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THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN TECHNOLOGY ON AFRICAN CULTURE: THE CASE OF THE YORUBA OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

JONATHAN OLUROPO FAMILUGBA (PhD)
Department of Arts Education
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology
Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
E-mail:familugbajonathanolu@gmail.com
Institutional E-mail: familugba.jonathan@bouesti.edu.ng
GSM: +2348034490268

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of foreign technology on African Culture with particular reference to the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria. The study identifies the various characteristics of African culture and delves into the meaning of technology with a view to highlighting its influences on African culture and that of the Yoruba in particular. The data for this study were made up of secondary sources which comprise of textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines, internet materials and other literatures relevant to the subject. The research methodology employed in the analysis of data obtained is historical method which is a simple descriptive collation and analysis of data. The paper finds out that the unbridled import of modern technology have had far reaching adverse influences on the culture and tradition of the Yoruba. It therefore suggested ways by which the negative stigma could be checked thereby redeeming the lost glory of Yoruba culture.

Keywords: Influence, Foreign Technology, Yoruba, African culture, South-western Nigeria.

Meaning of Culture

The concept "Culture" has attracted various forms of definitions by Scholars over the years. (Taylor, 1871), cited in (Babawale, 2007), defines culture as "that complex whole which includes shared ideas, knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". (Naegele, 1965), cited in (Olokesusi, 2004), defines culture as a collective term for "patterns of existential and normative assertions". These assertions according to him may take the form of sculpture and art, of movement in dance and ballet, of fashion in clothes and so forth"

(Kroboer, 1952) opines that values constitute an essential ingredient of culture, and that these values however subjectively held may also be objectively described and analysed. They are an integral part of culture and cannot be omitted in any serious sociological study. In his own assertion, (Ogungbemi, 2003) defines culture as the "sum total of the materials and intellectual equipment whereby man satisfies his biological and social needs and adapt himself to his environment." Culture can be perceived as social invention and social change. Culture is learned and shared by the members of a society. It is the totality of a peoples' way of life, (Lawal, 2020). Hence, it is the determinant of human interactions and interrelations. Its continuity is safeguarded by sanctions on those members of a society who refuse to allow the

patterns that are laid down for them. Every human being at every stage of history or pre-history is born into a society and from his earliest years is moulded by that society. The nature and character of his thought is determined by both language and environment (Ogungbemi, 2003)

Culture consists of three main elements. These are customs, beliefs and artefacts (Owolabi, 1987). Customs consists of the behavioural patterns exhibited by members of a particular group, for example, the use of cutlery (fork, table knife and spoon) by the Europeans and the use of fingers in Africa indicate cultural differences. Belief systems are ideas that indicate standards for what is right or wrong. The notion includes religious, medical and normative prescription for conduct. These three may complement each other thereby bringing about a consistent and well defined belief system as the case is in many African countries. Artefacts are the objects produced and shaped by the members of a society. These may be designed by the society or borrowed from other societies. Examples include hoe, cutlass, buckets, cooking stove, fridge, chairs, television etc. (Owolabi, 1987)

Meaning of Technology

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines "technology" as the "study, mastery and utilisation of manufacturing and industrial methods; systematic application of knowledge to practical tasks in industry". Hall in Encyclopaedias Americana defines "technology" as ways of making or doing things. Technology helps us to find solution to practical problems. The product of technology abounds all around us. These includes the house we live in, the pen with which we write, the clothes we wear, household electrical equipment such as refrigerator, fan, radio, television etc. (Awopetu,2004).(Hughes and Moore (1986), cited in (Ogungbemi2003), defined technology "as the component of culture of a people which enables them to control their environment in such a way that the continuity of the society is ensured"

Considering the above, it is obvious that culture and technology are closely related and could not be easily divorced from each other. While culture is perceived as social invention and social heritage, technology is the component of the culture of a people, which gives them the ability to exercise control over their environment so as to enhance the continuity of the society. Technology is the cultural tradition for dealing with the physical and biological environment (Webb, 1991). Each society uses its technology to extract life sustaining food, water and medicine from this environment. Foreign technology is therefore the importation of such cultural values and orientation that is alien to our culture but has been adopted as a way of life in our society.

Culture Change in Africa

Priorto the advent of the Europeans, Africans just like any other people have their own ways of doing things. However, on the arrival of the Europeans and the Arabs, the people experienced what is regarded as "culture-change" (Ifie,1991).

European and Islamic Culture first entered Africa and Nigeria in particular through indirect conquest. The European powers such as Portugal, Britain, France and Germany wishing to open new trading centres, entered Africa to establish trading posts (Ifie 1991). Through these trading contacts, A number of oriental cultural traits infiltrated Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Ever since the beginning of this colonial experience, African culture and particularly

that of the Yoruba have been under constant barrage from the forces of change. In this process of culture – change, every modification in any one department has naturally affected the cultural system as a whole. The demands of the modern technologies and scientific civilisation have constantly imposed quite a lot of changes and modifications on the culture and tradition of the Yoruba.

