# IMPACT OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION ON AFRICA
# THE ROLE OF WESTERN MEDIA

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper unveils the issues surrounding the cultural impact of globalization on Africa with a view of determining the able of western media in propagating cultural imperialism under the pretext of economic globalization through Africa.*

*Attempts to conceptualize globalization have resulted in diversity of world views. This argument has resulted into the formation of two schools of thoughts that now dominate the impact of cultural globalization. One school of thought contends that globalization is destructive since the flow of information has been viewed as one dimensional. The other school of thought argues that globalization is constructive. Although, there are growing debates regarding the role of western media in propagating globalization, it is strongly argued that the concept has created drawbacks of culture, the fact remains that cultural globalization is changing the faces of Africa at an alarming rate with profound negative consequences. Media output raises the questions about values, norms, and priorities of those who direct and control the media out-put in what is becoming increasingly westernized. It is concluded that Africa must adopt a globalization policy that takes into consideration the culture, values, and norms of the Africans.*

**Introduction:**

The decade of eighties was the New World Information Order which has since given way to what is now called globalization. Little did anyone believe in the reality of the concept when Marshall McLuhan predicted the world be a global village in 1964. Globalization has been defined by researchers from different perspectives. Held & McGrew (2002) define globalization as "an expanding scale with growing magnitude with deepening and expanding impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of interaction". Wolf (2004) calls it "an irresistible and desirable force sweeping away frontiers while overturning despotic government…"

While cultural globalization is viewed here as the infiltration of foreign cultures into African culture, norms, values, and alteration of African social structure. Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999), note that "culture is the social construction, articulation and reception of meaning". Cultural globalization has created unparalleled inequity throughout Africa, affected the behavior of people in numerous ways, and forced many people to assume a lifestyle of self interest, selfishness, individualism and made people to develop a psychopathic devotion and appetite for foreign films, foreign goods, foods, foreign way of life, foreign music, attitude and behavior which has always been foreign to African community.

Globalization can be empowering and coercive invasion that will lead to disintegration of identity and the spirit of culture. The issue of globalization has created a pro and con dichotomy among scholars. One camp claiming that globalization is destructive to Africa while the other camp contends that globalization is constructive to Africa. Those who believed in its constructiveness argued that it has increased economic prosperity, brought availability of foreign goods, and created great market economy to such an extent that Africa stands to gain economically, militarily, politically as well as sustainable environmental development. Globalization they argued continues to contribute to Africa society even as changes are feasible in every facet of society.

Those in disagreement contend that globalization is destructive, calling it an encroachment on the African culture. They claim that globalization brought threat to African culture that continues to erode the fabric of the African society hence put a death knelt to what brought people together, tradition. Opponents argue that globalization through cultural imperialism has bombarded Africa with Western films, Western music, Western television programs bringing along with it a change in culture that has contributed to increased armed robberies, violence at every level, unprecedented corruption because people are now interest in life styles they see on television.

Culture according to Lusting & Koester, (1999) is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms which affect the behaviours of relatively large group of people. Scholars have argues and contended over the years that culture is not genetically inherited trait of human beings, but rather, is learned. A sentiment echoed by Fridah Muyale-Manenji in her essay; *Justice, Peace, Creation Tasks and Concern: The Effects of Globalization on Africa in the Eyes of an African*

*Woman.* She noted that culture is learned. That to kill a language is to kill a culture. She argue that women share the burden of farming, civil servants, and as traders throughout Africa, it is therefore not going to be surprising how cultural globalization would impact their lives. This study was motivated by the suggestion that commercialization of culture in the name of globalization is a prescription for displacement of African culture. Since communication and culture are intertwined, the role of media in disseminating cultural information to people cannot be over emphasized.

**Literature Review:**
**Globalization**
Globalization is nothing new, it has been around since the beginning of time, it has manifested itself through the scramble by European countries to colonize Africa and divided Africa among them. Today, it is more pronounced because even after years of independence in most African countries, the influences of colonial master are increasingly being felt. What made this so palatable these days is that the western world hegemony is openly being played at thee expense of poor Africans who are exposed to foreign films, foreign television programs as well as foreign goods seen to be supplanting the national African culture; in what can simply be described as a one-way flow of media programs. This hegemony is being heckled under the pretext of global economy which is seen to favor the Western countries. It must be noted that this form of hegemony is a one way flow of information to the African countries without reciprocity. This one way flow of television and film programs are detrimental to the survival of African culture whose programs are being supplanted by American and European hegemony.

