



## Moral Decadence and Cultural Insecurity in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Nigerian culture before the advent of Western civilization was worthy of emulation because of its full moral and ethical teachings for all sets of people. However, the coming of the Western civilization and its colonialism marked the systematic beginning of the destruction and disruption of this culture, leading to insecurity in the nation's cultural heritage. This was due to the dominating influence of the Western culture and its fast growing threats over the nation's culture. The paper examines the factors responsible for cultural insecurity in Nigeria using purely secondary sources of data collection. The paper concludes that the white men, who brought Western civilization, colonialism and neo-colonialism into Nigeria, introduced their own ways of life, believing that Nigerians cultural practices were inferior to Western superior culture. Hence, they worked towards this, and over a long period, through their education system and the cultural imperialism with disastrous effect on morality and Nigeria's cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Culture, Civilisation, Western, Morality, Cultural Heritage

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### Introduction

Culture is a word that has so many definitions by different scholars and intellectuals based on their individual and collective understanding and perceptions. Thus, it is said to include people's beliefs, rules of behaviour, rituals, arts, technology, styles of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, religion and political and economic systems.<sup>1</sup> It is also defined as "The Way of life of a people to their traditional behaviour, in a broad sense, including their ideas, acts and artifacts."<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, Ajayi sees culture as an 'all-embracing and heterogeneous concept that encompasses every aspect of a man's life and experiences.'<sup>3</sup> In fact, culture in its totality depicts the way of life of a particular society and its people. He is of the opinion that culture is an established pattern of behaviour among a people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. Ojo, A. Handbook on Nigeria History from The Earliest Times To 1800 AD (2016). P. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Herskovits, Melvill J., and Bascorn, William R: Continuity and Change in African Cultures, Phoenix Books: The University of Chicago Press, 7<sup>th</sup> Impression (1969), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>O. Olaronti and I. S. Abayomi, (eds), Culture, Society and Development in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects, (2021), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup>Ojo and Abayomi, Culture, Society and Development in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects, (2021), p. 35.



Culture indeed reflects the standard attained in a society in any particular epoch and plays significant and substantial roles in people's daily life.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Cowie and Gimson define culture as: "The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that depend upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations."<sup>6</sup> Culture is said to be a total way of life of a people. It is the full totality of all the elements by which man adopts himself to his environment. It in fact, embraces every material and intellectual factor that man gives to survive in his own society.

According to Mazrui and Hasu, culture is the combination of all the spiritual and material values created by a society to promote self-reliance, social integration, pride and dignity, among others, in a people.<sup>7</sup> All the above definitions are collectively of the view that culture is the totality of a people's way of life of a people which encompasses everything from mode of dressing to philosophy, science and technology of the people concerned.

### **Cultural Insecurity in Nigeria**

This was a situation whereby a culture of a people was exposed to hazards due to the absence of protection. This lack of protection caused it to be dominated and degraded by foreign (western) cultures, thereby making it lose its natural purity. This was due to the incursion of colonial invasion and subsequent administration of Nigeria, thereby giving rise to the state of insecurity in the culture of Nigeria as a nation in Africa.

This was because the colonial invasion brought new values which overshadowed the cultural autonomy of Nigeria with its rich cultural heritage i.e., moral and spiritual teachings for all Nigerians of all ages. It also brought a system of laws that were ultimately dependent for their moral sanctions on code exterior to Nigeria and universalized from the Western point of view. This was why the political and economic systems that colonialism introduced into the country were grossly at variance with the norms of the traditional community.<sup>8</sup>

Before the advent of western civilization and colonialism, Nigerian culture was a medium of learning societal norms such as respecting elders helping the needy, participating in communal duties, upholding morality, and respecting the constituted authority, among others worthy of emulation. Thus, the Nigerian culture was regarded as a universal and unarguable law and the supreme source of moral values.

However, the white men who brought Western civilization and colonialism into Nigeria introduced their ways of life into it because they believed that Nigerians were morally inferior and believed themselves to be morally superior in their relation to Nigerians. They worked towards this, and over a period of time through their educational system and through repetition of cultural formulations.<sup>9</sup> This water-down system of education (colonial educational system) introduced into the country was

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<sup>5</sup> Ojo. A Handbook on Nigeria History, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup>H. A. Cowie and A.P.A Gimson, Oxford English Dictionary Oxford University Press, (1988). p. 857.

