WESTERN CULTURE AND PARENTING IN THE GAMBIA: AN INTROSPECTIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Some Gambian parents, like other African parents around the world, denounce the decline in cultural values, and blame some of their children's objectionable behaviors squarely on colonization and Western culture. What is however not often addressed, is the role of the Gambian parent in the acculturation of their children to Western culture. This paper addresses the role of Gambian parents in the acculturation of their children to Western culture. It is argued that Gambian parents play a significant role in the acculturation of their children to Western culture. It is also argued that certain cultures which Gambian parents denounce as Western, may also be part of Gambian culture, so as to blur any distinction between the two cultures. Hence it is recommended, that Gambian parents look inwards for solutions to address the acculturation of their children to Western culture, and be more measured in ascribing behaviors they find objectionable in their children to colonization and Western culture.

Keywords: Western culture, Parents, Children, Life, Gambia

INTRODUCTION

Although Bettelheim (1988) believes parents must resist the urge to create children they would like to have, but to allow children the freedom to grow into who they want to become, parents hesitate to give their children too much freedom because they feel their children need guidance. Thus, parents would want to impose certain restrictions on their children- at least until they attain the age of eighteen, which is the age signifying end of childhood in many countries, including Gambia under section 2 of the Children's Act 2005. That being the case, parent-child disagreement is inevitable (Weaver et al 2016), and as per Laursen et al (2008), is likely to decline only at the end of the child's adolescence, which the World Health Organization pegs at nineteen, and might last well beyond the child's adolescence through adulthood (Laursen et al, 2008).

A parent's belief that their child is behaving contrary to cultural norms and values is one source of parent-child disagreement in The Gambia. Although there are different ethnic groups and different ethnic cultures in the Gambia (Saine, 2012), a common requirement that would run across all the cultures in the Gambia when it comes to childrearing, is that children should be polite and respectful to adults, they should dress modestly (although Muslims might dress more modestly that Christians), they should not be promiscuous, and they should not abuse drugs or alcohol. However, it is not uncommon to hear a parent decry decline in cultural values. Hence, Gassama (2019) laments about the decline in Gambian cultural values, which he blames on the materialism, music, skimpy dressing, sensual antithetical dancing, crime, materialism, and drug use borrowed from foreign cultures. And Colley(n.d.), in his appraisal of Gambian cultures, lamented that:

> Many Gambians are concerned that useful traditional values are being threatened by the increase in delinquency, lawlessness, drug/alcohol abuse, promiscuity…access to blue films, violent films, tourists and reading materials that are in conflict with Gambian values and expected behavior (np)

Nowadays in The Gambia, it is common to see girls walking around town, or in their homes dressed skimpily. Some parents object to this kind of dressing, because they believe it gives the impression of promiscuity or would lead to promiscuity. Aligwekwe (2010), in the process of lamenting the erosion of the Igbo women culture in Nigeria, aptly captures the problem some Gambian parents have with their children's style of dressing when she said:

> …despite all the clothing in the world that is very much available to them, women deliberately choose to go about with their breasts jotted out, their blouses gone up halfway in order to purposely expose the upper hip as they adopt walking styles accurately adjusted even to the level of mimicking sexual acts! They could be seen sitting down with their feet wide apart or when crossed you still see right down to the naked buttocks; and when you look up trying to avoid the sight you are again confronted with the half -naked breasts hanging up on the upper body... (p. 35).

Gambian boys and young men are not exempt from criticisms about their style of dressing. Indeed, some parents are not pleased with the way Gambian boys dress. Boys are often seen imitating the style of some young men in the West by deliberately wearing their trousers just half way up their buttocks to show their under wears. This style of dressing is called "sagging" or "low-riding" in the West. In the Gambia, it is called "yutal" which is a wollof word for drooling, because like saliva, the trousers appear to be dripping or falling from the waist down, but stops midway the buttocks.

Eliot (1948) contend that culture cannot exist without religion. This is why most complaints about the decline in cultural values will inevitably have religious undertones, and will be based on a sense of morality based on religious beliefs. The Gambia is a religious country. Over 90% of the population identify themselves as Muslims, and over 4% of the population identify themselves as Christians (Pew Report 2010). Thus, it is typical for Gambian parents to be concerned about their children's style of dressing, and to complain about inappropriate dressing based on their sense of morality as derived from their religion. A Gambian parent telling off their child will most likely remark that "a good Christian/Muslim child will never dress in such manner", or a good Christian/Muslim child will never behave in such a way".

Thus, religion is at the very heart of parents' cultural sensitivity. However, most often, some Gambian parents, like parents from other parts of Africa, will lay the blame for their children's objectionable behavior squarely at the door step of Western culture, which they consider inferior. There is significant African literature that attributes most negative behaviors of African children and youth to the assimilation of Western culture through colonization, and views African cultural values as superior and different from Western cultural values. For example, Aligwekwe (2010) blames the skimpy style of dressing by African women and girls on Westernization; Arowolo (2010) blames promiscuity of African children on Westernization; and Igboin (2011) also lamented that:

> The decline of moral values is catastrophic. The 'society' is moving toward sexual norms that give wider latitude for individual sexual gratification and individual self-expression'…This has led to the prevalence of the children giving birth to children syndrome, which is pervading our society. Dignity of labour as cherished value has been infested with corrupt virus of quick and lewd way of success. The success highway code does not include hard- work anymore for most people… (pp.101-102).

Although Idang (2015) recognizes that African cultures such as those that view the birth of twins as signaling evil are undesirable, he also emphasizes a superiority of African culture over Western culture by highlighting that African culture is embedded in "strong moral considerations" (p. 103), and that African culture discourages immoral behavior such as adultery, stealing and doing harm to others. Baloyi (2014) also suggested a superiority of African culture when he proposed that:

> Respect and discipline is engraved on an African child's mind and behavior as early as he/she can see the first ray of sunshine. Tourists who have set foot in any part of Africa are always left amazed at the hospitality and respect that they receive in this part of the globe. Courtesy is inherent in every African child and

servitude is engraved in the early scrolls of raising an African child from all corners of this beautiful continent… (chapter 2, np).

Gassama (2019) on the other hand, emphasized the superiority of Gambian culture against some cultures of the West and other African countries such as Senegal and Nigeria. He decried the fact that many negative aspects of foreign cultures have found their way into Gambian way of life.