A number of studies seem to agree that mass media have powerful effects if they are used in programs and campaigns that are carefully prepared according to communication theory and principles. Western media do more than just present carefully prepared information, they continue to play the devils advocate as they engage in propagating their culture through the influx of media content that continue to bombard African media.

The importation of media contents and programs to developing nations form Western nations could be seen as cultural imperialism theory as well as acculturation theory. Tunstall, (1977) observe that;

> *Indigenous tradition and tribal cultures are being displaced and booted out of existence by Western media products that continue to bombard with commercial, especially from American and exposing people to lifestyles that are not easily attainable through a make belief situation.*

The mass media play a very important role in contributing to the socio-economic development of countries in Africa and also in the transmission of social values, norms, cultures, beliefs and more. But the media of communication in Africa had been invaded by Western and affluent and powerful nations with their imperialistic media and alien culture. Culture n this context refers to everything that occurs in a society, from its social habits, and manners to religious rites, from its techniques of preparing food or making love to customs and traditions of marriage, family and work, from common places of transportation or conversation of marriage, family and work, from common places of transportation or conversation to conception of time, birth, death, and immediate and ultimate values (Catsy, 1982).

The question then is: Are Africans depending on the Western media to lead in their news programming? Are Western cultures perpetuated through African media to coerce people to forgo their traditional values? The answer lies in the concept of dependency.

**Concept of Dependency**
Even though, all African countries are sovereign, most of their media are dominated by western media content. The importation of western cultures through media content distribution is on the rise. While government owned media outlets continue to strive to produce indigenous programs, most of the privately owned television and radio stations continue to rely solely on foreign produced programs to meet their audience demands. Media imperialism results in implants of western cultures, ideas and values on African countries, thus upsetting their natural evolutionary development (Dennis and Merrill, 1984); it has become an unrelenting one way flow of ideas from western countries to the African nations. The western media has destroyed the national cultures and brought African and the rest of the third world their control (economic and political hegemony Dennis and Merrill, 1984). Mustapha Masmoudi, Tunisia's permanent delegate to UNSCO summed up the effects of communication imperialism in these words:

In addition to dominating and manipulating news flow, the developed countries practice other forms of hegemony over communication institutions of the Third World…, advertising, magazines and television programs are today instruments of cultural domination and acculturation, transmitting to the developing countries messages which are harmful to their cultures, contrary to their values, and detrimental to their development aims and efforts. (Richstand & Anderson, 1981).

It is therefore imperative that every African country has its own communication policy. Control it sown destiny and not be cajoled by the vested interested of western media and media organizations whose political agenda is largely protected by the status quo resisting all economic changes that do not support their financial interests. Its information system should be fashioned according to local communication patterns like muffled drums, wall posters, or village gathering places mixed with modern technology (Dennis and Merrill, 1984).

It must be noted that dependency theory asserts that national sovereignty is not a sufficient safeguard against the possibility of de facto control of a nation's economy by alien interest (Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran, and Waollacott, 1982). Dependency is an embodiment of neo-colonial international relation between the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, and the exploiting and the exploited. Thus it all appears that African countries are depending on western media to put the contents of their programming in perspectives for them as foreign media contents continue to placate their programmes and the need to create their own programmes from their own culture to represent their values and needs of their society seem to be forgotten.

As individuals are exposed to these foreign media content, there is an ultimate change in the behaviour, the character and attitudes of the people. Children and youths are now thinking in terms of other countries currency, other countries clothing, other countries music, film, communication skills, etc. And they are selectively looking and exposing themselves to these negative influences and are adapting their life styles around them.

**Pros and Cons of Globalization:**
Globalization is a misguided policy that called for competition, deregulation, privatization and open capital market under economic prospects for the poor (Galbralth, 2004). According to Akande (2006);

> *All over African and the rest of the non-western regions of the world, there is now a culture that permeates materialistic, individualistic values previously associated with western cultures.*

This is brought about according to Akande, by the apparent importation of goods under the pretext of globalization.  These foreign goods are now flooding poor African markets with seductive mass advertising considered to be superficial but nonetheless changing the way people look at things and creating unprecedented desires in people of traditional societies.

Globalization is now seen to be imposing non indigenous cultural uniformity.  This cultural imperialism under the pretext of globalization is imposing western values on unsuspected poor African people with a view to improving their economic prosperity.  American values and product are constantly features and peddled through their films, television programs, seductive commercials, music, and other culturally demeaning programmes foreign to African culture but slowly penetrating their culture and invading their tradition.  It is therefore not surprising to see these cancers in urban centers, inner city youths, and rural areas, promising glamour and good life. American dream is spreading like wild fire that is being fought on all front but kept rising.

