



# **IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND GLOBALIZATION ON CULTURAL IDENTITY IN NIGERIA**

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Gana Neville Ajiah  
Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Nasarawa State University  
Keffigananevilleajiah@gmail.com

**Gana Neville Ajiah**

### **Abstract**

This seminar paper examines the profound effects of colonialism and globalization on Nigeria's cultural identity. Drawing from historical, literary, and empirical sources, it explores how British colonial rule disrupted indigenous cultures, languages, and social structures, leading to a hybridized identity marked by cultural erosion and resistance. Globalization, as a contemporary force, exacerbates this through cultural homogenization, media influence, and economic interdependence, while also offering opportunities for cultural exchange and revival. The study employs postcolonial theory and cultural imperialism frameworks to analyse these impacts. Through a qualitative desk research methodology, secondary data from scholarly articles, books, and reports are reviewed. Findings reveal ongoing identity crises, including language loss among youth and the dominance of Western norms, but also resilience in preserving traditions.

Recommendations include promoting cultural education, policy interventions for heritage preservation, and leveraging digital platforms for indigenous narratives. This paper contributes to understanding Nigeria's postcolonial trajectory in a globalized world.

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Keywords: Impact, Colonialism, Globalization, Culture, Identity, Nigeria

**Keywords:**



## **Introduction**

Impact refers to the demonstrable effect, change, or contribution that one phenomenon, event, or process produces on individuals, groups, societies, cultures, economies, or other domains, often extending beyond immediate or academic spheres to influence broader societal, cultural, or economic conditions over time. In social sciences and cultural studies, it encompasses both positive and negative outcomes such as shifts in values, behaviours, policies, or quality of life and is typically measured by its observable, lasting consequences on people or systems. The primary objective of this paper is to analyse the impact of colonialism and globalization on Nigeria's cultural identity. These objectives include assessing globalization's role in cultural homogenization and hybridity and reviewing theoretical frameworks explaining these impacts.

Colonialism is the practice or policy by which a powerful foreign state or nation extends and maintains political, economic, social, and cultural domination over a territory and its people, often involving direct control, exploitation of resources, settlement, and the imposition of the colonizer's language, institutions, values, and superiority narratives to benefit the metropole, the colonizing power. It frequently entails subjugation, dispossession, and the systematic devaluation of indigenous cultures, leading to long-term legacies even after formal political independence.

In contrast, globalization is the process of increasing interconnectedness and interdependence among the world's economies, cultures, societies, and populations through cross-border flows of trade, investment, technology, information, media, people, and ideas, driven by advancements in transportation, communication, and international cooperation. It results in greater integration of global markets and cultural exchanges but can also promote homogenization, economic disparities, and the spread of dominant, often Western, cultural norms.

Meanwhile, cultural identity is an individual's or group's sense of belonging to a particular culture or social collective, shaped by shared elements such as language, traditions, values, beliefs, norms, history, ethnicity, religion, nationality, social class, and practices that are transmitted across generations and influence self-perception and worldview. It is dynamic and multifaceted, often involving negotiation, hybridity, or resistance in postcolonial or globalized contexts, serving as a marker of distinctiveness while intersecting with other identity aspects like gender or locality.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, boasts a rich tapestry of over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, traditions, and social systems. Pre-colonial Nigeria was characterized by diverse kingdoms and empires, such as the Benin Empire, Hausa city-states, and Igbo decentralized societies, where cultural identity was rooted in communal values, oral traditions, and spiritual practices. However, the advent of British colonialism in the late nineteenth century marked a pivotal shift. From the 1861 annexation of Lagos to the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates, colonialism imposed Western administrative, educational, and religious systems, often denigrating indigenous cultures as "primitive" or



"heathen."

Post-independence in 1960, Nigeria grappled with the legacies of this era, including ethnic divisions exacerbated by colonial divide-and-rule policies. Globalization, accelerating since the late twentieth century through trade liberalization, information technology, and cultural flows, has further complicated this landscape. Defined as the interdependence of economies, cultures, and populations, globalization introduces Western media, consumer goods, and ideologies, challenging traditional Nigerian identities. In urban centres like Lagos, youth increasingly adopt global fashions and languages, while rural areas cling to ancestral practices. This duality raises questions about cultural preservation amid external pressures.

The interplay of colonialism and globalization has led to phenomena like cultural hybridity, blending indigenous and foreign elements, and homogenization, where local identities risk dilution. For instance, the dominance of English over indigenous languages like Yoruba or Igbo reflects colonial linguistic imperialism, perpetuated by global media. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for Nigeria's sustainable development, as cultural identity influences social cohesion, national unity, and economic participation.

