be the distinguishing criterion is the kind or type of meaning a cultural object possesses – the motivations for human behavior – in the context of aggregate human behavior. Marx, for example, is described as originating cultural meaning in the antagonistic patterns of social interaction that arise from productive, allocative or consumptive adaptations to austere material conditions. As a constituent part of the superstructure, culture exerts a hegemonic influence upon dynamic social class interests and antagonisms through material contradictions inherent man’s relationship to his parsimonious environment, and the contrived social contradictions inherent his attempts to organize his socioeconomic behavior thereupon. Contrastly, institutionalists focus on the ability of social structure to meet societal needs through its functional interdependencies and teleology. Again, social conflict constructs cultural meanings that evidence the degree to which institutions efficaciously satiate objective social needs. Here, societal needs are quite protean and fungible.

Being without an identified, consensual permanence, societal needs can dramatically shift over time in impetus, purpose or catalyst. The immediate effect of such shifts on the relevant institution’s ability to adequately meet the newly formed needs is systemic functional dysteleology. Ocluded social interactions, in the long run, would produce a diseconomies of scale until equilibrating adjustments in social relations take effect (*e.g., new policies or legislation*).

Inexplicably, the use of behaviorist approaches to research on society preterits an account of the origin, structure and substance of what Williams (1982) terms the *ideological* component of culture and its interpretative affectation on ordering the human experience. As a result, behaviorism begs significant questions about associations between its implicit assumptions about the distinctive nature of human being and their affective role in shaping, coordinating and integrating social interactions; momentous questions whose import extends well beyond discursive disagreements over causality. What requires clearer explanation is the symbolic model through which social agents are able to come to terms with their environment: to understand it, to see it, and to interpret it.⁹ That symbolic model identified by Williams (1982) as the ideological component of culture that interprets and orders the human experience, and by Geertz (1973) as accumulated, organized significant symbols that

⁹ See Benton, 1982.

impose meaning, function as behavioral controls to social agency, and construct a constant orientation which circumscribes social utility and rationality.

Cultural Deep Structure

A more holistically consideration of culture lies beyond its behaviorist treatment: one that considers the structure and functioning of ethnic cognitive modalities, personality constructs and worldviews within qualitatively differentiated environments.¹⁰ This fuller treatment posits a psycho-behavioral association between several distinct yet interdependent levels of perception whose interaction produces a dynamic *cybernetic* process of situating oneself within an environmental space. Its conceptual refinement of the philosophical underpinnings of culture renders it a scientific construct that Azibo (1992) broadly characterizes as a *process* which gives a people a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality.

As a process, various constituent elements interact *at* and *between* two levels of culture to provide for a functional order within its overall interpretive design. A primary level cosmogony structures the formation of a secondary level set of axioms of existence, through which emerge a system for conducting life that pattern or

“models” an idiosyncratic social reality. This interpretive model provides a moral structure that governs social behavior and praxes. Combined, these primary and secondary levels of culture comprise “cultural deep structure” -- a logistical arrangement of interpretative axioms of existence grounded in the cosmological and ontological orientations.¹¹ Cultural deep structure organizes the scope and nature of the tertiary level of culture, which is constituted by a vast array of overt, manifest behaviors and practices, inclusive of symbols, language and patterned social behaviors. The objective functioning of culture’s deep structure is to organize and reproduce social reality for the members of the social aggregate.

This conceptualization of culture delineates a universal human propensity to *construct symbolic paradigms* that *function* both as worldview-specific models for living, harboring a *metaphysical* interpretation of reality, and ethos-specific models for reality that prescribe moral or evaluative standards for social behavior. Once understood in this way, culture can then boast a logistical arrangement of interpretative axioms of human existence grounded in the *cosmological* and *ontological* orientations of “deep structure” that organizes the scope and nature of manifest social behaviors and praxes. It becomes a process of human development. Its deep structural axioms superintend the functional organization and reproduction of a human aggregate,

and the social conditions (*cum*: environment) that cultivate human development – *however idiosyncratically defined*. This set of cosmological and ontological axioms, as the basis of culture, hews out that distinctive axiological and behavioral orientation posited by Geertz, *et. al.* Philosophical conceptualizations of the origin, structure and mechanics of the universe as environment buttress a collective self-conceptualization that confers both purpose and direction to human existence. Through this conflation of perceived environmental relationships, both physical and metaphysical, emerges a set of norming behavioral parameters that are simultaneously prescriptive and morally evaluative of social conduct to the extent that they are cosmologically and ontologically consistent.

Thus, the deep structure of culture’s deep structure informs Benton’s collection of observable behavioral repertoires that signify philosophical orientations and social valuations. Culture itself models an idiosyncratic horizontal and vertical progression of human existence in purpose and function across layers of perceived reality.¹² Overt social behaviors and the institutionalized patterns of social relationships and interactions combine to constitute a culturally idiosyncratic model for human development propagated by myriad agents of socialization. Socialization itself necessarily involves

¹⁰ That is, socially oppressive environments. See Azibo, 1992; Baldwin, 1980; Akbar, 1976, 1991a; Nobles, 1976, 1991a, 1991b; Dixon, 1976; Fanon, 2005, 2008; King, 1976.

