

## Child Exposure to Media and Cultural Imperialism: Challenges to African Socio Cultural and Political Development

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### Abstract

A child is a gift to every social group in which the child is born and therefore must be raised to sustain the survival and development of that group. Failure to raise a child to appreciate his group usually results to self-hatred and hatred against the system. The development and socialization of African child can be difficult in the face of wide spread of uncontrolled access to public media coupled with the cultural imperialism which is using the international media and the concept of globalization as smoke screen to penetrate every system. This paper's focus is on analysing the relationship between child development, socialization, media exposure and cultural imperialism and the consequences using, available empirical, ethnographic and other literary documents. The paper critically examined the ways to curb the extent of cultural imperialism and self-hatred among the African children leaving, suggestions on the practical ways of approaching issue. Meanwhile the paper acknowledges some level of limitations such as non-empirically justifiable based on primary data.

**Keywords:** Child development; Media exposure; Cultural imperialism; Africa; Socio cultural/political development

### Introduction

Socio psychological development in children cannot be as simple as the physiological aspect of it, which relatively operates in an automatic manner. This is due to the fact that such development in this aspect (socio psychological aspect), requires more carefulness and regular attention (in terms of information and habitual activities) irrespective of what you may have provided the child with (in terms of material things). Failure to keep careful observation over the child will result to problems that will affect the individual, family and the society in general, in the later part of his or her life [1].

There are factors which can lead to this chaos such as the environment in which the child find himself, the exposure to information, imageries and the likes, etc. [2]. These factors are significantly responsible for how the child will cope with, and adapt into the socio cultural environment in which he/she belong. Of paramount importance, here is the availability of media channels and the form of information they spread, the child's access to them, and the parents' reaction in the particular context [3]. According to Ezeh [4], the media channels are the most powerful link through which individuals and groups can be absorbed into certain orientations, which may or may not be pleasant to them in the long run, considering the cultural cum philosophical underpinning of such orientation/socialization being championed by such media channels. Largely, all these amount to cultural imperialism, a term that captures the cultural politics and domination by the "superior groups" against the rest of the societies across the world.

The stage at which a child started having access to media channels, the type of information and the parents'/guidance's interpretation and reaction to such situation, all work as determinant factors in the child's

perception of his/her social group /society, and the contribution he/she may offer to the further development of such group. Meanwhile, this paper is focused to unravel the early child media exposure and cultural imperialism, and its implication to the socio-cultural development in Africa. The present study relied on the historical and administrative (Secondary) data, in tracing the, foreign elements that are slipping into African culture through international and local media, making the African children to unconsciously hate their indigenous culture. Consequently, the study critically examined the practical ways to approach the challenges with some valuable suggestions bearing in mind the limitation of the study due to lack of empirical data.

### Socialization and Child Development as a Conventional Phenomenon

Socialization according to Otite [5] is the process by which human beings, who are biologically human, become socially human. In line with the definition, man acquires his social behaviour which differentiate him from other lower infra sentient being, by a process adopted by the society in question. Fletcher [6] also maintained that socialization is the process by which society transmits its culture from one generation to the next and adopts the individual to the accepted and approved ways of organized social life. Meanwhile, child development in a more psychological framework is captured in the broader human developmental processes. According to Ugwu [7], the complexity of human developmental processes can be classified into biological, cognitive and social developmental processes, which have stages that are involved. While the biological development involves the changes in the individuals physical nature, cognitive processes involves the intellectual development that are characterized by gradual unfolding of the brain to assimilate and accommodate changes within and outside the body. Nevertheless, the social processes involve changes in the child's social relationship with other people and the internalization of the norms, values, and social expectancies of a group

[7]. Furthermore, in Piaget's theoretical legacy, the stages of child development include sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage and formal operational stage all, which account for the cognitive cum social development of the child [8].