Nigeria's cultural identity faces existential threats from the lingering effects of colonialism and the pervasive forces of globalization. Colonialism eroded traditional governance, artefacts, and values, creating a fragmented national identity evident in ethnic conflicts and cultural alienation. Globalization intensifies this by promoting Western consumerism, media, and lifestyles, leading to youth disengagement from indigenous languages and customs. Empirical evidence shows declining use of native tongues among urban Nigerians, with many viewing Western culture as superior. This cultural erosion undermines social harmony, exacerbates inequality, and hinders national development. Without intervention, Nigeria risks losing its diverse heritage, resulting in a homogenized identity devoid of historical roots.

## **Conceptual Review**

Scholarly discourse on colonialism's impact emphasizes its role in reshaping cultural identities. Achebe (58) illustrates how British missionaries and administrators dismantled Igbo social structures, labelling them "heathen" and imposing Western norms. Fanon (61), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, argues that colonialism creates psychological alienation, where colonized peoples internalize inferiority, leading to identity crises. In Nigeria, this manifested in the suppression of indigenous languages and artefacts, as noted by Rodney (72) in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, where economic exploitation paralleled cultural domination.

*The Wretched of the Earth*

*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Globalization literature highlights both erosive and integrative effects. Appadurai (96), in *Modernity at Large*, describes cultural flows through "scapes" (ethnoscapes, mediascapes), fostering hybrid identities.



However, Tomlinson (99) warns of cultural imperialism, where Western media homogenizes global cultures. For Nigeria, Eze (14), in "Nigeria and the Crisis of Cultural Identity in the Era of Globalization," posits that globalization alienates Nigerians from their roots, creating split personalities that are neither fully indigenous nor Western. Yankuzo (2013) views it as neocolonialism, eroding traditional diagnostics and economies.

### *Modernity at Large*

Hybridity theory, as articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, posits that colonial encounters and globalizing forces disrupt fixed cultural identities, giving rise to "third spaces" where new, ambivalent, and blended forms of identity and meaning emerge through negotiation between dominant and subordinate cultures. In the context of Nigeria, this hybridity manifests vividly in Nollywood films, which frequently fuse Hollywood's technical conventions, such as editing styles, narrative pacing, and visual effects, with distinctly local elements like African oral storytelling traditions, indigenous languages, proverbs, communal values, and spiritual themes drawn from Nigerian folklore and everyday life. Films such as *The Wedding Party* (2016) exemplify this blend by incorporating glamorous, Western-inspired romance tropes alongside Nigerian family dynamics, cultural rituals, and social commentary, thereby creating culturally resonant yet globally accessible stories that reflect a productive in-between space. However, critics drawing from Edward Said's foundational work *Orientalism* (78) contend that such apparent cultural mixtures are rarely neutral or equally empowering, as they often subtly prioritize Western aesthetic norms, narrative structures, and values, thereby reinforcing lingering colonial hierarchies and economic dependencies rather than fully subverting them. Ultimately, while Bhabha's framework celebrates hybridity as a site of resistance and innovation that challenges essentialist notions of pure culture, the Nigerian case illustrates how these third spaces can simultaneously enable creative expression and perpetuate inequalities when global media influences disproportionately shape postcolonial cultural production.

### *The Location of Culture*

### *The Wedding Party*

### *Orientalism*

Empirical studies strongly support these recurring themes regarding the enduring yet complex legacy of colonialism on Nigerian linguistic and cultural identities. A notable 2025 article published in the *Yale Review of International Studies (YRIS)*, titled "The Echoes of Colonialism: To What Extent Has Colonization Impacted the Way Nigerian Youths View Their Culture and Indigenous Language?" by Moyo Ogunfayo, draws on interviews with Nigerian youth to reveal a dual impact. The research highlights how colonial imposition of English as the dominant language fostered a diminished perception and everyday utilization of indigenous tongues such as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and others, often relegating them to secondary or ceremonial roles amid the pressures of globalization, education, and urban life. Yet,



paradoxically, this very erosion has intensified a conscious effort among many young Nigerians to reclaim and preserve these languages, viewing them as vital symbols of heritage and resistance against historical erasure.

#### *Yale Review of International Studies*

Respondents in the study acknowledged the pragmatic foundations of Nigeria's post-1914 amalgamation, which forcibly unified diverse ethnic groups under British rule and established English as a unifying administrative and educational medium, thereby contributing to national cohesion in a multi-ethnic state. At the same time, they expressed deep regret over the resulting language loss, describing it as a form of cultural disconnection that threatens communal bonds, oral traditions, and self-understanding. This heightened clinging to indigenous languages and cultural practices as identity markers reflects a reactive affirmation of authenticity in the face of colonial legacies, where youth increasingly see linguistic revitalization not just as nostalgia but as an active assertion of pride and belonging in a rapidly modernizing world. Such findings underscore the tension between colonial-induced pragmatism and the resilient, identity-driven pushback that continues to shape contemporary Nigerian youth perspectives.