However, Lewis (2006), underscores that because people of different cultures share deeply rooted basic concepts, but view them from different angles, they should not condemn other cultures as bad or illogical. He opines that we should be optimistic about cultural diversity, because the roots of our cultures binds us all together. His view is that, there will be more cultural understanding if we understand that our cultures share the same roots. Furthermore, results from a study by Burt et al (2005), suggest that parent-child conflict will occur from parental responses to their child's heritable externalizing behavior, simultaneously contributing to the child externalizing via environmental mechanisms. And so, there is support for the argument that parents' externalizing behaviors such as the adoption and practice of foreign cultures, will rub off on their children, who will likely take it to a higher level due to the evolving nature of such cultures.

It is true that colonization wreaked havoc in the African continent and destroyed some of its much cherished cultures. This fact is ably emphasized by Arowolo (2010), when he said:

> With Africa subjugated and dominated, the Western culture and European mode of civilization began to thrive and outgrow African cultural heritage. Traditional African cultural practices paved the way for foreign way of doing things as Africans became fully 'westernised'. Western culture now is regarded as frontline civilization. African ways of doing things became primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain. Not only were certain aspects of material culture in colonies lost or destroyed, colonial societies also lost the power and sense of cultural continuity, such that it became practically impossible to recover the ability to strive for cultural progress on their own terms (p. 2).

Significantly however, Adeyemi & Adeyinka (2002) reminds us, that it was pre-colonial African parents who introduced their children to Western culture when they set aside the valuable cultural education they themselves received, to readily accept Western culture for their children through the introduction of the Western education system imported by Christian missions during colonization. Also significantly, when it comes to style of dressing, Tarumbwa (2019), contends that the claim that African women and girls who dress skimpily are not dressing according to African culture, is an attack on African culture and misconceived. He argues that in pre-colonized Africa, women and girls were not forced to cover up their beauty, and were only

required to start covering up when colonization started and brought religions such as Islam and Christianity into the picture, which turned the continent against its true culture. Also notable, is the fact that even Igboin (2015), admits that the pre-colonial Igbo woman walked around bare chested and skimpily dressed. Furthermore, the "sagging", "low-riding" style of dressing adopted by some Gambian boys and young men "yutal", is not an inherent part of Western culture, but is believed to be part of deviant stylistic expression associated with young African American males and recent hip hop culture (Baxter & Marina, 2008; Morgado, 2007). Therefore, it is inaccurate to label it "Western culture". The materialism Gassama (2019) attributes to Western culture, might also be challenged on the basis that materialism is part of human nature, stemming from the need to attain security, social status and acceptance (Rose & Conlon, 2009). Apart from blaming Western culture for cultural erosion in Gambia, Gassama (2019) also blames other African cultures such as Senegalese and Nigerian cultures for decline in Gambian cultural values. Again, this indicates that decline in cultural values among Gambian children should not be attributable solely to the influence of Western culture.

Hence, the argument in this paper is three-fold. Firstly, because of the significant role Gambian parents play in the acculturation of Western culture by their children, it is unfair to blame the adoption of Western culture by their children, and the Westernization of their children totally and solely on the West and on colonization, secondly, some of the cultures which the Gambian parent believes are Western, might in fact not be Western, and so should not be attributed solely to the West to blame the West for some behaviors they find objectionable in their children, and thirdly, some of the cultures which the Gambian parent consider valuable and unique to Gambia, and accuse the West of eroding, are in fact practiced by the West and also considered valuable by the West, meaning that the distinction between Western and Gambia culture can be blurred, so that the distinction between the two by Gambian parents is not always justified.

CULTURE EXPLAINED

There are many definitions of the culture. A broad definition was given by Eliot (1948), who said "culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living. And it is what justifies other peoples and other generations in saying, when they contemplate the remains and the influence of an extinct civilization, that it was worthwhile for that civilization to have existed" p26. Eliot viewed culture as an organic structure that emerges from shared beliefs that are not planned or artificially produced. For him culture "includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people" (p. 31). For Eagleton (1978), culture:

> Can mean, first a body of artistic and intellectual work of agreed value, and the processes of making and sharing in this work; secondly, extending outward from this, it can mean what could be called a society's 'structure of feeling,' the

shifting, intangible complex of its lived manners, habits, morals, values, the pervasive atmosphere of its learnt behavior and beliefs, as this registers itself in fairly inarticulate ways in the social consciousness: registers itself, that is, obliquely and dialectically, in what could be called…'the invisible colour of daily life itself.' And thirdly, extending even further outwards, culture can of course mean a society's whole way of life in an institutional sense, the totality of interacting artistic, economic, social, political, ideological elements which composes its total lived experience and which defines it as this society and not as the other (pp.3-4).

Ellwood (1994) described culture as "tool-making, institution- making, and value-making… consists of behavior patterns socially transmitted by means of symbols" (p. 6). According to Ellwood, these symbols include language, industry, science, art, morality, religion, government, and all human institutions and human achievements. Lewis (2006), attributes the Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede, with another broad definition, which is that culture is the 'collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category from another' (p. 42). And Bidney 1994 observed that:

> … culture is the process of the development of the potentialities of human nature with a view to fitting man for life in society. Man conditions his natural potentialities in diverse ways in order to adapt himself to his natural, geographical environment as well as other human beings with whom he finds it necessary to live and cooperate …

> ..Human culture is, so to speak, an acquired or secondary nature supervening upon the primary, innate, potential human nature. Empirically, this cultured nature is manifested through acquired forms of technique, behavior, feeling and thought and it is to these that we refer when we speak of the culture of a given people …(p.34).

Berlo (1960) explains culture as follows:

> Culture is all man's shared beliefs, values, ways of making things, ways of behaving. Culture includes games, songs, and dances; the ways of building a shelter, growing maize, and navigating a boat; the structure and operation of families, governments, and the educational systems; the division of authority, assignment of roles, and the establishment of norms within such systems; language and all other codes, and the shared concepts which are encoded; and a complex of ways to pass along, to adapt itself to changed environment, and to

ensure through social pressure and rewards the carrying out of imperatives… (pp.164-165).

Idang (2015) further elaborates that:

> Culture has been classified into its material and non-material aspects. While material culture refers to visible tactile objects which man is able to manufacture for the purposes of human survival; non-material culture is abstract but has a very pervasive influence on the lives of the people of a particular culture. Hence beliefs about what is good and what is bad, together with norms and taboos, are all good examples of non- material culture (p. 10).

