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# Future World and the Intercultural Influence on Gender Roles in Africa: A Philosophical Discourse

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## **Abstract**

Culture evolves from the very life of the people. Hence, every human society guides its cultural space against foreign infiltrations. It is a popular knowledge that if such infiltrations are allowed to take root and grow, they will impact negatively on what the people hold sacred. Africans too have that conscious and inexorable desire within to preserve their culture against foreign influences. As culturally conservative people, they have been on guard to save their culture from Western adulterations. In Africa, Gender roles are being assigned according to the people's belief of what gender roles should be. In recent times, gender roles have been unfortunately mutated in Africa due to intercultural relationships that bring with new concepts which challenge her well known concept of gender and these, in turn, breed issues in the society. This paper applied the method of critical analysis in highlighting and studying some of the ways African culture has been influenced by Western culture. Do we accept these influences and what hope do we have for future African world?

**Key Words:** Culture, inter-culture, gender roles, transgender, identity, globalization future world.

## **Introduction**

A social, non-social and metaphysical phenomena control life events. Some of these phenomena are always consistent while some are not. Study shows that natural phenomena are usually the consistent ones. Cultural laws are not the same with natural laws and as such they vary from one culture to another. Africans were colonized by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the colonization brought with it inter-cultural influences. They have their own ways of doing things which is different from other cultures. This is a kind of cultural heritage which is handed down from one generation to another. An attempt to interchange one for another creates problem and usually results in the loss of one's cultural identity. Africans as a people avoid it at all cost. Despite the fact that there have been tremendous efforts to preserve our culture as a people, there is still evidence of some areas that our culture has been bastardized by cultural elements usually Western culture. This was as a result of been colonized by them. If we are given the option to choose who we are, our culture over some other persons own, we would gladly choose our personhood, our

culture and our identity. Our ability to hold dear that which is ours tenaciously against all odds is what makes us unique as a person and as a people. It is this same way that Africans protect and conserve their culture and identity as a people. Culture and the way it is expressed are the ways of life of a person or a group of people over a long period of time. This cultural expression, has over the years, manifested through physical forms handed down from one generation to the other. Some of them are, artifacts, buildings or landscapes, voices, values, traditions and oral history. Cultural expressions are the various means of preserving the links between the past and the present and also allow the transmission of its different shades and colors to future generation. Africans have that conscious and inexorable desire within to preserve their culture against external infiltrations. The inter and intra cultural mix has left Africa's conservative nature weak. Many of these influences are seen in the ways gender construction and assignment is represented. This work is a critical inquiry essentially in the form of reflections. Insights informing this paper were obtained from several studies on gender studies in Africa, books and studies on the African worldview, theories of effective learning and communication as well as from the web. The information from these sources were used to clearly portray that what works for A, will not necessarily work for B. This article presents problems associated with the inter mix of culture and what hope holds for the future African man's identity if he continues to lose himself in the wake of Westernization.

### **Culture**

Philosophy is a discipline that questions and confronts already established beliefs of people, their customs and cultural practices. This is seen in the lives of the people, their behaviors and world view. Culture has no generally acceptable definition but evidence of a people's culture could be seen in the manner it manifests itself. Okoro and Oguanya (2014:52) said that, "culture is manifest through the arts as well as the social structures and institutions of the society".

Culture has a global character that is the reason why we have as many cultures as there exist people in the world. Uto-Ezeajugh, (2010:p205) said that "culture contains the means of expressing all thoughts and emotions". One thing that is worthy to be noted is that culture constitutes the overall ways of a people. This includes speech, emotions, behavior, and beliefs. It is the people's ways of life in entirety. The culture of a people is their philosophy of life. It affects everything that concerns them. This is the reason why Soetan (2001:p15) stated that "culture therefore structures and determines the way social institutions shape life as well as cultivated and imposed behavior communally transmitted from one generation to another". According to Taylor in Oguagua (2004:p59-81) "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society". Melling and Barry (1992:1) said that, "cultural expression can be transformed and transmitted as shown by the development of industrial societies in Europe subsequently transmitted throughout the world". So it is not static as some might believe that it is. It is susceptible to changes from time despite the beliefs of choresterominded people. Oguagua (2004:62) also wrote that "Culture should then refer to those elements which help in refining, cultivating, reshaping, designing and developing man towards mental and physical endowment".

