

# Assessing the Impact of Cultural Diffusion on the Culture of Liberia

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

The apparent influence of cultural diffusion on all societies has emerged as a significant topic of sociological inquiry. The Liberian society is likewise affected by cultural diffusion. The paper has four specific objectives which were to assess evidence of cultural diffusion and its manifestations in Liberia; to identify the major sources and channels of cultural diffusion influencing Liberian culture; to evaluate the positive contributions of cultural diffusion to national development, education and social integration in Liberia; and to examine the negative consequences of cultural diffusion, including cultural erosion, identity crisis, and loss of indigenous knowledge systems. This article uses qualitative research methods, focusing specifically on content analysis and non-participant observation to shed light on cultural diffusion in Liberia. Drawing upon the diffusionist school of thought as its theoretical framework, this paper explores both the beneficial and detrimental effects of cultural diffusion on Liberia's culture. From the study, it was discovered that: there is empirical evidence of some forms of cultural diffusion in Liberia; globalization and weak culture were the two main factors influencing cultural diffusion in Liberia; the advent of technology was one of the positive contributions of cultural diffusion to national development in Liberia; and that indecent sexual exposure or behavior has become one of the negative contributions of cultural diffusion to national development in Liberia.

In conclusion, the research argues that the gradual decline of Liberia's cultural identity, especially its value system, could be linked to the adverse effects of foreign cultural diffusion, which have been significantly enhanced by globalization through migration. It was recommended, among other things, that the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, should integrate Liberian cultural studies into school curricula at all levels to strengthen cultural identity and reduce the effects of weak cultural foundations.

**Keywords:** Culture, Cultural Diffusion, Cultural Identity, Globalization, Migration, Liberia.

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## Introduction

Since its evolution, society has been characterized by fascinating social phenomena that many people may not be aware of. As such, the tendency to make

claims without empirical evidence must be viewed with pity and, more importantly, clarified by enlightenment. For example, quite often, some people, including callers on radio talk shows, argue



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that because of the 14 years of civil war, Liberia lost its culture, evidenced by the dominance of foreign cultures that are practiced. Others argue that Liberia doesn't have a culture or that the Liberian culture is too weak. What those making the claims about Liberia don't know is that there is no society without a culture. Of course, Liberia has a unique culture that is going through diffusion, which people are making such claims because of the conspicuous impacts on the culture of Liberia. To this end, this study provides some enlightenment about Liberia's cultural diffusion.

### Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to examine the impacts of cultural diffusion on the traditional and contemporary culture of Liberia.

### Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study included the following:

- I. To assess evidence of cultural diffusion and its manifestations in Liberia;
- II. To identify the major sources and channels of cultural diffusion influencing Liberian culture;
- III. To evaluate the positive contributions of cultural diffusion to national development, education, and social integration in Liberia;
- IV. To examine the negative consequences of cultural diffusion, including cultural erosion, identity crisis, and loss of indigenous knowledge systems.

### Literature Review

Considered one of the fascinating concepts in sociology, culture diffusion has enjoyed copious scholarly attention, which this study deems expedient to explore a few, if not all. The literature review revealed that the concept was pioneered by anthropologists and sociologists to explain the process through which elements of culture spread from one society or social group to another society (Crossman, 2019). Leo Frobenius, a German ethnologist, is believed to be the first to have conceptualized cultural diffusion. He defined the concept as the spread of cultural items such as ideas,

styles, religions, technologies, languages between individuals, whether within a single culture or from one culture to another (Frobenius, 1897;1898).

As part of his contribution to the development of the concept, the German-American anthropologist Boas (1948) posited how the process of diffusion works among areas that are close to each other, geographically speaking (Boas, 1948). By this, it can be inferred from Boas's argument that cultural diffusion is possible based on the proximity to other cultures.

Tylor (1865), a British anthropologist, based his argument on cultural similarities as an alternative explanation to cultural diffusion. From Taylor's conceptualization, it suggests the similarities of cultural diffusion. In other words, it connotes comparative cultural diffusion. More precisely, about cultural elements, in his 2009 study, Reisinger conceptualized cultural diffusion as 'the spread of cultural elements such as ideas, styles, food, religions, technologies, etc., between individuals and groups within a single culture or from one culture to another.' In paraphrasing all the above definitions into one simple explanation, it would be error-less to conceptualize cultural diffusion as the process by which cultural traits or elements of one society directly or indirectly spread to another society. In other words, the concept explains how and why cultural traits or elements directly or indirectly spread from one society to another society. The elements or traits that spread from one society to another include, but are not limited to ideas, values, concepts, knowledge, practices, behaviors, materials, symbols, food, styles, etc. (Reisinger, 2009).