Socialization and child social development which is the main concern of this paper, follow these processes and stages mentioned though, not absolutely, as there are alternative explanations of the child developmental processes such as Freudian psychosexual and personality development and Erikson's, socio emotional development [7]. While the child is developing in the three major processes/aspects (biological, cognitive and social), as mentioned above, there are multiple responsibilities for the parents and other members of the family, to stamp in, into the child, the image, norms and values of the social group, which he/she belong to. This is to ensure his appreciation of his social group. The paramount interest here is to build for the child, a foundation that will enable him to develop passion for his group, and participate in the development of such group. However, the socialization of a child especially in the modern era, is becoming difficult for most parents due to the wide spread of access to information, knowledge and media facilities by the children irrespective of age and location. This in the short and long run has created a situation in which the media channels take pre-eminence in determining what the child learns and the picture he creates about the things surrounding him [9]. Media channels such as television channels of different categories are determinant of the soul's geography [10]. It builds up incrementally a cognitive arrangement of expectations. It does so in much the same way that school lessons slowly, over the years, tutor the unformed mind and teach it how to think [11].

Muncie [12] observed that various families no longer watch television together and parents often do not know what their children are viewing. This, which is viewed as unsupervised freedom to mass media, has always been considered a major source of trouble and threat to the children's moral development. There is no doubt that the impact of the media on children's lives is broadly considered within what is referred to as media effects debates which to a great extent focuses on the potentially negative impact of the media on children's lives through such means as video violence, gambling, educational performance, mass consumerism etc. Indeed, socialization of children from the early stage in this modern time when there are myriads of media channels, displaying and disseminating all kinds of information, can be difficult. This reflect on the way many parents are now dragging the mind of their children with the numerous public media channels such as television channels, radio stations, social media (Facebook, whatsapp, tweeter, Instagram etc), magazines and all the likes. This is further complicated by the uncontrollable access to the facilities and links of these media channels irrespective of age and locations.

### **Child Exposure to Media and the Foreign Culture**

World over, the advancement in technology and the continued spread of the idea of human right and freedom, have made a huge impact on the societies across the globe. The impact, specifically on the part of dissemination and consumption of information in the society especially, among the children in modern time, has complicated the activity of child socialization and development. These complications have resulted into certain negative outcomes such as poor performance in academic by the teenagers, attention problems on the side of little children, morality, individual/collective cultural identity problem and

host of other issues which are becoming a threat to the survival of individuals and groups (society) [13-16].

Of major concern here among others, is the impact of media exposure on the cultural identity of the nations who are on the minority in terms of the popular media channels. The gradual inculcation of the values of foreign culture (usually the Western Europe and North America), in the children who constantly have access to these media links, results to the confusion and dejection of the indigenous culture [4]. International and local media are the powerful instrument for domination by one group over another, using the cultural undertone in every information displayed, to make the patronisers unconscious of other cultural norms and values other than the one being projected [17]. According to Ezeh [4] the variants of the media that have become internationalized are in the main either of European or American origin, or at any rate none is African. Effective domestication is yet to be achieved in Africa. What is produced and disseminated directly through international radio, television or print media houses promote foreign values and foreign knowledge systems. Locally produced ones at best, make only ineffectual efforts at serving authentic indigenous interest, at worst, they are crude imitations of foreign ones [18]. The constant access to international and local media channels and links by the children without or even with the presence of the guidance exposes the children to the alien culture. This alien culture gradually isolate them from the main indigenous culture thereby making them unconscious about their environment or at worst, make them to develop self hatred due to the perceived inferiority of the culture of the group in which they belong to. Owing to the fact that most youngsters are still looking for their own identities, they are a lot more vulnerable to suggestions and all the perceived peer stress from the media, which can overcome what they have already formed of their own identities[16].

### **Cultural Imperialism, for Who and Against Who?**

Imperialism is the creation and maintenance of unequal relationships between civilizations favouring, the more powerful civilization. Cultural imperialism in extension of imperialism is the cultural aspect of imperialism. It is the practice of promoting and imposing a culture, usually of politically powerful nations over less potent societies. It is the cultural hegemony of those industrialized or economically influential countries, which determine general cultural values and "standardized civilizations" throughout the world [19].