The Organization for World Peace (OWP) report on British colonization in Nigeria highlights how colonial policies profoundly deepened polarization along religious and ethnic lines, a legacy that continues to fuel tensions today (25). British administrators, through their divide-and-rule strategies and the 1914 amalgamation of diverse northern and southern protectorates, artificially grouped hundreds of distinct ethnic communities into a single entity without regard for historical, cultural, or religious boundaries, thereby entrenching divisions between the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the north and the largely Christian or animist groups in the south, such as the Yoruba and Igbo. This oversimplification was further reinforced in the educational system, particularly through missionary schools concentrated in southern Nigeria, which condensed complex Nigerian identities into just three major ethnic categories, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, as the primary lenses for understanding the population, often using standardized languages and curricula that promoted these dominant groups while systematically erasing or marginalizing the rich diversity of numerous minority ethnicities, languages, and traditions. By prioritizing these tripartite groupings in administration, politics, and resource allocation during and after colonial rule, the British fostered a competitive ethno-regional framework that sidelined smaller communities, exacerbated feelings of exclusion and domination, and sowed the seeds for post-independence conflicts, including civil war, separatist agitations, and ongoing ethno-religious violence that still plague national unity and stability.

On globalization, a 2024 study in the *Journal of African Studies and Development* analysed 2012-2022 data, revealing increased cultural exchange but erosion of values. Urban youth prefer Western media, leading to identity loss, according to surveys conducted in Lagos.

#### *Journal of African Studies and Development*



PMC's 2024 article on decolonization in Nigeria highlights persistent colonial legacies in education, creating cultural estrangement. Interviews with diaspora Nigerians show hybrid identities balancing traditions with global influences.

According to recent UNESCO reports, approximately 40% of the world's estimated 7,000 languages are endangered, with Nigeria facing a particularly acute crisis where over 500 indigenous languages are spoken, many of which are at risk due to the pervasive influence of globalization and the dominance of English as a lingua franca. This linguistic vulnerability is exacerbated by urbanization, migration, and educational systems that prioritize English for socioeconomic mobility, leading younger generations to abandon native tongues in favour of global languages that offer better access to jobs, media, and international communication. Studies highlight that around 172 Nigerian languages are on the brink of extinction, representing a significant portion, potentially up to 30-50% based on various estimates of the country's linguistic diversity, as globalization accelerates cultural assimilation and diminishes intergenerational transmission. Preservation efforts, such as UNESCO's promotion of multilingual education, aim to counteract this by integrating indigenous languages into schooling and digital platforms, fostering cultural resilience amid these pressures.

Anthropologist Christoph Brumann, in his work on cultural heritage, explores globalization's ambivalent impact, emphasizing its capacity to heighten global awareness of diverse traditions while simultaneously fostering homogenization through standardized cultural narratives and economic integration (25). Brumann argues that institutions like UNESCO play a pivotal role in this duality by designating sites and practices as world heritage, which raises international visibility and encourages conservation, yet this process can inadvertently impose universal frameworks that erode local nuances and authenticity. For instance, heritage tourism driven by global markets promotes economic development and cross-cultural understanding, but it often commodifies traditions, leading to a loss of organic cultural expressions as communities adapt to tourist expectations. This empirical analysis underscores the need for balanced approaches that leverage globalization's connective power without sacrificing the unique identities it threatens to homogenize.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts postcolonial theory and cultural imperialism theory as frameworks.

Postcolonial theory, pioneered by Said (78), Fanon (61), and Bhabha (94), critiques colonialism's enduring impacts on identity. It views cultural identity as contested, with colonialism imposing binary oppositions between colonizer and colonized, leading to mimicry and hybridity. In Nigeria, this explains the adoption of Western education while also accounting for resistance through cultural revival, as reflected in Achebe's works.