The above definitions are broad enough to show that traditions stem from, and are innate part of culture, and that a definition of culture can apply to any culture-be it Western or African or otherwise. They also show, that culture can be an adaptive system rather than a continuing system that remains unaltered for eternity.

For Lewis (2006), although each culture is normal, each cultural group will give its children a different set of instruction, which might only be valid and normal in their own environment, so that they will consider the cultures of other groups abnormal. Therefore, because some Gambian parents believe their own culture is normal and the one to follow, the corollary is that they will consider Western culture abnormal (Lewis, 2006). Hence the view by some Gambian parents, that Western cultural is inferior, and protest against cultural erosion. Despite the protest however, Bidney's (1944) perspective, is that culture depends for its continuity upon free and conscious transmission and invention. This would mean that we have a choice to reject cultures we adopt as our own.

In the case of the Gambia, like in the case of other colonized countries, the hands of parents are tied by national policies adopted since decolonization, which restricts their choice, and permanently binds them to Western aid and development (Baloyi, 2014; Offiong 1980). This leaves parents with no other option but to expose their children to Western culture. Therefore, the hard reality is that parents might be the ones causing or facilitating the Westernization of their children by consciously choosing to adopt Western culture, which is persistently thrust on them by national policies adopted since decolonization. This conscious choosing of Western culture, is what Wahab (2012) might describe as a "cultural supermarket effect". And because Lewis (2006) tells us that the child's mind is irreversibly culturally conditioned at an early age, it is expected that a child born to parents engaged in culture shopping, will inevitably be influenced by foreign cultures, and is also likely to engage in culture shopping to perpetuate the influence of foreign culture. Apart from national policies tying parents to Western aid and culture under a persistent dependency cycle as per Baloyi (2014) and Offiong (1980), parents who received

Western education and adopt Western culture, will inevitably want their children to have Western Education and adopt Western culture. Thus, such parents create the opportunity for their children and subsequent generations to have access to Western culture.

CULTURAL EROSION

It is not denied, that there was-still is cultural erosion around the African continent, and The Gambia is no exception. Indeed, Sardar (1998) argues that postmodernism preserves and enhances all the structures of oppression and dominance started at the time of colonization, and continues to the present day to make non-Western cultures prisoners of Western culture. Cultural erosion in The Gambia is evident in many forms. We have western styled schools with Western curricula, some of our names are Western, some of our ways of dressing, speaking, music, art and general lifestyle are Western. Indeed, our national official language is English-which is Western, some of us wear suits, dresses, and Western shoes to go to work in offices set up according to Western design, where we use Western appliances. And parents who might complain about cultural erosion send their children to schools where they can receive Western education, because they want to ensure their children will have good jobs and earn good money in the future. Also, we are members of the United Nations, World Bank and International Monetary Fund, meaning we are under the supervision, power, and influence of the West.

Some Gambian parents try to resist cultural erosion. For example, they might give themselves and their children purely African names and try to live the "African" lifestyle where they use mostly locally made products. However, they and their children will still consume Western products such as tea, sugar, milk, and will use clothing such as under garments. They will also use sophisticated Western products such as mobile phones and computers. And it is important to note, that the Western products available in The Gambia and other African countries, are getting increasingly advanced and sophisticated. We now have computers, air conditioners, and mobile phones among many other Western gadgets which were not developed by the West at the time of colonization. This will indicate that the level of cultural erosion in the Gambia as well as in other African countries, keeps growing, and will become more advanced and sophisticated as the West becomes more advanced and sophisticated. Western influence is increasingly sophisticated, and shows no signs of abating despite protests and resistance by some parents. And this is so, even if we are reminded by Igboin (2011), about the wise words of John Mary Waliggo as contained in Magessa (1997), that:

> No sane society chooses to build its future on foreign cultures, values and systems. Every society is obliged to search deep in its own history, culture, religion and morality in order to discover the values upon which its development

and liberation, its civilization and its identity should be based. To do otherwise is nothing less than communal suicide (p. 102).

In The Gambia, what parents might claim to be our cultural values, are more pronounced in some rural areas-especially those farther from the capital. In these areas, it is common to find parents mostly dressed in traditional clothes and using less Western products, and the children are more respectful to adults. While cultural values exist in the urban areas, they are often diluted by the mixture into them of some Western cultures. For example, some birthdays are celebrated with birthday cakes like in the West, and it is common to hold a wedding reception as in the West, even if the marriage ceremony is solemnized by cultural practices. It is also common for the Gambian bride to wear Western style wedding dress following a cultural wedding ceremony. Therefore, Idang (2015) also spoke for The Gambia when he observed that:

> Most contemporary Africans find it difficult to adjust between their primitive beliefs in certain aspects of their culture and the supposedly modern mode of accepted behavior. For instance, how does the African explain disasters, deaths, accidents and other misfortunes in the family? A new convert of the Christian church [or Islam] would run to the church [or the mosque] for explanation and comfort, but if the church's [or mosque's] reaction is not immediate or prompt, the person may turn, in secret, to the native medicine man for immediate remedies. If the relief comes, he finds himself having to hold dual allegiance-one to his new found faith, and the other to his primitive beliefs. This form of dichotomy goes beyond misfortunes and permeates most aspects of the person's life. (p.107).

Because of the dichotomy Idang (2015) mentions, some children will be confused when they hear their parents condemn Western culture. It will appear to them that their parents are not practicing what they preach. The dichotomy also demonstrates, that Gambian parents (like other African parents), will sometimes deliberately choose Western culture when convenient to do so, to fulfil their needs, even if they have traditional cultural ones at hand to do so. Thus, it is through them that their children will be exposed to more opportunities to access Western culture. Thus Igboin's (2011) view is that all the blame should not be placed at the doorstep of the colonialist. He advanced that:

> ...while it is however true that colonial influence are majorly concerned with imposition of their ideas, such as rugged individualism, which has destroyed the communal value of Africa, with its negative effects, the gullible reception by Africans cannot be excused…the problem was and is s till our flair for 'anything Western, especially American people…(p. 102).