From the conceptualization of cultural diffusion, the following can be inferred: it is a permanent feature of all societies. As such, it is seen as an inevitable social phenomenon in human societies. It is a product of human invention or construction. The longer a group of people come into direct or indirect contact with another culture, the likelihood of diffusion cannot be easily ruled out.

### Types of Cultural Diffusion

Cultural diffusion manifests in six different types or forms. Below is a catalog, including practical examples, of each diffusion.



## Relocation Diffusion

It is a two-way street phenomenon. First, it explains the spread of culture due to the physical movement of people from one place to another. Usually, it happens through migration in which people bring home some cultural aspects of the host country (Gelfand, 2022). Second, it occurs when people move from their original location to another and bring their innovations with them. Immigration from country to country, city to city, etc. As they relocate to a new location, they bring their ideas, and cultural traditions such as food, music, and more (Gelfand, 2022). For example, the Fante communities are found in some parts of Liberia relocated from Ghana with their culture of fishing that attracted the attention of many Liberians living near the seacoast.

## Expansion Diffusion

It occurs when cultural ideas or elements spread to a new place but remain popular where they began. It has expanded in popularity (Gelfand, 2022). For example, the spread of Facebook and WhatsApp which spread throughout Liberia, yet remained strong in the United States of America, as their place of origin.

## Contagious Diffusion

Is a type of expansion diffusion that describes how ideas can spread through one-on-one interactions between people (Gelfand, 2022). For example, the way viral videos are spread from one individual to a lot of people. Or when videos or songs go viral, they contagiously diffuse like wildfire through the help of modern technological innovations.

## Hierarchical Diffusion

Is another type of expansion diffusion that describes how an idea can move from the top of the social pyramid to the bottom (Gelfand, 2022). Fashion is an excellent example of hierarchical diffusion. From the onset, top policymakers in Liberia were attired in the pro-poor suit. As of now, some Liberians and other nationals residing in Liberia who are not policymakers or outside the circle of government are wearing pro-poor suits with sneakers.

## Maladaptive Diffusion

It explains how culture spreads to a new area, but it might not be relevant and does not adapt to the new surroundings (Gelfand, 2022). For example, the introduction of cricket sport in Liberia by Indians is still struggling to gain relevance.

## Stimulus Diffusion

It occurs when an idea diffuses from its cultural hearth outward, but the original idea is changed by the new adopters. A cultural hearth explains the place of origin of widespread cultural trends (Birney, 2020). The term was first introduced in the first half of the twentieth century (Kroeber, 1940). In summary, stimulus diffusion occurs when culture changes as it spreads to new areas but is localized to reflect the culture of the new area.

Almost all cultural diffusion will have some aspect of stimulus diffusion because of the ways culture adapts to new environmental, social, and political conditions (Gelfand, 2022). For example, Africa had been a continent largely involved in indigenous practices. However, with the advent of Christianity, the continent experienced a rapid invasion of African religions over centuries and has currently become the continent with the largest Christian population in the world.

## Globalization

From a sociological perspective, globalization is a very broad concept. It encapsulates economic, cultural, social, and political spheres. So, defining the concept from a cultural standpoint is prudent. Culturally, the concept refers to the global spread and integration of ideas, values, norms, behaviors, and ways of life (Cole, 2019; Wonkeryor, 2016). It is a process of spreading a culture's values around the world. In the words of Thompson (2023), the concept also refers to the rapid movement of ideas, attitudes, meanings, values, and cultural products across national borders. Its goal is to transform the planet into a collective community, resulting in a greater breakdown of trade walls and increased global market integration (Nwamuo and Anonaba, 2017). The definition raised two serious fundamental questions. First, the origin of these cultural elements



or traits that are spreading across national borders. And second, what are the driving forces behind the spread of these cultural elements? In response to the first question, one might be inclined to contextualize the answer. Nevertheless, research continues to prove that on average, the main origin of these cultural elements that are influencing other societies is from “Western Culture” or “Society”. Western culture connotes the bringing of knowledge, beliefs, morals, and ways of life that are typical of Western Europe and North America to other countries or the Western world (Sibani, 2018).