In international communication theory and research, cultural imperialism theory argues that audience across the globe are heavily affected by media messages emanating from the western industrialized countries [3]. Grounded in an understanding of media as cultural industries, cultural imperialism is firmly rooted in a political economy perspective on international communication [20,21].

Empirical studies have revealed that the flow of news and other products of international media and some times, the "imitating local media" are biased in favour of industrialized countries, reflecting in the quantity and quality of the products of these media, exported by the west, and imported by the developing nations[22-24]. In view of the positive impact of cultural imperialism on the part of industrialized nations, and the negative impacts on the part of the developing nations, a number of debates directly and indirectly had taken place. This is to create a balance in the international scene on what should be the extent of restriction on the type of information circulated and the level of coverage of the interests of the nations involved in the geo-

communication networks [3,25,26]. Unfortunately, due to the immeasurable contribution of cultural imperialism to the continuous expansion of political cum economic hegemony by the powerful nations involved, and their domination of the international scene, the debates over the cultural imperialism via international media had been stalled by the influential nations. This has resulted to the less developed nations making a background argument over the issue, which are more or less regarded as irrelevant objections. Such situation manifested in the 1973 UNESCO conference in Kenya, which resulted in the absolute withdrawal of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, leading to the defacto fall of the global media debate[3]. Cultural imperialism via international media is a smokescreen for the industrialized nations especially Western Europe and North America in extending their dominance over other societies. This further undermines the social and economic cum political development of these societies being dominated as everything they intend to do must follow the already set standard by these nations for such activity to have international coloration. In the process of pursuing this, the developing nations end up in servicing the interest of these influential nations.

The fact here is that the mysterious wave of cultural imperialism via international media and sometimes, biased local media, do saturate the environment of the less developed nations, and trigger other unfavourable effects. This in the end perpetuates the downgrading of everything about these nations, to the extent of raising doubt in the sub conscious mind of the citizens of the developing nations about the capability of their nations to advance in socio cultural and economic development in the absence of the so-called civilized nations [11].

This situation manifests itself in self-hatred in the life of the citizens. Self-hatred per se is not as easy as it sounds in understanding rather, it is a phenomenon, which mysteriously eats up almost a larger proportion of the citizens of the developing nations, and manifest in the negative attitude towards the elements, and entire composition of the indigenous culture and every other locally developed idea or innovation [4]. Of course, this now result to individual and collective dependence on the alien cultural, economic and political dictate [18]. All these processes and resulting situations are the fruits of exposure to imperialists controlled media, from childhood to certain stages in life by individuals and groups in the developing nations.

### **Cultural Imperialism, Self-Deprecation and the Fate of African Social, Cultural and Political Development**

The worst situation that have ever challenged the socio economic and political situations in Africa as a continent and a cultural group (though with different cultures), is that the development of self-hatred among the citizens, resulted in self-deprecation. When the colonial agents (vandals) came, they set some values in their different empires which became the objective and qualification for African child then, such that, for you to be recognized as pseudo human being around them, you must fulfil these objectives. Among other things, you must renounce your culture and if possible your origin, and adopt their own cultural values. If a youth in the process of orientation which start from childhood accomplish this culture obliteration, he becomes an assimilador (in the Portuguese colonies of Muzambique and Angola), evolve (in the Belgian colonies) and Caucasian or white (in the French and British colonies) [18]. This, like the education and certificate in the current dispensation, is the qualification that assured the average Africans a meal ticket in the white man controlled system. As people are mad about certificate today as a meal ticket in Nigeria setting so

many Africans were after the process of cultural obliteration in order to be accepted and recognized by the colonial agents. Due to the colonial agents have hold the system and people in it in ransomed, those who could not make it to please the white man set value system were seen as absolute derogation. Thus, this set the platform of people absolutely seeing their indigenous way of life as devilish, uncivilized or at worst inhuman.