America continue to export her culture to all parts of the world with great impunity in attempt to dominate world society.  This is evident in the alarming rate at which American culture us being exported to African countries with unrelenting force.  The pretext of technological importation continues to be conduit for this cultural importation.  The irony of the entire scenario of this cultural imperialism is that there is nothing in place to filter or differentiate the good from the bad, the moral from the immoral, and the fair from the unfair.

The effect of cultural imperialism is mind boggling; the result is loss of identity, loss of traditional values, and loss of self-pride.  Nigeria assumed American style of presidency; the result has been appealing to say the least.  There was nothing in place to foster the development and applicable mechanism of this so called presidential style of government.  Corruption spreads like an incurable cancer and woven itself into every level of government.  Nigeria movie makers became so much out of touch with reality and suffered a loss of identity could not find a traditional name for their movie industry, a name borne out of the Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani,

Ijaw, Uhrobo, Igbira, to name a few and carve a name from there for the industry – They named it Nollywood almost identical with American Hollywood. Antola & Rogers's (1984) alluded to the Latin American countries…, that "American network are yet to purchase programmes from their creation". Thus, those Latin American programs seen in America are from the Latin American themselves by way of cable of their constituents in the United States.

It must be noted that the uniqueness of various culture is the glue that binds people together. It is almost impossible for the Americans to believe that no two cultures are the same; that U.S. culture will never work in other culture the way it is working in the host country. The concept of culture is the incredible ideologies that differentiate one group of people from the other. Thus to impose ones culture on another group and forcing them to for go what has kept them together is nothing short of intrusion and encroachment on people's behavior, way of life, norms, values, tradition and the likes.

Cultural globalization is marginalizing some groups of people in Africa. It is George Orwell's 1984 *"All animals are equal, but some are more equal than the others"* revisited. This cultural imperialism camouflaged as globalization is damaging to African traditional way of life, a tradition borne out of respect for the elders, fro authorities, for traditional values in contrast to the Western principle of individualism.

Globalization has yet to translate into political and economic development is sub-Saharan Africa as most of them have not been able to increase their integration into the world economy which in most cases favours the rich and neglect to take into account the plight of poor peasants who make up the bulk of those that are in the rural areas of Africa. And according to the Africa News Service (2002) poverty has increased, education levels had are less rapidly than in the more globalized countries. The paper noted that poverty has in fact doubled in Nigeria in the last 20 years. Nigeria, is currently rated among the lowest ten in the world of human development index, in spite of the abundant human and natural resources the country is blessed with.

**Influence of Western Media**
The powers of the media to affect change cannot be over-emphasized. For example, television is, without a doubt, in a significant position to contribute to meeting

societal needs and problems, (Lerner, 1955; Rogers, 1962). The effectiveness of the electronic media of television in fostering, social, economic, political and educational development is enormous.

This study contends that globalization has created a negative effect on African culture; brought destructive rather than constructive cultural disintegration to such an extent that the cultural values people cherished has been shattered. The Magic Bullet theory alleged that ideas from mass media were in direct causal relation to behaviour (Biagi, 2003). And according to Everett (2002) "global dialogue is being fostered by corporate agents whose bottom line is profit rather than the welfare of the citizens." It is no surprise that Cable Network News (CNN) and other major media organizations are thrusting ideas and culture that are mainly American into the far flung of the world. The question then is; "to what degrees do these foreign culture benefits the citizens of Africa"? Better yet, one might be forced to ask how much has the American type media helped the citizens of Africa?

American media continue to bombard African culture through its countless numbers of media content that are foreign and malign to the people's culture. Media content such as; rock music, sensational material, pornography, advertising, as well as numerous numbers of junk materials that emphasize sex, criminal activities, violence, homosexually that were taboos to African culture are now prevalent; guns on the streets, cults in schools, and other contents that are completely foreign to African are constantly being exported to Africa at an alarming rate.

The threat to African social culture has been manifested in the name of globalization through movies, television shows, music and violence that are unprecedented in the case of Nigeria. Values and norms that are completely foreign to Africa are constantly being propagated through western media. In short, western media have brought a dealt knelt to what held the people of Africa together, "culture" and according to Achebe, (1964) things had fallen apart and thee center cannot hold.

In as much as globalization has been defended as a conduit to economic, political, and social development, it continues to threaten African main stream culture. As more and more Africans are introduced to filthy Western films, some of them have become captives of the corrupt system. People constantly imitate what they see on television. The lust for Western values and norms has overrun the tradition that held people together. Western goods supplant African goods as students continue

to develop more and more interest in Western made goods as opposed to those made in Nigeria.  The influxes of expensive western goods have opened the way for bootlegging, counterfeiting all over Africa.