We can now say that culture deals with meaning and history. Its meaningful nature gives it a metaphysical background and its historical nature makes it exist between space and time. Culture is not static. New traditions emerge as a more recent version of what used to be and they should replace old ones. Where matters of concern should be raised is if the reality on ground is not what used to be and will be one that will cause more harm than good. Every community has some values or significance for their cultural heritage and this value is determined by the values they

place on their culture and how they protect it from external invasions. It should however, be noted that values do change; even in those so called “traditional” communities values are not universally accepted by every member of the community; there are always dissenting voices- people who ascribe different values and hence significance- other than that held by the other members of a community, to a place or object. It is important to us as Africans to preserve our cultural heritage, because it helps us preserve our identity as a people. It helps us preserve ‘the African hood of the African’. Cultural heritage is central to protecting our identity and our essence as a people. It is what connects us to our past which is highly important for our future.

The uniqueness of each people’s culture is part of the reason why they guard it jealously. Every African community has that inexorable desire to protect their culture against external invasion. Africans are culturally conservative and have been fighting to save their cultures from western adulterations. One of such battle ground in these clashes between African and western cultures are on gender identity. In Africa gender identity is the product of nature such that any behavior contrary to acceptable gender role is seen as abominable. Thus transgendered identities promoted by western liberal culture are increasingly challenging the conservative gender assignment in Africa. Cultural behaviors are constructed in such way that it reflects a universally accepted way of life for the entire community. Mbah (2020, p. 8) noted that ‘because behaviors are performed over a long period of time, they turn up normative and habitual’. People who are protagonists of each culture are naturally inclined to preserve and protect it.

A lot of new Gender identities have come up to disrupt the orderliness in the society. This was as a result of cultural infiltrations. Cultural infiltrations came alongside with it new Gender identities undermining what Africans believe in on how gender representations should be assigned. These new Gender Identities makes it more and more difficult to assign Gender roles as it has always been done in our traditional African society. Globalization has brought with it inter-cultural mix-up. Simply put, this means cultures aligning and entangling with each other. This usually takes place when there is a Mass movement of people through the process of globalization. Africa as a people was among the countries of the world that experienced this mass movement and it is still ongoing as of today.

### **Gender Roles and Transgender**

The term gender and its application is the main focus of this paper. The term before becoming a world known issue of global concern has travelled a lot, through both time and place. Its meaning has been changed over time. Oyewunmi (2002, p. 23) said that “the term can be traced as far back as days of modernization, a time when the European cultural hegemony was being established and expanded the world over”. The term was then universalized and it became an issue of global concern when disparity came in between the genders.

Gender as a concept is often time used interchangeably with the term “sex”, but they are two different concepts. Sex has to do with biological components of an individual that rightly confirms one to be either a boy or a girl. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the meanings, values, and characteristics that people ascribe to different sexes. Ann Oakley was the first social scientist to distinguish the concept of gender from the concept of sex. Gender has to do with the roles we play in the society which has nothing to do with our sex. It can be linked to what the society expects us to do as members of a given society. There is no reason why distinctions should be made between both because it would like we are comparing something natural with something social. Western

culture and African culture are not the same. Efiritha Chauraya (2012) in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* (Volume 14, No.3, 2012) said that “Europe and Africa differ in culture, values and identities, it goes without saying that the application of gender in European context differs from its application in an African context”. In Africa, gender is seen as sexual attributes one is blessed with at birth. One is also expected to play roles in the society in accordance with your assigned sex. In Western culture, it does not necessarily mean that you will play the role of your natural given sex; you are expected to play the role you feel comfortable with. This means that you can have the biological attributes that makes you a boy, but you feel yourself comfortably playing the role of a woman. That automatically becomes your gender.

Gender discourses are constructed alongside cultural discourse. Cultural concepts, traditions and practices in Africa’s works alongside gender assignation. Gender roles are normally based on societal cultural practices, its norms and values, its tradition and heritage and of course nature.

Western world and their vast knowledge in science and technology are trying to lay claim as the only custodian of in-depth knowledge which undoubtedly makes up people’s culture, but research has shown us that other numerous cultures does exist and they also has their own way of viewing the world which constitute their world view.