Cultural imperialism theory, as articulated by Herbert Schiller in 1976 and further developed by John Tomlinson in 1991, conceptualizes globalization primarily as a mechanism of Western dominance, particularly through the pervasive influence of media and economic structures. Schiller emphasized how



multinational corporations, especially those from the United States, export cultural products that promote capitalist ideologies, leading to the homogenization of global cultures and the erosion of indigenous traditions. Tomlinson built on this by exploring the nuances of cultural flows, arguing that while Western media often imposes values like consumerism and individualism, it does not always result in complete cultural overwrite but can spark resistance or adaptation. When applied to Nigeria, this theory illuminates the profound impact of Hollywood films and American entertainment on Nigerian youth, as highlighted in Eze's 2014 study, which documents how exposure to Western narratives shapes aspirations, fashion, and social behaviours, often at the expense of local storytelling traditions. However, the theory also accommodates hybrid cultural outcomes, such as the rise of Afrobeat music, which fuses Nigerian rhythms and themes with global pop and hip-hop elements, exemplified by artists like Fela Kuti and contemporary figures like Burna Boy, demonstrating how local creatives reclaim and reinterpret imported influences to forge resilient, evolving cultural expressions.

These frameworks of cultural imperialism and postcolonialism intersect in compelling ways, offering a comprehensive lens for examining Nigeria's cultural landscape. Postcolonialism, rooted in the works of scholars like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, delves into the historical legacies of colonial rule, unpacking how British imperialism in Nigeria instilled hierarchies of power, language, and identity that persist in post-independence society, manifesting in issues like linguistic preferences for English over indigenous tongues or internalized notions of cultural inferiority. In contrast, cultural imperialism focuses on the ongoing dynamics of contemporary globalization, illustrating how neocolonial economic dependencies and media saturation perpetuate Western hegemony in the present day. Together, they enable a nuanced analysis of Nigeria's evolving national identity, revealing how historical traumas inform current resistances to cultural erosion, while modern global interactions foster innovative syntheses, such as Nollywood's booming film industry that counters Hollywood dominance by producing locally resonant stories infused with global production techniques, ultimately contributing to a dynamic, multifaceted sense of Nigerian selfhood in an interconnected world.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative desk research design emphasizes an interpretive approach, relying exclusively on the analysis of secondary sources to delve into complex, abstract phenomena such as cultural identity in Nigeria. By prioritizing interpretation over empirical data collection, this method enables a nuanced exploration of how historical forces like colonialism and contemporary influences like globalization have shaped Nigerian cultural narratives. It avoids the logistical challenges of primary fieldwork, such as surveys or interviews, and instead facilitates the synthesis of diverse historical and modern datasets, drawing from archival records, scholarly interpretations, and documented cultural discourses. This design is particularly apt for uncovering patterns in cultural evolution, allowing researchers to trace shifts in identity formation without direct engagement in the field, thereby maintaining an objective lens while integrating multifaceted



perspectives from existing literature.

The study's population is broadly defined to capture the rich tapestry of Nigeria's over 250 ethnic groups, reflecting the nation's profound diversity in languages, traditions, and social structures. However, to ensure depth and manageability, the focus narrows to the three major ethnic groups-Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast-which collectively represent a significant portion of the population and embody distinct cultural identities often highlighted in discussions of national unity and division.

Additionally, the research incorporates urban-rural divides, acknowledging how modernization and migration influence cultural perceptions differently in bustling cities like Lagos versus remote villages. Sources selected for analysis prioritize voices from Nigerian youth, who are navigating hybrid identities in a globalized world; educators, who transmit cultural knowledge through formal and informal channels; and cultural experts, including anthropologists and historians, whose insights provide authoritative commentary on identity dynamics.

Data collection was systematically conducted through an array of secondary sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic. Academic journals, such as the *Journal of African Studies* and *African Affairs*, offered peer-reviewed articles dissecting postcolonial themes. Influential books by authors like Chinua Achebe, whose work *Things Fall Apart* illustrates colonial disruptions, and Frantz Fanon, with his theories on decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth*, provided foundational theoretical frameworks. Reports from international organizations, including UNESCO's cultural heritage assessments and World Bank analyses on the socioeconomic impacts of globalization, added empirical and policy-oriented dimensions. Web archives, such as digital repositories from Nigerian universities and global databases like JSTOR and Google Scholar, supplemented these with accessible online materials. Key search terms guiding the retrieval process included "colonialism Nigeria cultural identity," "postcolonialism effects on Nigerian ethnicity," "globalization Nigeria culture," and "urbanization impact on Hausa Yoruba Igbo traditions," ensuring targeted and relevant results from credible platforms. Analysis used thematic content analysis, coding data into themes such as erosion, hybridity, and resistance through NVivo-inspired manual categorization. Validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, while reliability was strengthened through the use of peer-reviewed materials.