While it is possible for researchers to argue that economic globalization is culturally enriching. (Bhagwait, 2004); the fact remains that economic/cultural globalization continues to imperil the dual combination of mainstream ad indigenous cultures. The disheartening thing about it all is that, Africans are now greatly influenced by western cultures.  American music is being played on Nigerian and other African radios as well as American movies in Africa theaters, ad their influence on African youths have been devastatingly discouraging.  African youths are now dressing, walking, talking slang and behaving likewise.  CNN propaganda news coverage has denied societal values.  The irony of cultural globalization is that Africans are no longer interested in preserving their cultures and traditions, they are now carried away by the array of share hopelessness n foreign culture or rather cultures that are foreign to Africa.

> *Akande, (2002) noted; The untold damage to African psyche, so much so that most Africans have come to behave that there is truth in the "myths, lies about them as being primitive history less, mindless, cursed, lazy, inherently evil, and corrupt, third world, under developed.*

It must be noted that the advent of European under the pretext of colonialism is deeply rooted in today's cultural globalization debacle. At end of colonial exploitation, most African countries were looted, culturally maligned and are now susceptible to continue cultural invasion in what could be described as cultural imperialism.

There is no question about the fact that African is blessed and rich in large quantities of tapped and untapped resources.  The quests for foreign goods in African continue to create huge environmental problems for the African countries whose mineral resources are being exploited.  They preserve their own environmental order and destroy African's environment in the name of global commercialization.  And as Akande (2002) noted.

> *The far most reaching effect of cultural globalization is the continuing commercialization of culture, production and consumption of cultural*

*good services have become commodities along the essentials of social life.*

He went on to say that commercialization of culture has a distributing impact on people, noting that what once was an element of their way of life become a product, rather than something unique they had made to suit their own specific needs and circumstance.

In Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and a host of other African countries, traditional values are supplanted by Coca-Cola culture.  Thus, the Michael Jackson style of music and culture is taking over; leaving Africans with no values to cope with.  The irony of these whole globalization gimmicks is that African music will never be played on American main stream radio; neither will a Nigerian movie shown to American audience.  What is the impact of American daytime/nightime soap opera has on people in the rural areas most of who are not even educated? In the words of the founder of modern day Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who eloquently stated at the opening of parliament, "we do not have to imitate communism, we do not have to imitate ourselves." It is high time Africans imitated themselves rather than making a mockery of themselves.

**Impact on Culture**
The so called globalized cultural industries having found its way into the fabric of African society are supplanting traditional forms of creation and dissemination of culture – local and traditional culture are fading and eroding as it continues to cease to serve as the means of constructing societal values, reproducing groups' identity, and building cohesion.

Nigeria adopted American presidential system of governing but lack the mechanism to put the ideologies unto practices.  The 1999 constitution for example gave governors and law makes immunities from prosecution regardless of the type of crime these people committed while in office.  As a result, it has become almost impossible to touch any of the governors who embezzled money.  The Vice president could not be touched and a host of other legislators whoa re party to crimes.

The chairman of the economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Nuhu Ribadu notes that more than $380 billion had been stolen from Nigeria by successive government

since independence.  He went on to say the period between 1980s and the 1990s were the golden age of corruption in Nigeria and the two-thirds of the 36 governors in Nigeria have been investigated for misappropriation of funds.

The Internet has created new waves of criminals dubbed "419 fraudsters" in Africa. They have become menace of society.  These criminals have quickly taken advantage of globalization of technology to perfect their trade.  For example, the wave of assassination in the Nigeria if unprecedented.  The killings of PDP gubernatorial aspirants of Dr. Ayo Daramola in Ekiti and Funsho Williams in Lagos State as well as the threat to the life of the son of second premier of the former Easter Region of Nigeria Dr. Michael Okpara and the recent assassination of the former permanent secretary of Ekiti State Ministry of Sports Dr. Segun Erinle in his home at Oba-Ile, Akure in Ondo State is nothing to cheer about.

Technological advancement was supposed to enhance development, but the reverse is the case in Nigeria, fraudsters in Nigeria have perfected the use of the Internet to defraud countless numbers of people both at home and abroad.  The waves of killings by cult members have quadrupled.  Students exposed to foreign films and media had taken the role of make belief situation in foreign films and turned it around to become killers with great impunity.