From the above, it is evident that there is a specific way of assigning gender role in the society. An individual is expected to contribute to the society according to societal beliefs and norms. The society clearly beliefs that there is a great lot of difference between each sexes. Some of these are within and only expressed outside through gender roles. It is this strong belief and conviction that enable them assign gender role appropriately. So it is obvious that the concept of gender was made by man to suit him. This was made clearer by Amy Blackstone (2002 p 335-338a) when she said that

Because humans create the concept of gender socially, gender is referred to as a social construction. The social construction of gender is demonstrated by the fact that individuals, groups and societies ascribe particular traits, statuses, or values to individuals purely because of their sex, yet this ascription differ across societies and cultures, and over time within the same society.

On gender roles, Amy Blackstone (2002, pp. 335-338b) defined it thus,

Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individual and their environments and they give individuals cues about what sort of behavior is believed to be appropriate for what sex. Appropriate gender roles are defined according to a society’ beliefs about differences between the sexes

Having carefully established that Gender as a context in European culture is not the same thing in African context and as such its application will differ, one can then clearly establish that the future of the African culture is at stake if we keep on accepting the Western culture and lifestyle. The damage has already been done and the future of the African man and his culture is at stake. Sex and Gender are used interchangeably to mean the same thing as noted in African culture. He went on to say that if you were born a male, a male you shall be and if you are born a female, a female

you shall be. It is not the same thing in the European context. One can change ones sex and assumes the gender one feels free with. One can change ones gender in European context but in Africa, ones gender is in accordance with nature which means it cannot be changed.

Science has herald the death of the notion of gender as we have come to know it in Africa. Tina chanter (2006, p. 1) noted it when she said,

It was only a matter of time. We have heard about the death of God and the end of metaphysics; now the death of gender has been announced. These are interesting and difficult times for gender theorists. Science fiction scenarios in which people morph from male to female in the blink of an eye have become all too familiar. The line between fiction and reality is becoming fuzz now that we can present ourselves as whatever gender we want through internet personae.

This is what Westernization has brought down to us and we are following the trend even though in some African culture it is seen as a taboo till date. Western culture is challenging our tried and trusted ways of doing things which equate gender with society (culture or history) and sex with biology (physiology or nature). Gender is lived right from the time we were born. It is a set of cultural dictates according to which we expected to construct ourselves accordingly. As soon as we are born with a male or female genital, our gender roles has been mapped out already for us by our family and the society at large. We are expected to act accordingly. Any other thing short of the above is culturally prohibited then. It is not the same thing now s our defenses have been growing weaker and weaker as a result of intercultural influence. Our schools, churches, homes etc are now getting filled up with Tran's individuals and the society is getting more and more confused. How can you treat a boy born with all the features that makes him a boy behaving like a girl and even walking like one? One could as well ask what the world is turning into? Western culture says one is free himself or herself however way he or she feels like but our African culture frowns at such behavior. Some children behaving as such are even seen as "ogbanje". Our culture is getting infiltrated by the day by western elements and one could not help but wonder what would be left of the future.

### **Transgender**

My concern here is what should be acceptable in the society when assigning gender roles, nature or one's inclination (Transgender)? Transgender simply put is a situation where one has the inclination to change ones naturally given sex. It is something that has to do with choice one makes as an individual. Transsexual individuals experience a disconnect their sex and gender (role). One could not but wonder if such disconnection could be explained biologically. We cannot ascertain whether if trans individuals was as a result of natural or genetic claims because we are all born into the world filled with gender norms and of which we are expected to act accordingly. Science helps one too to morph from one sex to the other when the person undergoes surgery. Nature has structured gender roles played in the society according to the different sexes (male and female) we have in the society. This is what we have come to know as biological differences In addition to biological differences, which is inborn and as well attuned with one's nature, there are also temperament differences, abilities, differences etc. This psychological and biological difference influences the roles they play. Interfering with it will amount to questioning nature.