In contextualizing the answer to the first question, Africa is referenced. As the continent becomes increasingly integrated into the global economy, more diverse cultural practices and behaviors are emerging. Let us examine the examples. Sex and sexual relationships are still shrouded in secrecy, with some degree of sacredness among adults. It is often considered a taboo if the rules guiding such activity are ignored or violated.

However, globalization in Africa appears to have created unprecedented cultural deviance, gradually eroding traditional African sexual values (Okechi, 2018). Food consumption is an important aspect of culture and most societies around the world have diets that are unique to them, however, the cultural globalization of food has arguably led to the decline of local diets and eating traditions in most parts of Africa. In East Africa, the consumption of potato chips (French fries) due to the proliferation of fast-food restaurants has boomed (Potato Pro, 2023). Another spectacular example is the spread of social media that originated from the West.

According to Statista, the number of African social media users has risen continuously, amounting to over 384 million as of 2022. Social media penetration is considerably higher in Northern and Southern Africa than in other regions. As of February 2022, some 56 percent of the population in Northern Africa used social media, while the share was 45 percent in Southern Africa. Central Africa was significantly behind, with a share of only eight percent. In Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, social media users favored WhatsApp. On the other hand, Egyptian and Moroccan users preferred Facebook (Galal, 2023).

Observations from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, continue to prove that the Influence of the Western dress code is another fascinating example to mention in this paper. Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of women and men is now a prevalent culture mainly exhibited by the younger generation. Nowadays, women, young girls especially, attend social functions half-naked. Putting on what they often described as “sexy clothing” that exposes special parts of their body, all in the name of fashion (Sackey, 2003). Doubtlessly, as per the conventional standard, this citation is updated to reference. However, it holds relevance for contemporary African society mentioned in this paper.

In response to the second fundamental question, the catalyst or driving forces behind cultural globalization include technological advancements, evidenced by the internet, media, transport, and communication. The technological innovation the world has witnessed in the last two decades is overwhelming (Allen, 2021). Development has immensely influenced the global community by bridging space and time. Information technology has revolutionized the way of life in many aspects of Africa. For example, E-money, e-banking, and the internet have added to the speed up globalization in Africa. Buying and selling of stocks and transfer of funds can take place instantly (Laghmari, 2020). The wearing of what they often described as “sexy clothing” that exposes special parts of their body, all in the name of fashion, is another example of globalization influenced by access to social media and electronic media as well.

### ***Migration***

People generally migrate because of economic reasons. For example, many overseas migrants from Africa migrate to the United States because of better economic prospects. It also happens because of forced reason(s) in a civil war is identified as the most typical pull factor. But how does it cause cultural diffusion? Migration, whether forced or voluntary, influences diffusion. Migration has been widely described as a transformative experience for migrants, an experience along which they are



exposed to new cultural, social, and institutional norms. Once absorbed, these norms can be transferred back home through family, social, and community networks (Sardoschau & Silve, 2020). In Summary, migrants can affect cultural change by transferring the host-country cultural values and norms back to their home communities that have implications for the culture of the larger society. One of the obvious and contemporary examples is the lives of protracted refugees returning with some cultural aspect of the host country. The longer refugees stay and interact with the population of the host country, the probability of acculturation may not be ruled out. Conversely, not all migrants which could include refugees are acculturated despite sustained social interaction with the population of the host country. Research documents a substantial number of African migrants who remained resolute in retaining their cultural values abroad despite sustained social interaction with the host country (Jeffery, 2019).

### Contextualizing Cultural Diffusion in Liberia

Particularly, this segment of the study puts Liberia in context by providing some pieces of evidence of cultural diffusion. To begin with, it provides a brief description of the culture of Liberia.

### Brief Description of Liberia's Culture

This part of the paper demystifies the notion harbored by some people who often or on occasion assert that "Liberia doesn't have a culture". Of course, there is no society without a culture. In the absence of culture, society ceases to exist. In fact, culture is essentially one of the elements of society. In a simple explanation, culture is broadly defined as the way of life patterned by a group of people. In other words, the way of life explains the general or popular and predominant lifestyle of a people in each society. It is about how people live their daily lives. This way of life encapsulates behavior, beliefs, values, knowledge, symbols, etc. that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. These ways of life are also termed the elements of culture.