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Osaghae (1991), agrees that colonialism in Africa was not a case of total European domination, because according to him, the agenda of the Europeans was never passively accepted by African leaders. He also argued that, cultural dominance was, and is still made possible by the fact that Africa has been very weak and vulnerable, and so not able to resist the strong wave of Western civilization. Baloyi (2014) on the other hand, blames Africa's weakness and vulnerability on its poor leadership, which he says keeps it shackled and permanently indebted to the West, which allows the extension of Western cultural influence around the continent.

If Baloyi (2014); Ogboin (2011); and Osaghae (1991), are right, then it then becomes obvious that the claims of cultural erosion by Gambian parents, might very well be stemming from the fact that they, like many other African parents, are oblivious to the reality that they, through their national policies, play a significant role in perpetuating Western culture for their children. Thus there is need for introspection if the cultural erosion they object to is to be effectively managed. Through national policies adopted since decolonization, the Gambian parent is inevitably perpetuating and intensifying the presence of Western culture, and is encouraging the trickling in of more Western culture they might consider objectionable and detrimental to their children. Igboin (2011) notes that values change as societies evolve. Therefore, the violence Gambian parents now see in their children, and which they attribute to Westernization, might very well be inculcated through modern sophisticated Western products they buy for their children, such as television, mobile phones and computers. And other alleged Western cultures which Gambian parents reject today, for example promiscuity and skimpy dressing, might not have been as big an issue many years ago, because the level of Western development at that time was not as advanced as today to make them possible. This will further confirm that cultures are fluid and can develop to be more sophisticated or more objectionable with the passing of time. Therefore, as national policies remain same as since decolonization, and still tying parents to the West, the more parents expose their children to more sophisticated Western cultures they consider objectionable. Yet, going by the arguments of Baloyi (2014); and Offiong (1980), modern African parents are still promoting Western colonial influences through national policies that ties them to the West.

CHARTING A WAY FORWARD

But a reversal is an unlikely option. Exposure to Western culture has many positives. It has provided access to Western education, medical treatment and facilities, computers, phones and many other comforts parents and children are not able to do without. The spirit of globalization is running across the African continent at such high speed, that it would be difficult for African countries to be willing to revert back to their original states. In the face of globalization, reverting to their original states might make them feel isolated and inferior. However, Sardar (1989) did not believe that globalization is a good thing for Africa and other developing

countries. He argued that that developing countries are still being oppressed and being forced to adopt Western culture through globalization. He observed a global village policed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations, which are the mouth piece of Western powers, and acting to ensure that no one escapes Western influence and cultural imperialism by the West. And so, Western influence and culture persists in the continent. That being the case, Lewis (2006) aptly counsels that cross cultural training is the best tool to counter cultural imperialism. He said:

> In a world of rapidly globalizing business, internet electronic proximity and politico-economic associations, the ability to interact successfully with foreign partners in the spheres of commercial activity, diplomatic intercourse and scientific interchange is seen as increasingly essential and desirable. Cross-cultural training followed by international experience goes a long way toward facilitating better relationships and reducing misunderstandings. Ideally, the trainee acquires deepening insights into the target (partner's) culture and adopts a cultural stance towards the partner/colleague, designed (through adaptation) to fit in suitably with the attitude of the other (pp27-28).

Lewis (2006) also calls for more understanding and less condemning of other cultures. Cultures are fluid and dynamic, they develop with the times according to the needs and wishes of society, they are adaptive systems necessary for survival (Idang, 2015; Lewis, 2006). Therefore, they should not be used to judge and condemn others.

As we move forward, we must bear in mind, that the post- colonial African parent, is shaped by the acts of Western colonialists, the acts of his ancestors, as well as his own actions. Also, we need to be wary about seeing other cultures as morally inferior, because as Lewis (2006) underscores, people of different cultures share basic concepts, and the difference is created merely by the fact that they view the basic concepts they share from different angles and perspectives. However, Gambian parents, like many parents, in lamenting the loss of traditional cultural values among their children, would often give the impression that that their cultures are unique to them and founded by them. While this may be true in some cases, Osaghae (1991), significantly argued that some ideas which Africans associate with themselves, and claim as their own in precolonial times- for example, the sacredness of life often stressed by Africans as their culture (Igboin, 2011), might be universal, and might have non- African origins. Indeed, some will argue that values such as the sacredness of life, and the requirement to conform with society's sense of morality are universal (Donelly, 2007), and so are not unique to African or Western culture.

The implication of such argument, is that certain cultural values described as "Gambian" or "African", are in fact part of universal or Western cultures. For example, the culture of drug or alcohol abuse which some Gambian parents attribute to influence of Western culture, might have been part of the local culture well before the introduction of Western culture. In the Gambia and other parts of Africa, there was prior to colonization- and there still is, locally made alcoholic palm wine made from palm sap tapped from palm trees. Cannabis, which is still widely planted in the Gambia (albeit illegally), as well as tobacco, were in Africa well before colonialism (Duvall, 2017). There were also pre-existing smoking cultures in Africa, which cultures according to Duvall (2017) transformed cannabis into a rapid-acting drug widely used to cope with oppressive conditions during colonialism. Indeed, other drugs were being used in Africa well before colonization and the influence of Western culture. The use of a plant grown in Eastern Africa and Horn of Africa- Catha edulis Forsk (Khat), for its psychostimulatory effects, is deeply rooted in the culture of the population of those parts of Africa (Patel, 2015). Also, the Tabernanthe iboga, is a narcotic plant which formed part of the cultures of some West African countries such as Gabon and Congo before colonization (Pope,1969). All this tends to show, that drug and alcohol abuse might not be attributable solely to Westernization, even if they intensified following Western influence.