*In his article, Globalization and Democracy: A Dialectical Framework for Understanding Democratization in Nigeria:* Kura (2005) notes;

> *Globalization has actually made the ill educated Nigeria to know their rights through the international prints and electronic media which government cannot control (especially the BBC, CNN, VOA, RFI).*

Anao, (2002) cited in Kura (2005) notes that Nigeria is experiencing a remarkable progress in the use of wireless phones.  He statistically reported that from the inception of GSM in 2001 until 2002, more than 1.1million people acquired handsets with more than 30,000 lines added to a total of 60,000 including land lines and the number continue to increase by the minutes.  The irony of it is that the pay as you go system is creating enormous economic burden for the masses.

Aina, (2003) submits;

*We must feed, clothe, house and educate or people and maintain them in reasonably good health.  Our societies must rebuild and reclaim its wealth generation and sustaining capacity.  It must promote plenty, ensure and organize access and opportunities for all its peoples.  It must put in place the basis for the renewal and the transformation of institutions, productive systems and technologies.  We must find incentives within Africa to mobilize and encourage the necessary changes.*

It must be noted that the importation of goods and especially mused clothes from the western world has forced many traders and especially women out of business. In Kenya, women who manufacture thee "kiondos" (sisal bags) have been adversely affected as the items produced in large quantities in Japan are sold at relatively low prices in East Africa.  (Muyale – Maneji, 2006). The same scenario is repeated in Mali where foreign investor has taken over the sole revenue of producing crops such as tobacco and textile industries.  Banks, agricultural ventures as well as air line industry fall victim to foreign investors.  The spirits, motor and textile industry are near extinction in Zambia, while the textile and leather industries are about to close up in Tanzania.

There is massive unemployment in many African countries like Nigeria where graduates of the nation's universities continue to walk the unemployment path; retrenchment as well as liquidations have created unprecedented un employment in Zambia with well over 200,000 citizens of the country out of work for years.  In Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and a host of other countries are no exception.  Such stories continue to repeat itself all over the African continent with no end in sight (Muyale – Maneji, 2006).  This is a result of capital intensive labor saving technology that has come to replace human labor.

Thus those who argue for globalization are anchored on traditional geopolitical concerns as well as in large diversity of economic, social and ecological question.  It is therefore not surprising the fight against terrorism is taking a new dimension on the international arena against other societal ills such as drugs, pollution, human rights abuses, originally rooted in international cooperation.  The irony of the entire situation of the so called globalization is that some countries with gross human rights violation are being supported and kept in power under the pretext of co-operation to fight terrorism.

**Conclusion:**

The irony of the entire cultural globalization debacle is that western media is hypocritical. This is evident in their dealings with developing nations that they tend to forget the rule of engagement they helped put together is of favourable to developing countries and rather than working in cooperative partnership to improve the lots of citizens of the developing countries, they continue to bombard them with surplus goods. The concept of not giving a fish to a man but teach him how to fish is no longer part of their vocabulary.

Africa must adopt a globalization policy that takes into consideration the culture, values and norms of their people. Africa is the world's second-largest continent, is home to 800 million people and widespread instability, corruption and violence. Poverty, drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and civil wars are regular parts of life for many Africans. Many countries rely on the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the G-8 and other groups for aid to provide the barest essentials for their people. Globalization has not done anything to alleviate their problems,; rather developed nations had turned Africa into dumping ground for their goods, their waste products that are some times very toxic.

African Universities must do their part to work with students to prepare them for participation in global economy. Students must be taught how to become entrepreneurs rather than becoming dependents on government for all job opportunities.

African leaders as well as those that are charged with propelling countries into great economic independence must provide funds to colleges and universities so they can engage in academic research in every field of endeavor utilizing professors, lectures and others within the walls of institutions of higher learning as tools for sustainable development. Colleges and universities must be utilized to their fullest in research and development.

If Africa is to partake in global development, leaders must shun corruption; they must engage in nation building and become pioneers of development. African leaders must shun nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity, and in some instances fanaticism as well as all activities that serve as obstacles to national development vis-à-vis capacity building.

African leaders must take into consideration that globalization alone cannot sustain development as values and cultures differ along ethnic line and the rate of literacy is another concept to grapple with.  Therefore, globalization and liberalization alone cannot stand in thee place of domestic forces of growth.  Production of local goods must be encouraged.  There must be support for domestic investors as well as domestic producers.  Small business loans should be made available to private sectors to encourage employment. Government must revisit appropriate national policies to discourage trade investment/technology policies that are constrained by international policies in trade and borrowing.

Consequently, Petras and Vetneyer (2001) submit that;

> *Western imperialism dominated by the needs and requirements of finance capital within the world's major capitalist states is obviously serving the interest of powerful economic and social forced of the western world.*

Thus imperialism has acquired a new form as normal empires have been replaced by a new mechanism and led credence to multi-cultural control surveillance.

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