<sup>7</sup> A. Mazrui, A. Hasu, and H. Patel (Eds), Africa: The Next Thirty years (1974), p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Mazrui, Hasu, and Patel, Africa: The Next Thirty years (1974), p. 27

<sup>9</sup>A. W. Singham (eds), The Non-Aligned Movement In World Politics, (1977), p. 42.



for colonial export as it was meant to stifle the culture and identities of Nigerians meant for the country's disadvantage.<sup>10</sup>

The primary preoccupation of the colonialists was how to make the country's governance easy for them. Hence, they thought of first Europeanizing the Nigerian ways of life and thought. This indeed led to the emergence of a class of educated Nigerians whose ways of life and thought have been Europeanized. Thus, they became Nigerians in Whiteman's clothing. This was because they were indirectly urged to take off their Nigerian personality and adopt the European personality. This was because the type of education and orientation given to them at this time was essentially for promoting European social habits such as dressing code, sports, and eating manners, among others. This gave rise to the emergence of disconnected elite, an elite class totally disconnected from the people.<sup>11</sup> This systematically led to the collapse of Nigerian culture as the nation's cultural norms were deemed primitive, paganism, and uneducated, among other derogatoriness. Thus, Nigerians became ashamed of using their value system simply because they were described as uncultured, cultural misfit, and cultural deviant just to show that they were socially not integrated into a given social setting.

The aftermath of the collapse of the nation's cultural norms led to the emergence of alien values that cherished unnecessary killing of one another, insurgencies, corruption, disunity, indiscipline, and general moral decadence to list just a few of such vices in the country; as against Nigerian cultural values which identified such vices as crimes against the society. The emergence of this disconnected set of elites that were responsible for subjecting the nation's culture to cultural inferiority complex, as all the nation's traditional system had been relegated and regarded as uncivilized and barbaric in which vices such as rape, adultery, prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, gay and same-sex marriage, lesbianism, to list a few that Nigerian cultural values condemned are placed under freedom and fundamental human rights that must be respected by all globally.

In the same vein, the integral aspect of child training and proper upbringing in the nation's traditional cultural setting is today condemned and regarded as child abuse<sup>12</sup> in the Western calculation of child training and upbringing. This was the main reason why children and youths generally do not have respect for their parents, elders and the constituted authority today in Nigeria, showing the level at which people's culture has collapsed in the name of Western civilization, development, progress and modernization in Nigeria.

The recent erosion of morality in Nigerian cultural practices was the complete opposite of what was obtainable when there were responsible elders who provided the needed balance, greed was less, and little was enough, much more security we had, but suddenly there emerged suspicion, mistrust and hostility among one another. We no longer believed in Nigeria and in each other. Our value system collapsed. Growing up in those days, every father was a father to all children in the neighbourhood.

This is because nowadays, children no longer sit around the fire place in the evening to listen to stories that in those good days promoted the values of respect for elders and humanity, legitimate and constituted authority, integrity, dignity of labour, peace, love, unity, positive moral and religious

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<sup>10</sup> J. N. Paden, Ahmadu Bello, *The Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and Leadership in Nigeria*. (1986). P. 85.

<sup>11</sup> B. Barkindo, M. Omolewa, M.S. Babalola, *Africa and The Wider World (Africa since the Scramble)* (2006), p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Ojo and Abayomi, *IS Culture, Society and Development in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects* (2021), p. 39.



values due to the incursion of western civilization which regarded such as being primitive and uncivilized.

### **Indecent Dressing as Moral Corruption in Nigeria**

Indecent dressing is a morally corrupt way of dressing meant for seducing the opposite sex by exposing one's most attractive body parts such as armpits, thighs, breasts, and other parts of the body that are supposed to be kept secret and private. This is a mark of immorality, while decency in dressing is a hallmark and trademark of the Nigerian way of life. Nigeria, indeed, cherishes decency in dressing and general ways of life and abhors illicit or indecency in life.

In Nigeria, no one was expected to dress the way he/she wanted. It must conform to the norms and values of the society. This was because society had the right to resist immoral public behaviours of its members, as it had the right and obligation to sanitize public morality to fight depraved and corrupt attitudes of its members.

Today, the so-called modernization is the bane of Nigeria as a nation. This is because a person who dressed decently is viewed as anti-social, primitive, local, colonial, and what have you! And unfortunately, a person who dresses yet is naked is looked upon as being socialized, modern to list a few. Thus, many women today, to be specific, put on dresses but are still naked because almost all the most attractive parts of their bodies are exposed, such as the stomach, armpits, and thighs, just to mention a few, and unfortunately, some even wear very transparent dresses that reveal almost all parts of their bodies.<sup>13</sup> The most unfortunate aspect of it is that such women are highly admired by some people who are also morally corrupt.

Thus, our mode of dressing today is a marked deviation from the Nigerian mode of dressing, as Nigerian culture cherishes decency in all aspects of human life. Anything short of decency earns one a societal stigma as being unethical. This is because our appearance matters a lot in our relationships, because one is addressed by how he/she dresses.