This act of developing self-hatred among the citizens did not stop with colonialism rather; it became the channel through which neo-colonialism was actualized. It was baptized as civilization in the colonial era and later re-baptized as cultural globalization in the present era. Of course, the difference between colonialism and neo-colonialism is the presence of the colonial agents directly controlling the affairs of the colonized (in colonialism) while it is the presence of their puppets/dopes who are willing tool to the white man's interest in government and other relevant areas of the economy (in neo-colonialism). The difference between the colonial era (when they used policy of assimilation for French Portuguese and Belgian colonies), and policy of (inducement (indirect rule)), and neo-colonial era (when cultural imperialism surface through institutional and communication framework), is the direct inducement of self-hatred among the citizens, and indirect inducement of the same phenomenon. Using the mild way to obliterate the mind of the African children, of their indigenous cultural value and norms, have resulted in self-deprecation among the African citizens. Even though the black Africans contribute immensely to the development of the economy of the so-called developed nations, they seem to view their nation (Africa) as an awkward phenomenon, which deserves to be deleted from the world cultural map [14].

Due to cultural imperialism being achieved through international media links, majority of African children and youths tend to see everything about their culture as derogatory and by implication, view themselves as unacceptable without imbibing the alien culture. In the long run this result to self-hatred and hatred against the system in which one is born [13,27].

Hatred against the system among African nations can be conceived as a factor among others to underdevelopment among these nations. When someone hate a system, it really affect the way he perceives everything about it, this in extension leads to sabotaging the system or living in passivity within it. Cultural imperialism has twisted the subconscious mind of most African youth against their indigenous culture, government and economic system resulting to the outright rejection of the system and antagonistic behaviour towards it.

### **Laying a Hopeful Foundation as the Counter Measure to the Challenges of Children Exposure to Public Media and Unbecoming Attitudes**

What the African child or any other child belonging to any other social groups needs is self-confidence and attitude of appreciation for his/her social group. When a child is raise with the self-confidence and the attitude of appreciation of the group he/she belong to, the child will grow with love for his/her fatherland. Raising a child with self-confidence and attitude of appreciation for his social group entails a certain involvements, which mostly involves the family and government institutions. Although we appreciate modern civilization and its benefits to the developing nations, the way the Africans view and understand, such is somewhat a problem itself that at some point such is abused in some quarters. Many families are gradually taking for granted the household responsibility of fundamentally teaching the

child the history and the tenets of their culture, which, are almost the same thing as the general life ethics and morality that are needful everywhere across the globe. Attitude to such things as dignity of labour, respect for human right and dignity, patriotism, etc, are taking the back seat among many families in Nigeria as the emphasis has been shifted to short cut in making wealth, human body as object of sex without sanctity, selfish interest against the general objectives of the society as a whole, etc. Attitude to these phenomena in the negative direction are reinforced when the child is exposed to some kind of uncontrolled media programme from home and abroad which some class of individuals who have no interest in developing the mind of the youth who watch such in any case develops programmes for somewhat socially-valuable achievements. Indeed, most of these media programmes carry warning about the qualified ages to watch such programme however, the fact on the ground is that the uncontrolled access to such programmes among the children and youth in the developing nations make it difficult for the programmes to remain within the circle of expected consumers. When the parents take it as important to make sure that their wards on regular basis, are introduced to the basic cultural values of his society, through interaction and a somewhat mentorship in some practical activities, the child will not easily fall a prey to some media programmes that hamper the social values of his community or the society. Again, the foundation about on the social values in the society being inculcate in the child is still a determinant factor to the kind of peer group he will like to join among the numerous such around him and the kind of media programme he is likely to be interested in. A child with a great value attachment to patriotism and sense of dignity and sound morality from the family background will not easily be interested in pornography especially, with continual supervision from the parents.