Reflecting on this working definition of culture as the premise, this study unpacks some of the ways of life

that embody the culture of Liberia. To begin with, it is important to identify the cultural hearth of Liberia. The origin of Liberian culture comprises of two distinct roots, the Southern US heritage of the freed enslaved Africans who emigrated to Liberia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are variously referred to as "Americo-Liberians, "Congos", or "freed Africans", and the Ancient African descendants of the indigenous people and migratory ethnic groups (Nebo, 2020; Guannu, 1989).

Marriage is one of the conspicuous cultural embodiments of Liberia. Both monogamy and polygamy are practiced in Liberia. It includes civil marriage and customary or traditional marriage. In a civil marriage that is monogamous, one man, by law, is allowed to marry only one woman at a given time. Under the customary law that is polygamous, one man is allowed to marry more than one woman at any given time. On average, civil marriage often referred to as 'Western Marriage' in Liberia has always been characterized by a fabulous, colorful, elaborate array of social events. Whereas customary or traditional marriage is characterized by dowry payment to the bride to be family (Nebo, 2020). In Liberia, culture demands that both the groom and bride families have some degree of say in the preparatory stage of the marriage and often intervene when there is conflict in the marriage.

The food eaten by Liberians on average is also part of the cultural embodiment. It is called Liberian cuisine. Rice remained the staple food. Generally, Liberians eat rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There is a common saying that if one wants conflict in Liberia, take away their rice. A Liberian will eat every food, but once the rice is not part of what they ate, they have eaten nothing (Nebo, 2020). Another staple of Liberians is cassava which turns into "fufu" or cook and eaten as it is. "Dumboy" is fresh cassava roots boiled and beaten in a mortar with a pestle and finally cut into small pieces. Religious beliefs that also embody the Liberian culture? According to the 2008 National Census, 85.5% of Liberia's population practices Christianity, Muslims comprise 12.2% of the population, largely coming from the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. Moreover, most of the Liberian population (Christian and Muslim) believe



in the supernatural world of ancestral and bush spirits that impact their daily life (Olukoju, 2006).

Widespread among Liberians is the "snap-shake" greetings. Accordingly, during the shaking of hands, both hands come together and bring up a quick snap of the fingers. Interestingly, this snap-shake derived from slave days in the United States. The story is that a slave owner often would break the middle finger of a slave's hand to indicate bondage. The "snap-shake" greetings began in the nineteenth century as a sign of freedom among former slaves (Muin, 2016).

What about the media? It is part of Liberia's cultural embodiment. Of course, it has become part of the way of life in Liberia. Liberians' perceptions, values, attitudes, and behavior are significantly influenced by the media. The media in Liberia includes newspapers, radio stations, and TV programs broadcast and heard in the capital Monrovia, coastal cities and towns, and the countryside. Radio, newspapers, and online news articles have been the main form of mass communication in Liberia in recent years, surpassing TV stations as the most accessible forms of media to Liberians. Many popular FM radio stations have their headquarters in Monrovia, along with several major national newspapers. For example, the newspaper includes Front Page Africa, The Analyst, Liberian Observer, The News, The Heritage, The Inquirer, New Dawn, and others. Radio stations include Kool FM, Bana FM, Radio ELWA, Truth FM, ELBC Radio, Hot FM,

etc. The social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger) is extremely influencing the lives of the Liberian population, especially the youth relative to social networking (Nebo, 2020).

Family is another essential cultural embodiment of Liberia. Both the nuclear family and the extended family system. The nuclear family system refers to a couple along with any children who share a residence and form a social unit. In other words, it is made up of a husband, wife, and dependent children living together in a single dwelling place or house legitimized by civil marriage. It is a form of monogamous unit. In this type of family, no relatives or relations reside with the couple. Depending upon their financial potential, they can, or could extend alms to their relatives, relations not under their roof (Nebo, 2020).

Traditionally, observation has proven that the extended family system has been predominantly practiced by the indigenous population. It simply means besides the married couple and their children, or child, either the husband or wife relatives which could be parents, uncles, brothers, sisters, nieces, aunts, or nephews living in the same house supervised by the legally wedded couple (Nebo, 2020).

The dress code is another essential cultural embodiment that traditionally protected the dignity of men and women in Liberia. As shown in the below photo or image, indigenous Women frequently wear what is known as "traditional lappa suits."