Furthermore, the suppression of women and patriarchy, which human rights defenders will condemn today as negative aspect of Gambian or African culture, was prevalent in Western countries in pre-colonization, as much as it was prevalent in pre- colonial African countries. By explaining how Western women used colonialism to resist cultural values that subjugated them prior to, and during colonization Chaudri & Strobel (1992) highlight that Western women were oppressed prior to colonization. And, while some will claim that African women lost their rights due to colonization, Cheater (1985) reported that pre-colonial Zimbabwean women had no property rights, and were excluded from direct control of the means of production and family product. Furthermore, although Ogbomo & Ogboma (1993), recognized that the precolonial woman was not as oppressed as often alleged, they conceded that that the pre- colonial women of Iyede people of Nigeria, were oppressed by men through certain practices such as circumcision, widowhood, and exclusion from political authority. Also, while Donelly (2007) acknowledges the debate about the universality or otherwise of human rights, he supports the view that human rights are universal even if they are defined by a particular cultural context so that they are not applied or enforced the same way in all cultures. These examples tend to show, that what might be termed as "Western" culture might indeed be part of African culture and vice versa. More importantly, Lewis (2006), reminds us, that 'deep down all people are alike' pg19. Therefore, negative views about other cultures might simply be a matter of perception, and perception is not the reality. Surely, it cannot be said that all Gambian children were perfect and disciplined prior to colonization. Thus, perhaps colonization and Western culture should now only be blamed for

the increase and sophistication in the level of child misbehavior, because they expose children to more advanced products and facilities, which easily facilitates their misbehavior, and also makes their misbehavior more pronounced and frequent than before. Indeed, as already mentioned, some Africans such as Gassama (2019), also ascribe cultural erosion in their countries to other African countries and not only to Western countries.

Clearly, the superiority with which some Gambian parents will associate with their cultural values, though reasonable and expected, is trimmed by the fact that some of those same cultural values, might very well be universal, and are in fact shared by Western cultures. For example, apart from the fact that Lewis (2006) reminds us that deep inside we are all alike, results from a study by Cuddy & Reeves (2014) suggests that the culture of spanking children, which many Africans including Gambians, will believe is an African culture and a more effective form of punishment, is in fact part of American culture and western culture. And Narayan's (2009) study about Third World feminism and cultures, made it clear, that while some Gambian parents will complain that a change such as Western education for girls is "Westernization" and the adoption of Western culture, education for Western girls and women, was a deeply contested issue in nineteenth century, and so cannot be described as an inherent part of "Western" culture, or be described as "Western" culture (Narayan, 2009).

Indeed, even though some Gambian parents will blame immorality amongst their children and youth on Western culture, morality was equally valued in the West despite the fact that the West practiced colonialism, which is considered immoral. Indeed, Hinde (2005), relate how the development of moral codes is part human nature, and hence the presence of moral codes in every society. Therefore, just like Gambian parents are complaining about loss or decline of moral values among their children and youth, so are Western parents in their own context. Smietana (2017) discusses reports of a survey by LifeWay Research, which shows that most Americans worry about declining moral values in their country. Indeed, many American parents are so outraged about the "sagging" or "low-riding" style (which exposes the underwear), to the extent that there are now laws prohibiting it in some American states such as Atlanta (Sinopole, 2008) and Florida (Williams, 2010). It should not be contended that Western culture was, or is devoid of morality. Western culture had religion, even if it was improperly used to colonize people. Indeed, while African or Gambian moral standards are high, Western culture of human rights and morality can be credited for moralistic laws such as laws against female genital mutilation, child marriage and child labour- even if those same vices might have been present in some pre-colonial Western cultures. More importantly, the definitions of morality are many and varied, and so a single definition of morality cannot be applicable to all moral discussions and be used to condemn all or any act as immoral (Gert&Gert, 2016). Indeed, while Idang (2015) and

Maluleke (2015) support African culture, they equally recognize its dark aspects which are not supported by globalization, and so should be discarded.

Volpe (2000) emphasize the presence of child marriage, polygamy and other dysfunctions in Western countries prior to and during colonization, to argue that Western culture was in fact not different from, and not superior to cultures of poorer nations, Narayan (2009) also emphasize the extremely selective rejection of "Westernization" in Third World countries. For Narayan, this selective rejection is merely to serve agendas of politicians and elites. In the case of The Gambia, such selective rejection is exemplified by the fact that those parents who might reject "Westernization" of their children, will still use, and might not be able to do without products associated with Western culture such as constitutions, justice systems, cars, computers, medicines, medical services, telephones, television, flushing toilets, and household furniture among other things.

Thus, the Gambian parent might not easily condemn Western culture that serves their interests, but might easily condemn Western culture that they can do away with. This is the type of selective attitude Narayan (2009) contend "enables the portrayal of unwelcome changes as unforgivable betrayals of deep-rooted and constitutive traditions, while welcome changes are seen as merely pragmatic adaptations that are utterly consonant with the 'preservation of our culture and values'…" (p. 23). Thus, like Idang (2015), Narayan (2009) also emphasize the fluidity in all cultures. She warned that "we need to be wary about all ideals of "cultural authenticity" that portray "authenticity" as constituted by lack of criticism and lack of change" (p. 33). Therefore, the point to emphasize, is that cultures-be they Western, African, or otherwise, are not static. They often develop, evolve and change according to the needs of society. This is aptly explained by Narayan (2009) when she said:

> "Westernization" is often used to define "national culture" in ways that imagine more "cultural continuity" than is in fact the case. National cultures in many parts of the world seem susceptible to seeing themselves as unchanging continuities stretching back into a distant past. This picture tends to reinforce powerfully what I think is the "Idea of Venerability," making people susceptible to the suggestion that practices and institutions are valuable merely by virtue of the fact that they are long-standing. It is a picture of Nation and Culture that stresses continuities of tradition, (often imagined continuities) over assimilation, adaptation, and change.

> In some Third World contexts, the past history of colonization seems to exacerbate this problem. For instance, many versions of Indian anti colonial nationalism relied greatly on appeals to a totalizing vision of 'our ancient civilization', casting independence from colonialism as a recovery of this 'ancient

civilization' while simultaneously casting 'Western civilization as an uppity adolescent newcomer to the stage of world history and civilization. Such discursive backgrounds often obscure the extent to which actual cultural practices, the significance of particular cultural practices, as well as the material and social contexts of these practices, have undergone and continue to undergo, substantial change… (pp. 21-22).

Eliot (1948) also contend that because culture is the product of different harmonious activities carried out to meet particular needs that arise at a given time, it is neither static nor something that we can deliberately plan or aim to create. Thus, it appears that culture is akin to an adaptive or a coping mechanism, and so should be addressed with the required objectivity, understanding and empathy. Accordingly, Volpe (2000) suggests an approach that neither attacks Western cultures by denouncing them as inferior or bad, nor presume that we in developing countries have unique and perfect cultures, which are superior to all other cultures.