Cultural practices works simultaneously with natural laws in the same way that traditional gender roles does. Influx or inter mix of culture has introduced new gender identities other than the ones nature has given us. The introduction of this new transgendered identity culture has gained momentum in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tina chanter (2006: p1) stated that ‘it was only a matter of time, we have heard about the end of metaphysics, now the end of Gender has been announced’. The end that Tina Chanter was prophesying of here is the end of Gender roles in accordance to nature because the line between reality and fiction is getting thinner and thinner. Science has given people the advantage to choose whichever gender they wish and live their life according to such ways. This is challenging old long tradition and ways of doing things of which our people were known for.

Sex and Gender though looking alike does not mean the same thing as Sex supersedes Gender because Gender roles are assigned according to one’s sex. One’s sex is within while Gender is outside. Gender is what expresses what we have within. The mapping of one’s sex was already done by nature. Gender and sex works together and any attempt at separating them should be seen as an aberration. Delphy (1993, p.4) said that “Sex itself is a sign, it’s status is symbolic certain bodies came to be marked as female, while others are marked mal”’. Tina Chanter echoing this said’ while borrowing the trappings of gender, sex is envisaged as its significance where already in place inscribed by nature’.

The existent of other Gender was as a result of Western, advanced era which is the 21<sup>st</sup> century that we in now. This been the result of globalization which introduced to us a free world where everyone is free to live as he or she wants including going against nature. Its existent is putting to try all our age long beliefs. Tina Chanter echoed this again when she pointed out,

Transgendered identities including intersexuality and other cross over terms are Challenging tried and trusted feminist formulae, which equate gender with society (or culture, or history) and sex with biology for physiology or nature).

The above statement includes assigning of gender roles to these cross over individuals. The line is increasingly growing blurrier and blurrier. This makes it difficult to know the roles they will now play in the society. Nature and Science seem to be at par with each other.

### **Identity**

A philosophical interpretation of identity says that’ it is whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable over time’. For the purpose of this work, what we are interested in is Gender identity. It is the personal sense of one’s gender. Gender identity can relate with one’s assigned sex at birth or in total variance to it. One naturally exhibits character traits in relation to one’s gender. The term Gender identity according to Wikipedia was coined by Robert Jessese Stoller an American Professor of Psychiatrics. He identified three key components in the formation of one’s core gender identity.

- 1 Biological and hormonal influence
- 2 Sex assignment at birth

### 3 Environmental and psychological influence

Gender identities came to be as a result of discordances between one's felt gender and one's assigned gender. These discordances according to medical reports may be especially acute in regard to expectations about appropriate behavior for a particular gender. Some persons express themselves as females whereas their genetic connotation makes them male and vice versa

At early stage in life, some individuals discover for themselves that they are not comfortable with the gender they are born with or one which nature has imposed on them. This might start as a feeling of discomfort which can lead to outright denial or rejection of one's gender and opting for another. There are various ways one can start an outward rejection of one's gender. It can be in through rejection of stereotypic ways of dressing, poise, toys, speech etc.

#### **Globalization and Future world**

Globalization as a concept is loaded with meanings. There are as many definitions of globalization as there are scholars who are interested in it. Globalization as the word implies is global in nature as it involves mass movement of people of all race and culture. Right from the dawn of creation, globalization had already started taking place. Umoh (2007: p658) said "globalization refers to the growing integration of the world economies. It is the world intermingling of culture, politics, economics and technology". Daouas (2001, pp. 6-8) on the other hand said that "globalization is multi-dimensional, affecting all aspects of life-economic, cultural, environmental and social as well as relations between government and nations of the five continents". Globalization involves relationship, movement which ultimately leads to intermingling of cultures. Globalization has both positive and negative impact. Many a times the negative aspect seems to outweigh the positive impact especially when the intention of one or both parties is not made clear. In Africa, it is heading towards the extinction of our culture as foreign cultures are now taking the place of our own culture. Dukor (2010, p.135) asserting to this by saying that "there has been a historical erosion of African identity and authenticity through the process of colonialism, neo colonialism and imperialism". He went on to say that Africans are on the verge of losing their identity to that one thing which is meant for their growth.

Ugwueye (2007, p.109) submits that

Africans risk losing their cultural heritage in the face of globalization, not because their heritage is obsolete or inferior but because people have been so taken in by what is Western. This sort of cultural imperialism, which seeks to enslave the African mind, has left in its wake a clueless or culturally disoriented people.