Courtesy of Textile Value Chain, 2020

The Americo-Liberians wear suits and ties on Sundays, and the Vai shirts and hats are common among indigenous men. Girls are seen wearing trousers, skirts, blouses, garments made from lappas, and boys wear shirts, trousers, etc.

### Theoretical Framework

Also termed diffusionism, the diffusionist school of thought or theory originated as one of the popular theories, associated with the emergence of anthropology. Pioneered by the early works of leading figures or thinkers such as Fritz Graebner, Leo Frobenius, Franz Boas, Freidrich Ratzel, etc., the school of thought suggests that cultural elements such as belief, practices, and objects were spread through the diffusion or movement of people, ideas, from one culture to another (IGNOU SERVICE, 2023).

Proponents argued that all cultures had a common origin and that cultural similarities were the result of diffusion from a single, ancient culture (King, Wright, and Goldstein, n.d.). On the grounds of cultural hearth that explains the hub from where a culture has originated, thrived, flourished, and disseminated (Gelfand, 2023), it somehow makes it difficult to counter-argue the proponents' claim about the common origin of all cultures. This theory also highlights the importance of understanding how cultural and ideological factors shape individual experiences and perspectives in society (Saheed, 2023). In no way could this also be untrue. This is simply because exposure to or encountering other cultures may likely influence our perspectives about life.

In addition, the diffusionist school of thought even holds onto the notion of the existence of a single universal culture that has been diffused throughout the world (IGNOU SERVICE, 2023). According to Bialowas, universal cultural traits or elements are found in all cultures, but they may not look or appear the same or exactly in all cultures (Bialowas, 2022). In other words, these traits are unique or peculiar to all cultures. Examples include language, humor, religion, burial rituals, family structures, dancing, music, traditions, values, etc. Moreover, the ways that people dress are increasingly looking similar

across the globe, with items like jeans and t-shirts being widespread.

Like other theories, the diffusionist school of thought has its own fair share of criticisms considered as shortcomings. Critics argued that diffusionist theory can lead to cultural imperialism, where dominant cultures impose their values and practices on weaker cultures. Consequently, the proclivity for the erosion of local traditions and the loss of diversity is obvious (Adim, 2023). Critically, the theory also falls short of answering the question: 'Why do some items diffuse, and others do not?

Despite its shortcomings or weaknesses, diffusionist theory provides a useful lens for understanding how social change comes about through diffusion in societies (Saklani, 2009). It now explains how globalization has led to the homogenization of culture and the spread of Western values, which can undermine traditional cultural values and practices in Africa, of which Liberia, as the background of this study, is no exception.

### Methodology

This study utilizes the qualitative research method. The study adopts a combination of two forms, including Content Analysis and Direct Observation by the authors. The content analysis comprised of literature review of relevant materials analyzed by the researcher. The observation constitutes some of the aspects of cultural diffusion within the behavioral pattern that the authors observed in some parts of Liberia.

### Analysis

For this study, the researchers made the following observations in fulfillment of the objectives:

### Evidence of Cultural Diffusion in Liberia

From observation, there is empirical evidence of some forms of cultural diffusion in Liberia. The types of cultural diffusion within the behavioral pattern observed in Liberia are as follows:

### Contagious Diffusion

As mentioned in this study, contagious diffusion describes the process of an idea being spread rapidly



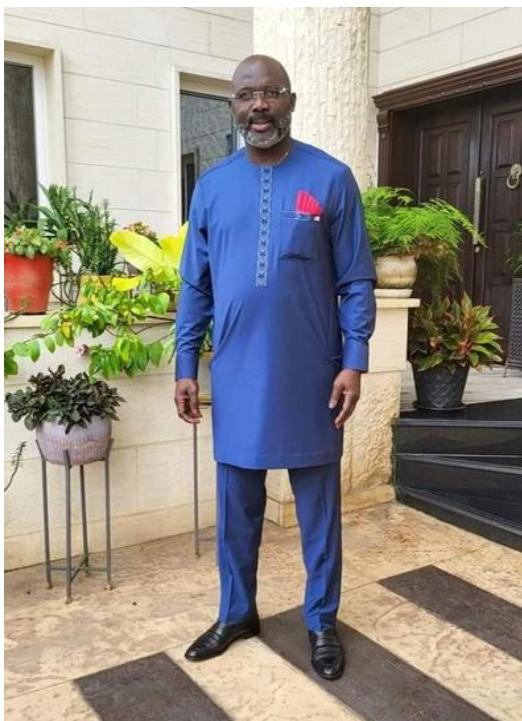
throughout the population. Consequently, all places and individuals in the region are affected. For example, the way viral videos are spread from one individual to a lot of people. Or when videos or songs go viral, they contagiously diffuse like wildfire through the help of modern technological innovations. So, what's the evidence of contagious diffusion in Liberia? The spread and use of the Internet is one of the undisputed contemporary pieces of evidence.