It is very unfortunate that nowadays, many people have systematically closed the gap in dressing style, especially women; thereby, it is impossible for one to distinguish between a prostitute and a normal woman. Many national and international newspapers and magazines are very much saturated with naked dressing and sexual suggestiveness. People just refused to realize that indecent dressing provokes assault and is an inverted form of sexual harassment, especially when a woman bares her entire arms, armpits, breast, stomach and other attractive parts of her body to the public and public officers in the name of dressing. This is one of the main factors responsible for the series of cases of rape, sexual violence and harassment against women witnessed nowadays in Nigeria.<sup>14</sup>

It should be borne in mind that a well-dressed person carries more grace, mystery, dignity, class and indeed beauty than an indecently dressed person who, in comparison, looks cheap and contemptible. In light of this, Ozigis said: "it is a common thing these days in our streets to find youths who are shabby and offensively dressed in the name of current fashion, they wear what they call "mini-

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<sup>13</sup> Summit Newspaper, April 14<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> (2010). P. 29.

<sup>14</sup>Daily Sun, December 8, 2021, p. 14.



skirts”, “spaghetti”, “sleeveless”, pointing out that the dress pattern is uncultured and un-Nigerian.”<sup>15</sup> These types of dressing are mostly foreign goods imported into the country.

On the economic implications of this, Ayakoroma said: “The prevailing appetite for western dress pattern has not only become a trend that has made Nigeria a dumping ground for all sorts of western goods, pointing out that the ugly trend has made local textile firms to fold up due to low patronage.”<sup>16</sup> This is because goods brought from outside are sold at much lower prices than the locally produced ones because they are mostly second-hand or fairly used.

Another unfortunate aspect is that people tend to admire those who appear in these foreign goods more than those in indigenous dressing. Thus, Fridah said ladies who wear clothes from Paris and shoes from Italy tend to receive more respect than those wearing a locally manufactured brand.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the production of the local one is forced to close up-thereby killing Nigeria’s attempt at industrialization.

### **Pornography and its Dangers on Morality in Nigeria**

This is an act of being nude or an act of appearing naked for the sake of worldly things. It is the depiction of erotic behaviour in pictures or in writing to cause sexual excitement. It is the representation of sexual behaviour in books, pictures, statutes, films and other media intended to cause sexual excitement in depicting the life of prostitutes or free women. It is the portrayal of sexual subject matter for the exclusive purpose of sexual arousal. This may be presented in a variety of media, such as magazines, animation, writing, films, video and video games. The primary objective of pornographic depictions is pornographic models who engage in filmed sex acts.

Pornography has become a social problem for this nation, generating serious public outcry. The most unfortunate thing about it is that it propagates perverse sexualities and its proliferation portends the poverty of morality. Thus, the need to put in more effort into sensitization of people on its effects on society, preaching and fighting against it in schools, among students, worship centres and indeed in our homes. In fact, there is no doubt that pornography is found almost everywhere in Nigeria and the entire world, with its attendant side effects through books, magazines, music, video, films, and indeed on the internet, which is the most perverse.

It is indeed a representation of set acts in words and pictures. To this ugly development, Sudau said in relation to the havoc of pornography through the internet: “Indeed, there are numerous types of pornography that are freely available on the internet. The entire spectrum of pornographic materials available in the computer network includes images of soft-core nudity, hard-core sex acts, anal sex, bestiality, bondage and dominion. Others include sadomasochism, scatological acts usually on women for sexual pleasure, fetishes and child pornography.”<sup>18</sup>

This means that children, too, are in this dirty and unholy act knowingly or unknowingly. It is, of course, a great mistake and disservice to the society to allow children below the age of twenty access to pornographic materials especially from the internet, which is the most perverse of all.

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<sup>15</sup> Weekly Trust, October 3, 2004, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Summit Newspaper, April 14-18, (2010), p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> M. M. Fridah, *The Effect of Globalization on Culture in Africa in the Eyes of an African Woman*, 1998, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Weekly Trust, October 3, 2004, p. 32.



Allowing children access to the internet uncontrollably breeds morally corrupt leaders of tomorrow that will later corrupt the entire society. Thus, concerned authority must be up and doing in protecting children from accessing pornographic materials for the good of future Nigerians.

### Conclusion

The Nigerian culture before the incursion of Western civilization, colonialism and neo-colonialism was full of moral and ethical teachings for all sets of people. However, the advent of western civilization, colonialism and neo-colonialism marked the systematic beginning of the destruction of this cherished culture, thereby leading to a state of cultural insecurity in the country.

This was done through the introduction of western education, through which the Whitemen introduced their own ways of life believing that Nigerian ways of life were primitive and out-modeled. This type of education produced a class of disconnected elites that were not prepared to serve their people. They rather took delight in fulfilling Western agenda of modernity and exploitation without humanity. This type of education rather gave rise to the emergency of regional, tribal and religious champions instead of patriotic individuals who have good intentions for the nation. Indecency and pornography have almost become part of the daily lives of Nigerians with devastating effects on cultural security.

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