THE CHALLENGES

A major persistent challenge for Gambian parents (like all parents), is to be good role models for their children. This is a challenge many African parents are unable to surmount due to various factors Baloyi (2014) identified in his introductory remarks thus:

> It is a known secret that Africa or to put it clearer, all Africans need help regardless of which corner, cave, mountain, hill desert or forest of this beautiful African continent they occupy. No one is exempted from helping Africans and the good news is that from the beginning of time to date, no one has ever helped an African or invested in Africa and failed to reap a ten, a hundred, a thousand, or even a million fold of their investment. It is also known beyond the borders of the beautiful African continent that this is one place where its inhabitants are exceptionally "gifted" in biting the hand that feeds it using its sharpest teeth known as; Corruption, Civil wars, Laziness, Ignorance, Crime, Witchcraft, Primitive cultural practices and other subtle methods that may be hard to prove beyond reasonable doubt… (np).

Clearly, Baloyi (2014) suggests that African parents have a lot to answer for the present situation of their children and youth. Although he urged Africans to truthfully and thoroughly introspect their stand, belief system, drive, and contribution to the wrongs that plague them, the fact remains, that Africans-in particular African parents, are still plagued by the wrongs he observes, which wrongs produce risk factors inimical to effective child upbringing. Chief among these risk factors, is poverty. Child Protection Alliance-The Gambia (2014), point out that "poverty is inimical to the realization of children's rights, in particular the right to survival and development,

education and protection" (p. 8). However, according to an Integrated Household Survey 2015/16 report by The Gambia Bureau of statistics (2017):

> Overall nearly half of the 1.9 million people live below the absolute poverty line in The Gambia in 2015/16. Poverty has remained flat since 2010. While poverty is still prevalent in the rural areas it is becoming a major concern as this increased by 8.2 percent-about 1.3 percent annual increase.

> The number of poor living below the absolute poverty line has increased substantially (18.2 percent). It must be noted that the number of poor increased both in rural and urban areas and is of concern even though poverty declined in the urban areas. The rural areas account for the 60 percent of the total poor yet it accounts for the 45 per cent of the population. Thus, a real challenge to the Government must be concerted efforts to end extreme poverty by 2030. The number of poor is set to increase with high population growth rate of over 3.1 percent… (p. 49).

The UNDP Human Development Report (2019), indicates that The Gambia's Human Development index in 2018 was 0.4466-, which positions it at 174 out of 189 countries and UN recognized territories. Poverty in The Gambia impacts the quality of child rearing and negatively impacts youth development. Panday et al (2013) advance that:

> Positive youth development happens when the youth are socially embedded in families and systems that support and promote their development. Even when some of these experiences are less than ideal, the social safety net provided by families and communities can still lead to positive outcomes. But when barriers in the home and within systems overwhelmingly supersede opportunities over a sustained period of time, the outcomes begin to turn negative… (p. 127).

Effective child rearing will not be possible if children and their parents are trapped in a cycle of poverty. Poverty in The Gambia persists despite government efforts to fight it. The Gambia Bureau of Statics (2017) reports positive effects of education in the reduction of poverty. They found that people living in households whose head has no education, account for 79% of the poor. Thus, access to education for parents is one way of fighting poverty. Unfortunately, the illiteracy rate of parents in The Gambia is still high. The Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education (2008) citing The Gambia Bureau of Statistics Census Report 2003, estimated the overall literacy rate for the adult population in The Gambia (15 years and over), at 42.5%: 30.6% among women, and 55.1% among men. However, the international data collector KNOEMA (n.d.) have positive news on their website. They report that the adult literacy rate in The Gambia, is steadily increasing, and rose to 50.8% in 2015.

Fighting poverty must be a priority for parents. It is believed that high levels of stressors such as poverty, are a good predictor of greater family violence (Foster, 2013). Poverty can produce many risk factors for effective child rearing and youth development. Van der Merwe et al (2013), in their study about South African Youths, observed that important risk factors to be addressed for positive youth and child development, include Malnutrition and Family conflict and violence, which are both caused by poverty. However, according to the results from a study by National Nutritional Agency-The Gambia (NANA) in 2001, 64% of children under five were deficient in vitamin A, and 76% were anemic. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015), reported that more than 100,000 children under five and pregnant lactating women in the Gambia are projected to be at risk of malnutrition. And a report by the World Food Program (2018), disclose that "The Gambia is faced with rising food insecurity, poverty and mal nutrition" (np). According to Van der Merwe et al (2013), early childhood malnutrition predisposes children to aggression, and the earlier the child develops an aggressive pattern of behavior, the more likely they are to continue to be aggressive.

Regarding family violence, many parents around the world (including the West), believe harsh punishments like hitting their children is effective deterrent. Results from a 2012 survey, disclose that most American parents think that it is sometimes necessary to discipline children by spanking (Cuddy & Reeves, 2014). Some Gambian parents also believe that it is necessary to hit children in the course of disciplining them. However, such parents should be wary about being role-models for violent behavior. Cuddy & Reeves (2014) refer to studies which suggest that children who are spanked regularly, are more likely to be aggressive both as children and as adults. Foster (2013) emphasize that:

> …family dynamics, particularly for young children form important roots of subsequent violence. We have to change age-old wrongful beliefs that hitting children is good for them. We now know that hitting, hurting and abusing children is simply a recipe for disaster. We need to cultivate the message that children (and all human beings for that matter) require recognition, honour, respect and opportunities to belong: that hitting and neglecting them will come back to haunt us… (p. 47).

And Vander Merwe et al (2013) also argue that early physical abuse of boys is a risk factor for emotional dysregulation and aggression, and the earlier a child develops aggressive patterns of behavior, the more likely they will continue to be aggressive. They argue that:

> Being a victim of aggression or abuse also may put a child at risk of developing violent behaviors. For instance, male adolescent sexual offenders are likely to have been abused themselves and will abuse others the same way they were

abused…young people victimized by violence are more likely to approve aggression as a social response, to have problems interpreting social cues and to have deviant goals… (p. 59).