Through social media, the use of the Internet affects aspects of Liberia's culture. In the absence of empirical data, or statistics, observation certainly suggests that there are millions of people in Liberia online communicating in countless spaces on virtually every topic, issue, and event, one could possibly imagine. Another common but contemporary evidence of contagious diffusion in Liberia is the rapid spreading of mobile money transfers, online purchases, and electronic banking. Also, the spread of AIDS prevention in Liberia is

another form of an idea being spread rapidly throughout the population.

### Hierarchical Diffusion

Is another type of expansion diffusion that describes how an idea can move from the top of the social pyramid to the bottom (Gelfand, 2022). Fashion is an excellent example of hierarchical diffusion. For example, the moment President George Weah introduced the wearing of the "Pro-Poor Suit" with sneakers, and shoes which went viral on social media, it diffused quickly among cabinet members, top government officials, and other prominent figures stratified at the apex of the social ladder. Without a doubt, observation has proven that people at the bottom of the social pyramid or ladder are copying this fashion from the President, even though the quality and texture of the material and sneakers do not appear the same. Today, the "pro-poor suit" worn with both shoes and sneakers has become an embodiment of Liberia's culture. The photos below are some examples.



**H.E. Dr. George Manneh Weah, former President of Rep. Liberia, Courtesy of Shine Liberia 2021.**



Courtesy of Shine Liberia, 2021

### Expansion Diffusion

When innovations such as ideas, knowledge, belief, technology, etc., spread to new places while staying strong in their original locations is called expansion diffusion. A historic but also classic example is Islam and Christianity, which spread throughout Liberia, yet stayed strong in the Middle East, where they originated. Another example is the spread of Facebook and WhatsApp, which spread throughout Liberia, yet remained strong in the United States of America, as their place of origin.

### Maladaptive Diffusion

It explains how culture spreads to a new area, but it might not be relevant and does not adapt to the new surroundings (Gelfand, 2022). The introduction of cricket in Liberia by Indians, which is still struggling to gain relevance, typifies or exemplifies maladaptive diffusion.

### Relocation Diffusion

It occurs when people move from their original location to another and bring their innovations or culture with them. Immigration from country to country, city to city, etc. As they relocate to a new location, they bring their ideas and cultural traditions, such as food, music, dress code, etc. For

example, a few Igbos from southeastern Nigeria residing in Liberia have introduced one of their traditional foods called “Eba”—eaten with “Egwusi soup”—in restaurants. Without doubt, observation has proven that this food has become the regular diet for many Liberians in places such as Red Light, the commercial hub of Paynesville, Point Four in Bushrod Island, Central Monrovia, Montserrado County; Ganta, Nimba County; and Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, etc.

### Stimulus Diffusion

As defined in this study, the pieces of evidence of stimulus diffusion in Liberia are noticeable or apparent. For example, the Hip-hop culture that started in American inner cities like New York City has grown in Liberia with modifications reflecting the culture of Liberia. Think about Hip-hop musicians such as Teddy Ride, Jonathan Koffa, popularly known as Takun J, Christopher the Change, and Bucky Raw, Maurice Terziq Gayflor—popularly known as Commander in Chief (CIC), Christoph Nyenga—alas Christopher the Change, Caroline Moore—better known as MC Caro, etc. These Hip-hop artists or rappers sing in Liberian parlance but in dress code, gestures, and postures

which imitated the culture of American Hip-hop. Another contemporary example is the diffusion of Nigerian Igbo movies imitated or replicated by the Liberian movie industry. Nowadays, Liberian movie actors modified the traditional Igbo dress code to represent the traditional dress code in Liberia.