¹¹ See Nobles, 1976, 1991a, 1991b.

¹² See Akbar, 1976, 1991; Ani, 1994; Benton, 1982; Mbiti, 1970; Nobles, 1991a, 1991b; Stansfield, 1982.

participatory processes of enculturation that entrench and sustain society members through phased human development by prescribing social behaviors, responsibilities and obligations within the parameter of an idiosyncratic conceptualization of human existence rooted in the culture's axiological set. Behavior or conduct becomes "rational" to the extent that it is cosmologically and ontologically consistent. Social institutions as habitualized behavioral patterns actualize this axiological set by transforming its cosmological and ontological axioms into ordered societal praxes that at once communicate, reinforce and propagate their interpretations of physical and metaphysical realities. Upon this, culture can now be regarded as a cybernetic process of human development wherein shared cosmological perceptions and individuated ontological references comprise an axiological set that structures social agency within a specified social space.

Post-Industrial Axiological Sets

Accordingly, the unique problem posed for non-Western peoples by studies of their social dilemmas is the former's inherent need for behavioral consistency between cultural deep structure and adapted socioeconomic praxes should habituated patterns of purposive social interaction avoid falling into dysfunction.¹³ However, western social science has and continues

¹³ See Diop, 1991, p. 129ff. Later, Stewart (1992) would deal with this very issue with regard to a strict study of African Americans.

to provide the analytical approaches, frameworks and models that obfuscate the significance of cultural deep structure to evolving social problems in a highly globalized world. These models raise serious questions about linkages between social science inquiries and the emergent crises in societal organization and functioning among non-Western peoples – crises fueled by inherited but disparate axiological sets that support socially non-productive behavioral repertoires.¹⁴

The fact that both colonialism and neocolonialism superimposed alien axiological sets in need of appropriate social behaviors begs the question: Can a strictly Western axiological set support existing non-Western behavioral repertoires that sustain an idiosyncratic cultural perception of social environment? Economic agency within non-Western communities, for example, the local reinforces an obligatory integrity between deep structural axiology such that an unproductive subsistence modality necessarily evidences an inurement of alien cosmology and ontology perceptions that subvert if not displace praxes known to be ethnically-religious based. Beneath national efforts at democratization, privatization, civic engagement and social reform lay an *antipodal* cultural model of reality that prescribes *material* want-satiation, *material* accumulation, and psychological objectification as moral - evaluative criteria for behaviors whose rationality obtains only within Western social organization. With

¹⁴ See Stewart, 1992.

culture perceived as materially determined¹⁵, such efforts moor non-Western economic agency to simple subsistence behaviors appearing capable of satisfying only the most basic bio-social needs. Their utilitarian root divests local behavior of its socio-religious axiological set, thereby misdirecting its balanced satiation of three-dimensional bio-social need to privilege only the *material*. Hedonism supplants deep structural spiritual impetus for moral conduct.¹⁶ The use of Western rational choice criteria to support and reproduce the socio-religious foundation of indigenous society generates meta-axiological dilemma over appropriate micro-level behaviors and their contribution to societal needs.¹⁷ Meta-axiological dilemma encourages sustained underdevelopment as local economic agency acquires new attitudes, social behaviors and moral obligations but no adequate resources with which to satisfy their material ends. Consequently, conflict over scarce resources necessarily ensues, and, in locations such as Northern Nigeria, consumerism as the behavioral manifestation of materialism necessitates eruptions of violence.

Questions of linkage focus specifically on the disjunction between models of social organization and functioning among

¹⁵ Not in the sense of a philosophical orientation which suggests that material existence defines man's purpose and thereby informs culture. Rather, in the sense of a psychological belief that there exists physical objects readily available for individual possession.

¹⁶ See Bentham, Jeremy ([1776] 1988), especially chapters 1 - 5.

¹⁷ See ibn-Hyman, 1997.

non-Western peoples as a subset of Western knowledge, as a self-contained and distinct body of knowledge, and, as a combination of existing disciplines. This disjunction indicates a lack of clarity in delineating the cultural scope and nature of the social phenomenon to be studied, and the implications of this lack of clarity for social scientific perspectives and approaches that seek to assess comparative proximity to Western social processes. The object of disciplinary inquiry must be clearly specified in order to unders-

tand the full conceptual significance of culture to the primary models within the field and any disjunction between them. Accordingly, and for the purpose of this paper, this object of analysis is specified as the global African social aggregation. This specification renders the social phenomenon for social science inquiry conceptually inclusive. Moreover, it holds variations in life experiences typically imputed environmental and circumstantial differentials conceptually constant as distinctions of degree, not of kind. While

social oppression and inequality did historically shape African social aggregates in different geographical locations to varying degrees, the common effect of these shared exogenous influences was reformations of social praxes. It is upon this that the significance of culture as a process of human development for social science models must be carefully considered and permitted to superintend serious scholarly inquiries into the conceptual organization of social organization and functioning among African peoples.

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