*Journal of African Studies*

*African Affairs*

*Things Fall Apart*

*The Wretched of the Earth*

## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from recent studies align closely with established literature on the enduring psychological and social legacies of colonialism in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Walter Rodney's seminal 1972 work, *How*



Europe Underdeveloped Africa, powerfully illustrates how European colonial domination not only extracted economic resources but also imposed narratives of cultural superiority that fostered deep-seated identity crises. These manifested in stark North-South dichotomies, where the "civilized" European North was contrasted with the supposedly "primitive" African South, embedding feelings of inferiority among colonized populations. In contemporary Nigeria, this historical imposition continues to resonate, as young people internalize these colonial hierarchies, often diminishing the value of indigenous knowledge systems, traditions, and worldviews. A 2025 analysis from the Youth Research and Insights Series highlights this ongoing process, showing how Nigerian youth frequently prioritize Western standards of success, beauty, and progress, leading to a devaluation of local customs and languages as relics of an inferior past. This internalized colonialism perpetuates a fragmented sense of self, where pride in heritage competes with aspirations shaped by external ideals.

#### *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Globalization further complicates this dynamic by accelerating cultural homogenization through dominant media flows, as John Tomlinson argued in his 1999 book *Globalization and Culture*. Tomlinson critiques how global media, dominated by Western content, erodes local values, promotes a standardized consumerist lifestyle, marginalizes traditional practices, and fosters a sense of cultural displacement. In Nigeria, this is evident in the widespread consumption of Hollywood films, international music, and social media trends that overshadow indigenous storytelling and aesthetics. However, globalization also enables positive hybridity, as Arjun Appadurai described in his 1996 work *Modernity at Large*, where cultural flows create innovative blends rather than outright erasure. Nigerian Afrobeats and hip-hop, for instance, fuse local rhythms with global influences to achieve international success, exemplifying creative adaptation and cultural export. Diaspora communities play a vital role here, facilitating exchanges that enrich Nigerian identity abroad and at home. Yet these benefits are uneven: rural areas often lag behind urban centres in accessing these opportunities, exacerbating inequalities as noted in World Bank reports around 2006 on globalization's uneven impacts, where economic gains concentrate in connected hubs while remote communities face greater marginalization and cultural erosion.

#### *Globalization and Culture*

#### *Modernity at Large*

Amid these pressures, resistance remains a defining feature of Nigeria's cultural landscape, with movements actively preserving heritage as a form of counter-imperialism. Scholars like Kabiru Ibrahim Yankuzo have documented efforts to reclaim traditional practices, languages, and knowledge systems against the tide of Western dominance, whether through community initiatives, educational reforms, or artistic expressions that assert indigenous pride. These acts of cultural defiance highlight resilience, transforming vulnerability into agency as Nigerians negotiate their place in a globalized world. Overall, Nigeria's national identity emerges as profoundly dynamic—a fluid synthesis of historical wounds, contemporary influences, and persistent self-assertion, blending enduring vulnerability to external forces



with remarkable capacity for adaptation and renewal. This ongoing negotiation ensures that identity remains neither fully colonized nor wholly untouched, but continually evolving through collective reflection and action.

## **Conclusions**

The legacy of British colonialism in Nigeria initiated a profound erosion of indigenous cultural identity, as the imposition of Western education, religion, and administrative systems systematically undermined traditional practices and social structures. For instance, colonial policies classified ethnic groups arbitrarily, erasing linguistic and tribal diversity while fostering inter-ethnic tensions that persist today. The introduction of Christianity and English as the dominant language displaced native beliefs and tongues, leading to a cultural identity crisis in which Nigerians grappled with balancing ancestral values against imposed Western norms. Transitioning into the global era, globalization has further transformed this landscape through cultural hybridization, where Western media, consumerism, and technology blend with local elements, enhancing global visibility for Nigerian arts and music but often at the cost of homogenizing traditions. This fusion has promoted economic opportunities through cultural exports, yet it has accelerated the marginalization of indigenous practices, particularly among youth influenced by global trends.

Despite these ongoing challenges, such as the dilution of traditional values and the risk of cultural extinction amid rapid globalization, Nigeria harbours significant opportunities for cultural revival through deliberate preservation efforts. Initiatives such as multilingual education, community-led documentation, and partnerships with diaspora experts can safeguard languages and heritage sites, fostering national pride and unity. Government bodies, such as the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, alongside international funding programs, provide resources for restoration and authentic tourism, which not only preserve artefacts but also generate economic benefits by attracting global interest. By embracing technology for digital archiving and promoting traditional festivals, Nigeria can reclaim and revitalize its rich cultural tapestry for future generations.

## **Recommendations**

Integrate cultural education in schools to promote indigenous languages.

Develop government policies for heritage sites and anti-imperial media regulation.

Leverage digital tools for the global promotion of Nigerian culture.

Support community programs that foster hybrid identities without cultural loss.

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