

**Globalization and Cultural Erosion: Impact on Sexuality in Nigeria**  
**( ID 155)**

**By**

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### **ABSTRACT**

An important component of culture among different people of the world is sexuality. In Nigeria discourses on sexuality are strictly placed in the purview of family and religious circles, higher institution of learning, in the hallowed walls of national and state assemblies, and pages of news papers. The adventt of globalization has brought an increase in sexual awareness and reorientation among Nigerians. The pre-globalised Nigerian culture was characterized by restriction of sex and related issues to family life between a man and a woman who are joined in marriage. In addition, virginity or girl- child chastity was considered a thing of pride for the bride's family and as such any one who dared to deviate from the norms was deemed to have brought shame upon her family and was stigmatized by the entire community. Further still, every member of the society was guided by general rules as set by societal expectations, superstitions, taboos and culture. All these formed the identity and value system of the people and individuals that failed to conform were usually sanctioned heavily. However, with the advent of globalization, the fast changing world of information dissemination and cultural imperialism, traditional ideas about human sexuality are changing fast across Africa, Nigeria inclusive. The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the impact of globalization on sexuality in Nigeria. Recommendations are also made that parents should re-educate the Nigerian child by employing didactic values of the African indigenous languages through teaching their children folk tales and songs that will neutralize the negative influence of globalization as well as reinforce the indigenous African value systems in homes.

**Keywords:** Culture, globalization, sexuality, indigenous values

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, like many other African countries, has her fair share of people living with HIV and AIDS, sexual diversity, and sexuality-related controversies. Discourse

relating to sexual orientation, identity, and violence in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has been hotly conducted in family and religious circles, higher institutions of learning, in the hallowed walls of the national assembly, the different houses of assemblies in the 36 states of the federation and on the pages of the country's newspaper. However, the advent of globalisation has brought about increase in sexual awareness and re-orientation amongst Nigerians.

Sexuality as a term has emotional and psychological dimensions which play very important roles in the development of human personality either consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, the exposure through globalization, to foreign cultures and other sexual orientations has led to the emergence of new cultures, languages, dressing, values and liberalization of the sexual ethics or beliefs amongst Nigerians. This is evident in the fact that many taboos, old traditions and customs relating to sexuality are wavering and the new sexual awareness seem to be gaining ground fast.

Sexuality refers to the feelings and activities connected with a person's sexual desires. It also refers to a person's sexual orientation- be it homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual or transgendered. To Amanze (2010), sexuality is the reproductive mechanism and the basic biological drive that exists in all species and can encompass sexual intercourse and sexual contact in all its forms. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided us with a comprehensive definition of sexuality. It states that:

*Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and` roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, religious and spiritual factors.*

Sexuality in Nigeria had since evolved from what it was during the traditional or pre-globalization era when sex was considered as a thing not to be trifled with. Sex organs were not even called by their right or biological names and issues surrounding sex, sexuality and morality were not to be discussed outside. For example, Amanze

(2010) observed that the language used in conversation on issues pertaining to sex and human sexuality in Africa is replete with euphemisms which are usually done in the process concealing the meaning of the subject under discussion.

In the traditional Nigerian society, particularly among the traditional Yoruba ethnic group, sex was strictly either for the purpose of procreation or carnal gratification and not a topic to be discussed with little children. Therefore in pre-globalised traditional Nigerian communities, sex was restricted to family life, between a man and a woman and meant only for persons who are joined in marriage. Also, virginity or girl-child chastity was considered a thing of pride for the bride's family. Anyone who dared to deviate from the norm brought shame upon his family and was stigmatized by the entire community.

Further still, every member of the society was guided by general rules as set by societal expectations, superstitions, taboos and culture. This formed the identity and value system of the people and individuals that failed to conform were usually sanctioned heavily. However, with the advent of globalization and the fast changing world of information dissemination and cultural imperialism, traditional ideas or national views about human sexuality are changing fast across Africa, not excluding Nigeria . The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the influence of globalization on sexuality in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework for the study**

This study is hinged on the cultural imperialism theory as postulated by Herb Schiller (1973). The theory focuses on the cultural aspects of imperialism. That is, the creation and maintenance of unequal relationships between civilizations when they come in contact, thereby favouring the more powerful civilization. The term cultural imperialism emerged in the 1960s and it is based on the conquest and control of a nation's culture by a more powerful nation, Cultural imperialism theory suggests that ideas, worldviews and cultures of the more powerful nation, in this case the western nations, dominate the media around the world through the tool of globalization which has a great influence on the third world nations. This has dire consequences on the continued survival of the cultures in most developing countries of the world as

westernized cultures, views and ideas are imposed on them thereby destroying native or indigenous cultures.