Unlike in the developed nations that most African nations are trying to emulate, the rate at which certain documents and teachings are circulating is so bad that even some times what ought to be publicly banned are easily allowed to circulate within the system for people to make their profits at the detriment of the entire society. For instance, in Europe and America certain categories of movies carries some level of warnings which the government institution in charge of information and culture force the producers to attach to them to at least, minimize the access of the young ones to them. In most African nations especially in Nigeria, the trend is to give license to all manner of business and productions without considering the implication of such business to the emotional health of the children growing up within the system. The problem of moral decadence in most African nations as Nigeria is deeply rooted in the type of home movies both domestic and foreign ones. The issue of moral ethics have to do with the way the children started to perceive certain things in the system in they are born however when some critical issues are trivialized due to the way the movie makers present them especially from abroad, the children find it so hard to value such things around them. Dressing half-naked in Nigeria and other African countries especially among the females was the outcome of the projection of certain home movie producers and this ended up causing a chaos in the system, as many young women today cannot be differentiated from the whores on the street. In the end, this led to the problem of incessant sexual abuse and raping which are rampant among us today. In Europe and America, it is easy for the females to stand their right and somehow protect themselves from these problems, in Nigeria and some other African countries such is not possible as the female ones are wallowing in pains and disgrace and cannot summon courage to confess what they are passing through. The problems of reckless abortions, spread of sexually

transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, etc are the by-products of the youth seeing their body as sex objects as a result of media projections which have degraded the mind of the youth from seeing their bodies as something with some level of sanctity. In view of the effect of exposure to media on child, it is necessary that parents and guardians screen the way their wards have access to media facilities and the type of programme they watch and follow. Although it may sound somehow uncivilised and tedious, the parents and guardians should observe teaching and habitually exposing the children into African cultural norms and values. In addition, parents should learn how to inculcate in their words, the attitude of appreciating their fatherland from childhood for subsequent patriotic attitude.

The issue of cultural imperialism that is being championed by the European nations and America in particular is among the top issues that are causing serious challenges to African socio-economic development efforts. Watching some, projections by the Euro-American media by the African youth have psychologically reduced the youth into object of hatred to the traditional African system. In most cases, the African traditional African system is somehow projected as unacceptable thing in the present generation while Euro-American system becomes the remedy in the mind of the indigenous African youth. African culture is projected, as barbaric, African religion is devilish, African political system inherently unacceptable while the black Africans are low on the evolutionary scale. Only Euro-American version of religion, political system and culture are acceptable for globalization and the survival of the world. Watching these kinds of things, which are mildly presented on the western controlled media, is one of the issues about the love and patriotic attitude towards African indigenous system among the youth. These are presented both from the public media and home movie productions from abroad. Of paramount importance here is the fact that when a child starts seeing his place of birth or father land as inherently evil due to what he is watching about it, it will definitely lead to internal hatred against the system as well as self-deprecation. The more the youth of African nations draw closer to the objects of western civilization the more they develop hatred against their father land and become object of underdevelopment to the system. While it fall within the domain of the parents to monitor what their children watch to save them from being psychologically abused, the government institutions especially the cultural and educational institutions ought to initiate the process of proper orientation of our children as well as reorientation for our youth via the educational institutions and certain cultural policies. Among other things, the proactive move such as introducing history of African culture in the primary and secondary schools, and legally placing severe punishment on any one who is making certain categories of media programme accessible among the children should be introduced.

## Conclusion/Recommendations

Child upbringing is a task, which requires carefulness from the parents or whosoever the responsibility fall in his/her domain. This is because, whatever is the family background of the child in terms of socialization continues to affect other information that he receives, and the way in which the child will approach the social environment in the later stage of his life. More than any other thing, child exposure to public media of different categories is a serious factor in the child's formulations about his social environment which in turn, determines how he appreciate or deject the social environment and the group he

belongs to. In the hypodermic view of mass media, public media channels provide a mysterious wave through which cultural imperialism is achieved by the superior nations among the developing nations; which in the end, develop self hatred in the subconscious mind of the citizens of these developing nations from childhood. This further result to hatred against the socio cultural economic and political system by the citizens, resulting to a gross inactivity and in most cases, sabotage against the system.

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