Thus, parental violence (by words or action) breeds violent children (Haapasalo & Pokela 1999; Sears et al 1953). Parents must therefore be wary about violent family practices that breed violent children, who grow up to commit crime and threaten the security of society. The autocratic style of parenting discovered by Baumrind (1991), as cited by Ganga & Chinyoka (2017), is a style of parenting that can groom children to be violent adults. In this style of parenting, the parent is detached from the child, values obedience and punitive measures, imposes their views on the child, and holds no discussions with the child to hear the child's view. As pointed out by Ganga & Chinyoka (2017), such children have negative self-concept and low self-confidence. And because their parents use violence and aggression against them, they also use violence and aggression against others. Such children grow up believing that the only way to exercise control is through the use of aggression and force (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2017). Interparental conflict and violence is also linked to same behaviors in children. Results from a study by Bradford et al (2008) links interparental conflict with anti- social behavior in children of such parents. The same study also links depression and anti-social behavior in children who are in conflict with their parents. Clearly parents will have to tread very carefully, and this will be very hard for them to do. Therefore, it is no surprise that the United Nations Child Fund (UNICEF) in The Gambia, issued a statement to the media (as reported amongst others by the Voice Gambia Newspaper 2020, February 3rd), indicating that while it appreciates The Gambia's efforts to protect children, the reality is that children in The Gambia continue to face violence in homes, schools, and public places. Protecting children from violence is therefore a great challenge in The Gambia.

In The Gambia, like in many other countries, there can be violent political rhetoric, which Van de Merwe et al (2013) say sends a message to children and youth, that use of violence is legitimate behavior. It is not strange to hear politicians insult each other, and use violent language to make their point. A case in point was the violent language often used by a former president to threaten his opponents. He often threatened to bury his opponents "six feet deep", and would often threaten to send people to jail at his pleasure, despite there being a justice system in The Gambia to determine the guilt or otherwise of accused people. Such violent language sends a message to children and youth that the national policy is to rule by violence, and that use of violence is the norm.

Parents should also be wary about exposing their children to media violence. According to Van de Merwe et al (2012), evidence from around the world suggest that where children are exposed to violent images on television, and where they live in an environment that does not have strong

anti-violent norms, they are likely to become increasingly aggressive. Thus, while the Gambian parent will have to expose their children to the media, they have to be involved and control the media content their children are exposed to. They should be wary about being too permissive. Ganga & Chinyoka (2017) explain that the permissive parenting style, which is another parenting style discovered by Baumrind (1991), can lead to child neglect, because it does not require much parental supervision, parents make few demands from their children, and hardly punish their children. Ganga & Chinyoka (2017) emphasize that neglected children develop negative self-concept as they feel they are not valued. Thus, the permissive parenting style can lead to disastrous consequences. Results from a study by Haapasalo&Pokela (1999) also suggest that the permissive and authoritarian styles of parenting tend to produce anti-social, aggressive and violent adults.

The third style of parenting discovered by Baumrind (1991) as cited by Ganga & Chinyoka (2017), is the authoritative style. In this style, parents establish rules and standards for their children, but are willing to hold discussions with their children regarding those rules and standards. Such parents according to Ganga & Chinyoka (2017), are loving, caring, and attached to their children. They respect their children's rights, and ensure their children are aware they have rights. This parenting style would promote positive self- concept and self-confidence. Because it requires respectful communication between parent and children, it might be the best parenting style to adopt if parents want to effectively address cultural erosion and decline in cultural values. However, Ganga & Chinyoka (2017) inform us, that this style of parenting is also not perfect, because a child of such parents might be so overwhelmed by their rights that they make wrong decisions, the effects of which might result in negative self-concept or lack of self -confidence. For example, a child might push their right to express themselves so far, to the extent they alienate themselves from their family and community, leaving them without any proper social support for guidance and protection from deviant behavior. However, the results from a study by Janssens& Deković (1997) suggests that children growing up in an authoritative environment would grow up to behave more prosocially.

All three parenting styles are practiced in The Gambia, as well as in other African countries such as Zimbabwe (Ganga & Chinyoka, 2017), even though they were discovered in Western societies by Baumrind (1991). This demonstrates that childrearing styles are inherently the same everywhere, and any alleged difference merely occurs when a style less favored by one community is prevalent in another, or when different and less favored means are used to achieve similar ends from a particular style. Having said that, it is then possible to contend that Western child rearing styles might not fundamentally differ from Gambian (or African) styles to justify any distinction between the two. What is referred to as Gambian cultural style of childrearing, will inevitably be permissive, or autocratic, or authoritative, or a mixture of all or some of the

three. This is another reason why Gambian parents might need to reconsider totally blaming Western cultures for behaviors they find objectionable in their children. The point to make is that, despite lack of the same resources available to Western parents, Gambian parents are using the same styles of parenting as Western parents.

Thus, Lewis (2006) counsels that we must not be judgmental of other cultures. He said:

> I have stated earlier that we shall never fully understand the "others," particularly if the separating factors of language, geography and ideology have been distant. The best we can hope for is to acquire an orientation that enables us to lessen the communication gap between ourselves and our partners. All of us are wrapped up in prejudice, subject to a natural dynamic of bias. We cannot proceed to an evaluation or judgment of another without starting with an acute sharpening of our own self-awareness …

> Once you realize that many of your cherished values or core beliefs were drummed into you by a biased community that possibly represents only a very small percentage of international opinion, presenting a very limited or blinkered world view, you are more likely to accept the opinions and manners of others as being at least equally valid, if not occasionally superior…

> If you are able to see yourself or your culture from the outside and think more objectively as a consequence, you will have a good chance of clearing away certain cultural barriers that would impede access to other' thoughts or personalities (p. 581).

RECOMMENDATIONS

No culture is perfect. But there were-still are, some deficiencies in African culture. Indeed, the way African parents teach their children culture has been criticized. Adeyemi & Adeyinka (2002) observed that "a major shortcoming of African traditional education, was that it focused almost exclusively on the clan or tribe, and hardly prepared its recipients for outside contact" (p. 235). They further observed that traditional education-especially those that placed too much reliance on violence, fear and punishment, tended to kill the spirit of initiative, innovation and enterprise in African Youth. Idang (2015) also observed that "while African culture and values have positive, soul lifting and humanistic-dimensions, it also has some negative and dehumanizing aspects" (p. 109). Thus, there is justification for opening up to some Western cultures. And opening up to Western culture should not impact negatively on the child if local culture is integrated into the educational structure as suggested by Gassama (2019). Thus, a way forward might be for parents to increase their level of involvement. Paying school fees and

expecting good grades might not be enough. Parents might have to contribute to the development of curricular content to include culture. This will be one way of ensuring that values and cultural practices they hold so dear, are not separated from school curricular and their children's upbringing. Another way forward, is for parents to engage in more discussions with their children about the cultures they hold so dear, while bearing in mind that cultures evolve with the times, and that the cultures they object to in their children, might just be a reflection of the times, to which their children are trying to adapt.