In addition, Alexandra (2003) described cultural imperialism as the practice of promoting a more powerful culture over a least known or desirable culture. It is usually the case that the former belongs to a large, economically or militarily powerful nations and the latter belongs to a smaller, less powerful one. Cultural imperialism can take the form of an active, formal policy or a general attitude. The modus operandi of cultural imperialism can be likened to a form of colonization in that, the cultural product of the developed country invades the developing countries and overwhelm the indigenous cultures of these countries.

Bello & Adesemoye (2012) submitted that based on the assumption of the cultural imperialism theory, humans do not have the free will to choose how they feel, act, think and live. Therefore when cultures come in contact through whatever medium - the internet, television, music, technology or religion and the culture of the western world imposes itself on the cultures of the third world countries, such influences question some of the fundamental beliefs of the indigenous cultures and the way of life of the people and issues on sexuality,

Other studies (Rauschenberger, 2003: Hamm. 2005) have traced the emergence of cultural imperialism in historical perspective:

Speculation of cultural imperialism emerged in the post World War II under various names including neo-colonialism, soft imperialism and economic imperialism. Over the years, it has gained numerous other labels such as media imperialism, structural imperialism, cultural dependency and synchronization, electronic colonialism, ideological imperialism and communication imperialism. Such theories describing cultural imperialism emerged in the 1960s and gained prominence by the 1970s. Such research encouraged the establishment of international organizations such as UNESCO, designed to research *and monitor global information flows*.

Also, Schiller (1973) described cultural imperialism as the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern system, and how its cultures or value systems are attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into reshaping or changing its orientation to conform to, or even promote the values and structures of the dominant centre of the system.

## **Globalization and Sexuality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria**

Sexuality in Nigeria has taken a new dimension since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as globalization has gradually taken the centre stage and imposed global views, ideas and identities on the traditional Nigerian way of life. Fafowora (2008) described globalization as the process of integrating economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries and nations. It principally aims at making the world a global village through the homogenization of political and socio-economic theory across the globe with the accompanying increase in the breakdown of trade barriers and the increasing integration of world market.

The main idea behind globalization is to reduce the effect of time, space and geographical boundaries in human relations and business transactions. To Bello (2010), globalization is aimed at unifying the world in all thinkable ramifications: social, cultural, economic, political, educational etc. and this has undoubtedly come with serious challenges that have influenced the lives of people all over the world since its emergence,

In addition, globalization is capable of influencing greatly the socio-economic, political, educational and cultural life of many countries of the world, especially the developing countries. It has raised questions on the appropriateness of certain traditional beliefs, customs, religion, language and the indigenous justice system. It has influenced the Nigerian value system, especially on issues that bother on sexual orientation and behaviour. According to Bello (2010), the cultural fabrics of most of the developing countries of the world have suffered a seemingly irreparable damage in the face of globalization. This is because the mass media and the so-called new media - radio, television, computer, newspaper, magazines, books, billboards, cinema, recordings, films, internets etc, have all by content and production eroded the cultural values of Africans. Also, the operations of Nigerian mass media, like in many other African countries, are patterned on the western model which invariably erodes our cultures and general opinions on important discourse both locally and internationally.

Since sexuality is central to human life, and it is generally perceived by all Nigerians, irrespective of tribe and religious affiliations, as the heartbeat of society; the influence of globalization on sexuality is fast redefining conventional Nigerian traditional views and beliefs concerning this topic. Traditional and cultural worldviews concerning virginity, sex, gender and marriage are fast changing due to the cultural erosion occasioned by the embrace of globalization.

In addition, Ojo & Fasuba (2005) argued that debates on sexual orientation and identity in Nigeria, especially the adolescent's sexuality behavior in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa is seriously going through transformation from what it used to be in the past. They attributed this to the effects of globalization as dictated by the internet, industrialization, education, exposure and enculturation through importation of various western films and foreign cultures which were alien to the Nigerian cultures in particular and Africa as a whole. Ojo & Fasuba concluded that the internet more than any other agent of social change has contributed in no small measure to the removal of guilt, fear and shame associated with unconventional sexual activities and pornographic films.

Similarly, Bello and Adesemoye (2012) concluded that as long as the developing countries continue to come into contact with and promote western cultures and ideas, these citizens of these countries will always act, feel, think and live like their counterparts in the western civilizations act, feel, think and live.

Also, Longe (2007) observed that the current sexuality trends among teenagers and Children in Nigeria are culturally alien to the Nigerian society in the past. These changes have been attributed to unregulated exposure to westernized cultures through contacts with the many agents of globalisation. The current trend of sexuality in Nigeria portends dangers for the sustenance of the nation's culture and the people's way of life as the social, traditional and religious worldviews concerning sexuality are fast being eroded by the demanding weights of globalization. In the last five years, there has been a huge increase in the cases of sexual harassment, under aged defilement, indecent dressing or nudity, rape, incest, bestiality, and homosexuality to mention just a few.