From the social sphere, Yoruba culture has witnessed a lot of changes. Western education has greatly changed the outlook of the average Yoruba person. Breakthrough in technology such as the television, good as it may, has dealt incalculable damage on the African culture. In fact, it could be described as a rape on African culture in general and that of the Yoruba in particular. Our culture has been in danger of being trampled upon by the apparently unbridled forces of globalisation with an import of universal images emanating from the electronic media. This, Adesanya described as cultural imperialism.

In the area of dressing for instance, the Yoruba had evolved a modest style of dressing before the advent of the Europeans (Daramola and Jeje, 1967). Men and women have their distinctive styles of dressing. The men, for instance have various styles that are designed to suit various occasions. Examples of these are*agbada, gbariye, oyala, buba* and *soro* for men while the women wear*iro* and *buba*. These various designs may be made either with foreign materials or made out of the product of indigenous technology called *asooke.* All these Yoruba traditional wears were designed in such a way that the nakedness of both sexes was covered. Apart from this, the clothes were also designed to suit our climatic conditions. This is however in sharp contrast to what obtains in our midst in these modern times. As against the traditional wears, men and women now prefer to wear English dresses such as shirts and trousers, suit, skirt and blouses etc.

Foreign technology with its attendant cultural imperialism had succeeded in making us black Europeans. We have not only abandoned our cultural ways of dressing but also we have at the same time thrown away the concept of *Omoluabi* (well behave child) that was handed over to us by our forefathers. One could hardly differentiate our men from women today on account of dressing as our ladies freely wear male dresses such as shirts and trousers without shame. Suggestive and immoral styles of dressing now pervade our environment with impunity. This ugly trend, however, is not unconnected with the unguarded import of foreign culture through the medium of foreign films, most of which are pornographic and erotic in nature.

Another area where foreign technology had impacted Yoruba culture is that of panegyrics (*oriki).* These are inspirational and motivational words with which the Yoruba do appreciate loved ones (Daramola and Jeje, 1967). There is no family in Yorubaland without its own panegyric. For example, the king (*oba*) in Yorubaland could be praised thus:

"*Kabiyesi, oba 'luaye*
Odundunaso'ded'ero
Oba ade-ki-ile-roju
Oba ade-ki-ona-rorun" (Daramola and Jeje, 1967).

The above panegyric (*oriki*) reveals the ability of the king to maintain peace in his domain. Panegyrics (*Oriki*) occupy a prominent place in the culture and tradition of the Yoruba people. Apart from being a veritable tool for motivation and inspiration, it is equally of great historical importance. Through listening to the words as the panegyric (*oriki*) is being chanted, a lot of facts are revealed regarding the historical background of the family of such an individual. It serves as a very good source of historical reconstruction. However, this aspect of Yoruba culture is fast being eroded as a result of the influence of foreign technology. Individual hardly know their family panegyric these days.

Another area where foreign technology had influenced Yoruba culture negatively was that of morals. Africans, just like any other people, have a system of values and standard of conduct. Every culture has its own concept of what is good or bad and what is acceptable as good behaviour. For example, among the Hausa, and the Yoruba ethnic groups in Nigeria, the well behaved man or man of character is referred to as *Mutumin Kirki* in Hausa and *Omoluabi* in Yoruba. These two words encapsulate the Hausa and the Yoruba concept of morality. In both situations, prior to colonisation and globalisation, evidence of sound morals was not predicated on physical attributes or prowess. In terms of usage, the good man in both cultures connotes a man of character. A man is not referred to as *Mutumin Kirki* or *Omoluabi* simply because he is wealthy or an achiever in one area of life or the other (Koseemani 2000)

Among the Yoruba, *Omoluabi* is a product of*iwa* meaning "character". In both cultures, good character is fundamental to the concept of well-behaved man. Consequently, both *kirki* and *iwa*can be referred to as the inner quality or embodiment of qualities which find expression in good moral behaviour among Hausa and Yoruba respectively. This is clearly evident by the Hausa proverb that says "character is a line drawn on a rock, nobody can erase it" (Koseemani, 2000). Among the Yoruba, a person is morally evaluated on the basis of his/her character. For example, the Yoruba has a common saying that clearly demonstrated her fervent belief in the concept of good morals. It goes thus: iwarerelesoeniyan (meaning: good character is the adornment of a human being). This implies that the difference between one person and the other in terms of morality is the quality of their character. The 'well behaved child' *Omoluabi*, must exhibit the following virtues in order to be considered a morally good person: Truthfulness, honesty, fidelity, kindness, justice, fairness among others.

In the traditional Yoruba society, prior to the advent of foreign culture, the concept of *omoluabi* (well behaved child) was greatly upheld. The Yoruba were proud of the kind of home training they gave to their children. They believed that whatever virtue or vice a child manifest in the society is traceable to the kind of training or upbringing he had received from home. They took time to bring up their children by inculcating in them, right from childhood, moral virtues such as that of respect for elders, diligence, temperance and truthfulness.