### **The Major Sources and Channels of Cultural Diffusion Influencing Liberian Culture**

Inevitably, globalization and weak culture are the two main factors influencing cultural diffusion in Liberia. From all indications, globalization discussed in this study is identified as the main driver of cultural diffusion in Liberia. To prove this claim, let it should be noted that Liberia is not detached from the global community. As such, what affects the global community is likely to impact the culture of Liberia. Take, for instance, the prevalence of social media that impacts the culture of Liberia, which is based on the advent of globalization. The examples of stimulus diffusion in Liberia just mentioned not long ago are essentially influenced by the same globalization. In summary, all aspects of cultural diffusion in Liberia are the direct result of globalization.

Another reason why Liberia is experiencing cultural diffusion is because of its weak culture. A weak culture is conceptualized as individualistic, whereby norms, symbols, and traditions have little impact on behavior (Spacey, 2018). The definition implies that a culture becomes weak when it starts to decline in value. It happens due to the lack of transmission to the rising generation. In other words, the rising generation knows nothing about the significance of essential cultural traits. While it is true that a strong culture resists some aspects of cultural diffusion that are repugnant to its entrenched value system, the same is also true that a weak culture is vulnerable to some aspects of cultural diffusion. For example, in Ghana, Twi remains the popular language spoken despite cultural diffusion through globalization. Chinese still hold onto their chopsticks despite evidence of cultural diffusion. The Igbos and Yorubas still hold onto their traditional value systems despite modernization. Resistance does not necessarily mean that these cultures don't experience diffusion. Of course, they do but are meticulously

selective of those having implications for their entrenched values system.

In the case of Liberia, for example, the visibility of cultural diffusion so prevalent suggests a weak culture in Liberia. For instance, observation has proven that the rising generation in Urban areas, especially in Monrovia, is completely ignorant of the native language of their counties of origin. Nowadays, it is very common to find young people who cannot speak their native language or dialect despite their claims of ethnicity. The socialization of the borrowed English language has devalued the native languages or dialects in Liberia. Another classic example can be seen in the dress code of the young rising generation.

The semblance of Hip-hop fashion style of dressing that originated from Urban Black America and inner-city youth in New York City is so popular among young people, including Liberian Hip-hop artists. Arguably, these examples explain aspects of Liberia's weak culture. It is this weakness that erroneously gives some people the inclination that Liberia does not have a culture. What they may not be aware of is the dominance of foreign cultural diffusion into Liberia.

### **The Impacts of Cultural Diffusion on the Liberian Culture**

The segment of this study assesses some of the positive and negative impacts of cultural diffusion on the Liberian culture. Undoubtedly, cultural diffusion impacts every society or culture in two notable ways -- positive and negative. If the positive impacts outweigh the negatives, it suggests the common good of the society that aligns with its approved cultural goals or value system. According to Dr. Charles Heatwole of Hunter College, one positive impact of cultural diffusion is that people in society can learn about ideas outside their own culture. They begin to see that there are other ways of doing things, other ways of thinking, and other ways of reacting, Heatwole says. This expanded perception allows them to experience the enrichment and benefit of new concepts (Taylor, 2017).

On the contrary, the negative impact has the propensity to erode the value system of society. According to Exeter University's Lesley Newson, as



cultural diffusion seeps in, long-term traditions may be forgotten in the face of more dynamic ways of doing things. Unfortunately, feelings of rootlessness or cultural detachment may result (Taylor, 2017). Against this premise established by the impacts of cultural diffusion, Liberia is now placed in context with specific reference to some positive and negative impacts.

### **The Positive Contributions of Cultural Diffusion to National Development, Education and Social Integration in Liberia;**

The advent of technology. As part of the global culture, the diffusion of technology in Liberia has become an integral part of the lives of millions of people in Liberia. Today, through the development of the Internet and gadgets, people in Liberia enjoy virtual cultural events through social media to improve their livelihood. It has also improved the culture of education among students. For example, prior to the advent of the Internet and gadgets, students relied on the library to access information related to assignments. Today, students do not have to rely on the library to read books that may be outdated.

Using gadgets, or cell phones powered by data bundles, students can quickly access current and historical information. To a greater extent, technology is making learning easy. Through a scientific calculator, students solve and tabulate mathematics and physics questions within a few seconds. Online learning is another evidence of the positive impact of cultural diffusion. It has added value to the culture of education in Liberia. Arguably, this is evidenced by the outbreak of Covid-19 that introduced the educational sector to online learning, which constituted a global educational culture.