Stychin (2004) observed that globalization has greatly influenced the concept of sexuality across national boundaries especially in the realm of gay rights. According to Stychin, all over the world, a globalization of human rights has occurred, whereby human rights have become a key criterion by which the progress of nations is evaluated. There has also been an increase in the globalization of same sex sexualities as identities and the reality of this is evident in Africa. For example, the issue of gay relationship and marriage dominated international discourse recently even to the point of being a subject of legislative discourse in the two chambers of national assembly in Nigeria

Globalization has been a major contributing factor to the universality of

same-sex sexualities and identities and it has influenced the movement for contemporary lesbian and gay identity politics of sexuality, identity, and liberation since 1969 (Altman, 2002). This movement has since taken a global dimension to issues on same-sex sexuality and defined distinct sexual identities in categories that are labelled as gays and lesbians, or both. Blasius (2001) argued that the individual (in terms of gender) with whom one has sexual relations with is the key to who you are.

Obidoa (2010) described Nigeria as a nation that is currently experiencing rapid social change, due to the forces of globalization. According to the study, globalization and its' accompanied influence on sexual orientations in Nigeria has led to the continued growth of the HIV/AIDS epidemic particularly among young people. HIV/AIDS statistics show that young people between the ages of 15 to 24 years constitute one of the most affected groups in the country. Obidoa asserted that there is an emerging body of evidence showing that global economic and cultural forces impact youth sexual risk through various avenues. These avenues include socio-cultural factors, particularly global popular youth cultures and socio-economic processes initiated by globalization, and they affect the sexual behaviors of young people in Nigeria.

Some studies (Davis & Whitten, 1987; Hoad, 2004) have traced the emergence of diverse sexual orientations in Africa back to the pre-colonial time; these studies identified factors such as military training, rites of passage from age grade to adulthood or other special ceremonies conducted for the purpose of initiation into manhood and need for sexual satisfaction through artificial phalli especially in polygamous homes. However, sexuality has since taken other forms in the 21<sup>s</sup> century African society and the focus of this paper is to examine the influence of globalization on the current trends in sexuality especially in Nigerians.

Assessing the current changes on human sexuality in areas of sexual orientations such as pornography, homosexuality, Awake, March 2013 Vol. 94. No.3 pg 10 - 11 states:

Today, pornography is more popular and accessible than ever before... Researchers continue to debate the likelihood of people acting on fantasies fueled by pornography and its effects on people which include depression, social isolation, damaged relationships and other sad consequences.

More than ever before, through the instrument of globalization, pornography has gained a wider scope of acceptability among Nigerian youths and secondary school students. With most of these students visiting internet cafes solely to visit or watch pornographic sites and they equally download pornographic contents into their cell phones. These activities and many others that globalization present to the youth through the western world mass media has led to an increase in their sexual awareness and early involvement in sexual activities. This has had serious adverse effects on the lives of these youths in terms of premarital sex, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, drug abuse, indecent dressing, rape etc.

Iheanacho (2012) stated that one of the main factors of society and human transformation is premised on the concept of globalisation which has eroded the spirit of African socialism and communal values. Iheanacho identified cultural globalization as central to the current levels of transformation in African countries, like Nigeria. Accordingly, the effects of the contact with other cultures through globalization and its numerous elements such as language, technology, music, ideology, belief etc. in the indigenous Nigerian societies has given rise to new perceptions, life style and alteration in a people's worldview, individual aspiration, personality formation and indeed the transformation of society.

Further still, apart from the socio-cultural and biological aspects of sexuality which deal with the general societal beliefs on acceptable sexual behaviours and human reproduction as well as the physical means with which to camouflage it out. sexuality also has emotional and psychological dimensions which play very important roles in the development of human personality whether people are aware of it or not. Cultural globalization has influenced the conception of sexuality in Nigeria especially going by the comments credited to the Senate President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, David Mark on the national network news of December 6, 2013:

I want to invite you all to join the crusade of decency in our society. There are many good values we can copy from other societies, but certainly not this one (same-sex marriage). We have to prove to the rest of the world, who are advocates of this unnatural way, that we Nigerians promote and respect sanity, morality and humanity. Every individual is a product of the union of a man and woman.

Enwegbara (2012) described globalization as a cancer and argued that unless it

is made to undergo drastic overhauling just like it was done to capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the economic value systems and cultural heritages of the most developing countries stand on the brink of extinction. Iheanacho (2012) identified global awareness in sexuality such as gay marriage as yet another dimension of the challenges that globalization has brought on African traditional and religious beliefs. Nigerians, like many other Africans, are increasingly taking to secular life and embracing the new cultures that globalization offers.