However, foreign technology with its unrestricted import of foreign films, most of which were violent, obscene and erotic in nature had greatly eroded most of these virtues among the Yoruba today. These days, any attempt to uphold moral virtues such as modesty and good character is regarded as uncivilized. The get-rich-quick syndrome with its attendant criminal activities such as ritual killings, advance free fraud popularly referred to as '419', yahoo plus, stealing, cheating, untruthfulness, armed robbery and various acts of criminality now becomes the order of the day. Most of the vices mentioned above are not unconnected with

the evil that is learnt from the foreign films that we watch in our various homes whether on the televisions or other electronic media.

Music is another area where foreign technology had adversely impacted Yoruba culture. The place of music cannot be over-emphasised in African culture and most especially, that of Yoruba. From history, music is one of the commonest ways by which man expresses his emotion, feeling and sentiment. In fact, music as a phenomenon is part and parcel of human life (Ayeyemi, 2006). Music, according to the Encyclopaedia Americana (2003) "is the art by which a composer through a performer as intermediary communicates to a listener certain ideas, feeling or state of mind". Music occupies a prominent position in the daily activity of the Africans because of the functional role it performs in the socio-economic life of the people. In African society, most especially, among the Yoruba, music is almost an indispensable factor in daily activities. It is a life pattern by which other cultural aspects of a given society is understood (Ayeyemi, 2006).

Music serves as a source of entertainment and also accompanies the various ceremonies and festivals of the people. Music playing accompanied by drumming and dancing was used to entertain members of the community in the evening after the day's work (Akinfemiwa, 1994).

Music, in the olden days was of tremendous historical significance. Among the Yoruba, quite of a lot of historical information could be deduced by inference from the indigenous singing and drumming of the people. For example, during the funeral ceremony of an aged person, a lot of traditional and folk music, full of proverbs, myth, panegyrics (*oriki)*, and incantatory songs were rendered. Most of these *orikis* were full of praises of the virtues, qualities and special attributes of the deceased families. In this modern time, however foreign music is fast replacing the traditional ones. In many social gatherings, today, foreign music such as reggae, rock, and jazz are now in most cases preferred to the traditional ones. The result of this however, was the loss of our cultural values and orientation. The hitherto philosophical, educative and informative ingredients derived from our traditional music had been eroded. The worst hits are our youths who daily swallow the corrupt pills of foreign music with its attendant evil and negative tendencies.

The Influence of Computer on African Beliefs

In this age of globalization, the influence that foreign technology has had on African culture and most especially that of the Yoruba cannot be over-emphasized. Prominent among these is the influence of computer technology. The computer, though, a product of technological revolution, has served as to affirm the religious beliefs of the Africans in general and that of the Yoruba in particular. Computer has the capacity to store information accurately and rapidly than man (Omole, 1996 cited in Ogungbemi, 2003).

Furthermore, the computer further reinforces the belief of the Yoruba regarding the nature of God as all knowing and incomprehensible. The mystery embedded in the output of the computer in view of its high speed, improved performance, intelligence, reliability, versatility, economy and security only affirm the omniscience, omnipresence and God's providence on man and its activities (Olasanmi, 1996 cited in Ogungbemi, 2003).

Another area where foreign technology had impacted positively on African culture is that of preservation of our cultural heritage. The place of films, video and audio recordings in the preservation of our cultural values cannot be over-emphasized. Through the use of video coverage, events, cultural facts and artefacts could be accurately recorded, well documented and preserved for future use. Through these technological inventions such as audio-visual tapes, events that have occurred several years back could be recalled back for the purpose of investigation and research (Familugba and Babalola, 2006).

Coupled with the above,is the internet and its influence on African culture. The internet, which is a global computer network which provides a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks across the world to your house, office, school for easy access. Internet occupies a central place in the school of information technology. It makes all kinds of data transmissions faster; gives access to information from all over the world and acts as an incentive to combine and evaluate this information (Kumuyi, 2007).

In spite of all these benefits however, the internet technology is not without its vices, most especially as it affects African culture and that of Yoruba in particular. The evils associated with the usage of the internet could be any of the following: Through the medium of the internet, one could be initiated into cultism, Satanism; enticed to unprofitable, corrupt cyber relationship; unwholesome materials such as pornography, violence provoking materials that encourages dangerous or illegal activities (Kumuyi, 2007). Quite a lot of evil and immoral ways of life being exhibited by our youths today in our society is not unconnected with what they learnt from the internet

Conclusion

In the course of this paper, we have attempted an examination of the impact of foreign technology as it affects African culture in general with particular reference to that of the Yoruba. It has been pointed out that foreign technology, good as it may, have done more harm than good to African culture and tradition. In view of this therefore, concerted efforts should be made towards the promotion of our cultural values and orientation; our leaders should lead by example in promoting our cultural values. Areas of dressing code should be re-emphasized in our society; most especially in our various institutions of learning. This should form an important aspect of our educational curriculum. The national regulatory agencies should intensify efforts in censoring the types of films that are imported into the country with an effort to discouraging those that promotes immorality, violence and other vices.

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