Parents might need to reconsider their sense of cultural superiority, and can be more measured in attributing their children's deviances to Western culture. In fact, the Gambian traditional values which Colley(n.d.) and Gassama (2019) claim are being threatened, might be the same values Western parents yearn for in their children. As stated, results from a survey by LifeWay Research (2016), show that Americans are worried about declining moral behavior in their country. And Browne (2008) relates that the British now have a widespread sense of a decline in their morals or values, which he attributes to family break downs, drug/alcohol abuse, and increase in violent crime among the factors.

Thus, Lewis (2006) suggests that cultures must accept their differences and build on these differences in a positive manner rather than condemn or discriminate against each other. He believes that "Better self-evaluation and elimination of …principal cultural idiosyncrasies will lead …to the final step toward achieving harmony, that of developing empathy for the other side..." (p. 581).

He also noted that:

> Culture is designed for success and survival; if we are alive, healthy and solvent, we have reasons to believe in a particular formula. Temporary setbacks, or in certain cases, shocking failures, can undermine this confidence. (p. 582).

Thus, in the case of The Gambia, like in the case of other colonized countries, the shocking defeat of colonization, led many parents at that time to humbly start emulating various aspects of Western culture, some of which have since become more developed and sophisticated as to be shocking and objectionable to them. However, because parents by their national policies choose to hold unto Western culture despite attaining "independence", the best way forward would be to look inward for solution and not blame others. Lewis (2006) suggests the following:

> Self-criticism, avoidance of irritants and stress, more accurate assessment of the individual, tact, tolerance, adaptation without sacrificing one's integrity, substantial study of our partner's culture, history and language-all these are resources to be drawn upon when cultures collide (p. 583).

Indeed, as much as Sardar (1998) accused the West of oppression and dominance, he also recognized that genuine progress for former colonies will only be possible if their peoples direct their "intellectual and physical energies into vanquishing the metalanguage of oppression so deeply ingrained in western culture, that postmodernism is now using to reconquer the world" p. 43. That being so, introspection would be a good way to start the fight against the oppression Sardar rejects. It is our contention, that introspection by Gambian parents, will allow the emergence of a more measured and objective approach to address behaviors they attribute to Western culture and find objectionable in their children.

CONCLUSION

Parental condemnation and blaming of other cultures for their children's deviances, might lead to what Lewis (2006) terms as "cultural myopia" in their children. Such cultural myopia will lead to prejudice and discrimination against those other cultures. And so there will be a cycle of prejudice and discrimination, which would have started from the prejudice and discrimination of the colonialists, and will end with the prejudice and discrimination of the colonized. The truth which cannot be denied, is that the colonialists started the prejudice and discrimination. However, we should not create or continue the cycle of prejudice and discrimination. That certainly is not the way forward. In any event, Browne (2008) reminds us that:

> panics about moral decline are experienced in every generation, almost as though there is a human need for them…and each panic turned out to be ill-founded –at least in the long run. Frequently, problems that we consider new are in fact ever-present, just discovered anew by each generation" (p. 3).

If Browne (2008) is right, then the behaviors which the Gambian parent might object to and might attribute to Western culture today, were present all along even if the parent did not witness them in their lifespan. And even if Browne is wrong, Hall (1987) advanced that parental experience is biased because it rests on the earlier years when the child accepted parental mandates, and so cannot apply through teenage years when the child is socialized toward independence and wants to test the barriers set by their parents. Therefore, there is no guarantee that children will not be induced by other cultures, even if they were brought up by their parents to resist them. And Bettelheim (1988) had advised parents not to restrict their children from being who they want to be, as that would affect their self-confidence. in fact, section 5 of the Children's Act 2005, gives children the right to survival and development, and section 19 of the same Act gives them the right not to be subjected to harmful social and customary practices. With these rights, children are-or should be free, to enjoy and experience the benefit of the good in all cultures. After all, exploring other cultures helps strengthen our sense of self and empathy for other cultures, because we get to appreciate and understand our own culture, while at the

same time understanding other cultures and feeling connected to them. Thus, it helps connect us to others and gives us a global perspective that is both humbling and empowering (Hancock, 2017).

Indeed, Gambian children have many rights enshrined in law. The Child Protection Alliance-Gambia (2014), underscored the laws that aim to protect Gambian Children. The Gambia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2000. These led to the enactment of the Children's Act 2005, the Trafficking in persons Act 2007, and the Tourism Offences Act 2003. Children are also protected under the 1997 Constitution. However, as also pointed out by Child Protection Alliance- Gambia (2014), many children remain unprotected. Up to date, the United Nations Child Fund (UNICEF), report on their website (Thematic Interventions, nd), that the main child protection issues in The Gambia, are sexual abuse and exploitation, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, violence against children, living and working in the streets, HIV/Aids, non-registration of births to give children identity, crime and parental abandonment. These are urgent areas that need intervention, and it should be noted, that poverty is at the root of all of them and binds them together. For example, children who are sexually abused might not have parents who are economically strong to stay at home to look after them and protect them from such abuse, early marriage might occur because the parent is too poor to be educated to know the health implications of early marriage for their child. Violence against children often occur when parents are economically and socially disadvantaged due to poverty (Van der Merwe at al (2013). And child abandonment often occurs because the mother is unmarried and abandoned by the father, does not have the means to look after the child, and her family would not offer her financial assistance because she is unmarried and brings shame to the family.

Evidently, fighting poverty must be a priority for Gambian parents. And even if the arguments such as those by Maseland (2018) and Young (2004), that African countries (institutions in particular) are increasingly reverting to their pre-colonial situations and weaning themselves of colonialism and Western culture are true, Gambian parents might still need to heed the advice of the likes of Baloyi (2014); Offiong (1980); and Sardar (1998), and reconsider policies that keeps them shackled to the West, all the poorer, and their children increasingly exposed to other cultures they sometimes selectively denounce and reject. However, the challenge they face is, how to reject such policies, and what other policies to replace them with? Although Gassama (2019) suggests that there should be more investment in cultural infrastructure, such investment will be futile if the policies remain the same. Thus, it is contended that critical introspection will be a good starting point, as it should yield the necessary honesty and authenticity required to come up with the right ideas for the best way forward.

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