Our people have so embraced everything Western and see as a ray beacon of light that would lead them into something brighter. Our people are on the verge of losing our identity in the wake of Westernization. Our cultural values and norms are now made to entangle with globalization and everything that comes with it. One could as well ask when globalization became so powerful to the extent that it now threatens our organized ways of doing things. Globalization is seen around us and in everything we do that it is now becoming impossible to see traces of African culture.



With the rate Africans are losing their identity what will be the fate of future African world? Umeogu and Ojiakor (2012: 2, p 123-1217) has this to say

Who am i? Who are we? This is the type of question that subsequent generations will ask if the rate of cultural de-pendency on foreign material is not checkmated. This situation will be an aftermath of the elimination of culture. When a country consciously or unconsciously loses its identifying traits, what will they become? If “A “ceases to be “A” or blends into “B”, what happens to “A” when it comes to sovereignty and location?

### **Future world**

Future world on the other hand has to do with continuity of a people. We are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century now and the world is already getting more confused by the day. Many cultures are facing the threat of going extinct. Western forces on the hand are pushing for domination as we can see in our world of today. Recently, the stories making round is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine keeps resisting with everything they got. This is to ensure their continuity as a people. They are fighting to retain their culture and identity as a people. They are also looking up to other bigger countries of the world to come to their aid. Such invasions usually take place when one country feel that they are more superior than the other. The trend has no end as countries device their own means of domination. Here in Nigeria, we are also experiencing western style of dressing, behavior, relationships and even gender roles. Our youths are boldly coming out to reject their naturally assigned gender roles in accordance to their biological sex and taking up other gender roles. We see them everywhere now, be it homes, churches, schools, market places etc. This boldness was brought about by our African culture entangling with the Western culture. Its influence is seen in our society. We have every reason to be worried of the future of our world.

### **Inter-cultural influence on African culture**

When we talk of influence, we are looking at it both ways weighing the different options available to us. One thing is certain, no two cultures are the same and what works for may not work for B no matter how attractive the situation might be. If a person wants to influence another person, the disadvantage a times outweighs the advantage. The motive at the end of it all is to subdue and conquer and any resistance is met with severe penalties. Mba (2020, p. 8) noted ‘issues of cultural conflict and or modification, or erasure ultimately boil down to power struggle, empire building and domain construction’.

My submission in this paper is that Africans has their own way of doing things before the advent of colonization and infiltration of African culture by Western elements. Western civilization and culture has precariously contaminated the traditional values including Gender roles, African culture leaving it bare and an easy prey. We have been able to prove in this paper that Africans had established, well before the advent of colonialism, a pattern of well-structured process of government and generally acceptable institutional rule-making process in such a way that African people and their ways of doing things were a sight to behold for the greedy Western merchants. There is no argument that Africans would have made tremendous progress in growing and improving their cultural values without external influence. All colonization did was to retard our growth culturally by forcefully infiltrating our culture with theirs. As Dare Arowolu noted,

Western civilization and culture began to creep into African socio-cultural Milieu first, with the contact of Europeans with Africa, a consequence of Berlin conference in the quest for imperial pilfering of African resources and, later, consolidated by the unstoppable wave of globalization. It is important to stress that colonialism distorted and retarded the pace and tempo of cultural growth and trend of civilization in Africa. One of the most profound consequences of colonization has been how the political and economic rape of the colonies has also led to what sometimes seem to be an unbridgeable cultural gap between the nations that were the beneficiaries of colonization and those that were the victims of the colonial assault.

From the above assertion it is obvious that all western civilization did to us was to rob us of our identity or what I had earlier on referred to as the “The Africanhood in the African”. Dare also asserted that,

It is appalling to note that two hundred years or so of Colonization were not only destructive in terms of cultural before colonialism but also precariously retrogressive as the continent was robbed of decades of opportunities-opportunities of self-development, opportunities of self-government and, indeed, opportunities of self-styled technological developmental pace.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has shown the overall influence that the influx of Western culture has on African culture. New cultural elements introduced will cause our culture go extinct when not checkmated. There is every need that what is new should not be used to throw away what has always been there. Africans should never let go of that conscious and inexorable desire within to preserve their culture against all odd.

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