Akinnaso (2012) described the influence of globalization on Nigeria as 'cultural erosion'<sup>7</sup>. This term cultural erosion, according to Akinnaso (2012) is the systematic devaluation sometimes leading to the deletion, of certain aspects of our cultures due to foreign influences of religion, colonization and globalization. Such influences could wipe out a people's memory of their past; their traditional cultural practices; their language and their worldview, including their perception of reality. Enwegbara (2012) concluded that the influence of the overwhelming weight of globalization on the survival of minority cultures and economies could trigger a global protest and the rise of a new communist movement in most developing countries in the not too distant future.

### **Globalisation and New Sexualities in Nigeria: The way out.**

Globalization is a global phenomenon that cannot be stopped in view of its utilitarian values in some aspects of life; the purpose of this aspect of the paper is to suggest possible ways by which Nigeria can embrace globalization while at the same time preserve her cultural heritage.

Okonkwo (2008) asserted that most negative impact of moral decadence which has developed into 'unnatural' or 'unafrican' forms of sexuality in Nigeria and other African countries is the erosion of that sense of shame, courtesy and right and wrong in the past three decades. The cultural erosion by globalization has brought upon us a reorientation of our traditional core values of honesty, integrity, and equity communal social responsibility and has left us in this dire state of social and culture corrosion. According to Okonkwo, Nigerians have fallen for the negative influence of globalization and thus, perverted their original nature. Something needs to be done fast in order to salvage the future of the nation from extinction.

The influence of globalization on the worldviews, value system and the way of life of Africans in general and Nigerians in particular has taken a worrisome dimension and should be of concern to all Nigerians. Iheanacho (2012) opined that globalisation is

taking negative toll on the indigenous African knowledge and skill. Also, many Nigerian languages, and those of many other African societies have been predicted to be on the part of extinction. The loss of indigenous languages is the loss of and traditional knowledge, values and customs that define us as Nigerians. Efforts need to be doubled to preserve our indigenous languages through the vehicle of education,

Indigenous languages should be reintroduced as mother tongues in Nigerian homes and parents or family circles need to employ the didactic values of the African indigenous languages by teaching their children folk tales of songs that will neutralize the negative influence of globalization as well as reinforce the indigenous African value system in homes. The only solution to the 'mis-education' of the Nigerian child is to 're-educate' him in the Nigerian way, by using the indigenous languages in the homes. Nigerians and indeed Africans need to resist the imposition of the language of the globalised world by promoting the use of indigenous language. A loss of language is the same as a loss of culture and identity, and this could have serious impact on sexuality in Nigeria.

In addition, the imposition of globalization on our indigenous cultures has eroded our cultural knowledge and this has strained the values of community life, solidarity and corporate existence for which Africans are known. These values are being replaced by individual spirit and cut-throat competition of the capitalist propelled global system (Iheanacho, 2012). The loss of indigenous cultural identity and knowledge has greatly imparted on our sexuality as there have been wanton increase in the cases of incest, rape, bestiality and other negative sexual orientation considered alien to the traditional African society.

Further still, education remains the only solution to current influences of globalization on Nigeria. Apart from the use of indigenous languages in education in the lower primary schools as stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004), traditional moral instruction can be introduced in schools for the purpose of re-orientating the students on the indigenous value system. Efforts should also be focused on indigenous sex education in schools and at home because we live in a dynamic world where people can easily access information on any topic from anywhere in the world. Failure to explain or teach the indigenous worldview on sexuality could make the Nigerian youths to accept pornography, homosexuality, bestiality, masturbation and other forms of sexual orientations that are alien to indigenous beliefs, customs and traditions.

Nwegbu, Eze, & Asogwa (2013.) suggested that the government as an agent of change should repackage and re-inculcate absolute values through the use of libraries, mass media, and advanced information technologies to counter the negative changes that are emerging today. Also, there is a need for the legal protection of cultural heritage of Nigeria, especially the intangible aspect of culture such as indigenous languages, folk music, arts etc. Cultural libraries could be established in the different local government areas in the country for the purpose of preserving the nation's culture.

In addition, efforts should be geared towards the celebration of positive indigenous beliefs on sexuality such as virginity, chastity, and traditional views on premarital sex. Corporate organizations and media institutions should be compelled to exhibit and celebrate indigenous views of sexual abstinence and faithfulness in relationship rather than endorsing nudity and other sexual vices through their advertisement and sales promotions. The preservation of the indigenous African culture should be the responsibility of every African in the face of massive cultural erosion which is spearheaded by globalization.

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