Technology has also improved the culture of business transactions. Traditionally, the risk of being robbed by thieves due to carrying huge sums of cash was too high. Through the diffusion of electronic banking, mobile money transfers, transactions, online shopping, etc., technology has substantially reduced the risk. Through this reduction, technology strengthens part of Liberia's cultural values system that frowns on robbery or thievery. It has also

provided a platform for people in Liberia to communicate via the virtual space through Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, etc., to connect family members, friends, relatives, business partners, etc.

Added to the list of technology are movies that are screened on television. Even though the date of the evolution of movies screened on television in Liberia is unknown. However, it is believed to have existed since the 1960s. No doubt about the profound impacts of movies on society. Not only do television shows or audiovisuals inspire, teach history, entertain, educate, and create awareness of multiple aspects of life, but more importantly, they shape culture as well (Elezaj, 2019).

The majority of programs on television are reflective of the diversity of their audiences' interests and cultural values (McDonald, 2009). In a culturally and ethnically diverse country like Liberia with 16 ethnic groups, television plays a vital role in integrating their diverse interests. Programming on television has an important role to play in shaping social meaning, bearing in mind that communication contents determine the way local or global mass media systems affect people's social experiences (Oso and Pate, 2011).

Prior to the 14 years of civil war, most of the television shows or movies Liberians watched were Western-oriented, mainly American movies. For example, Hawaii Five-0, Chips, Dallas, Dynasty, Barnaby Jones, Combat, etc. Probably because of damage to the Liberia Broadcasting Cooperation Television transmission, these movies have disappeared. As such, the current generation coming after the Civil War knows nothing about these movies. They are familiar with more Nigerian movies depicting the Igbo culture, Ghanaian movies, Indian movie episodes, Mexican movies, and Spanish movies. Another positive impact of cultural diffusion in Liberia can be seen in the business sector. Before the 14 years of Liberian civil war, the business culture of Liberia was essentially dominated by foreigners, mainly the Lebanese, Indians, and Syrians. Even though the scenario has not totally changed.



However, Liberians exposure to travel within the West African sub-region and other parts of the Earth is changing the narrative. Arguably, the presence of Liberians in the business culture is becoming conspicuous. An example to prove this assertion is copious. Simeon Freeman, who runs the Consolidated Group Incorporated (CGI), the service provider of DSTV in Liberia, started his business venture in 1990 from scratch (Genoway, 2020); Jungle Water Group of Investment, in which Tomah Seh Floyd, Sr., is the President/CEO, is the largest Liberian-owned and operated business in Nimba County. The company can be accessed at: (<https://junglewatergroupinc.org/business-profile>). Benoni Urey, owner of Wulki Farms I & II, Lonestar Communication Corporation, Liberia's largest mobile phone service provider, which is partnered with the MTN Group. Urey owns a significant portion of the company through his PLC Investments Group (Fox News, 2015). George Kailondo, Sr., is another prominent Liberian businessman who owns Kailondo Petroleum Inc. (Davis, 2023).

The diffusion of foreign food in Liberia cuisine is excellent and speaks to the positive impact. Even though Liberia's traditional diet, including the staple food, "rice", has continuously remained resistant to cultural diffusion. However, Pizza, French fries, Hamburgers, Fried Rice, Eba, Shawarma, etc., have been diffused into the regular diet in Liberia. Observation has proven that most people are regular consumers of these diets. Dress code. The diffusion of the suit "Senator" in Liberia from Nigeria is also another positive impact of cultural diffusion. Popularly called the "Pro-poor Suit", it is positive simply because in no way does it devalue the culture of Liberia. The way in which the suit is tailored protects the dignity of both men and women wearing it. Observation has proven that, except for lawyers and bankers who are compelled to wear the Western coat suit, a lot of people prefer the "Pro-poor suit" that portrays the value of African culture. The images below are samples of the pro-poor attire:



Courtesy of the Courtesy of Shine Liberia, 2021

Still, on dress code, people attending funeral and wedding ceremonies wearing the same African cloth

(lappa) tailored with different styles speak to another positive impact of cultural diffusion. These cultural

traits, which emanate mainly from Ghana and Nigeria, have become a common culture of identification observed in Liberia. In theory, it is positive because it shows solidarity and unity among family members, especially during funeral rites. Moreover, it portrays and sustains the true value of the African culture.

### **The Negative Consequences of Cultural Diffusion, Including Cultural Erosion, Identity Crisis and Loss of Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Under the negative impacts of cultural diffusion on the culture of Liberia, the following examples are given: Indecent sexual exposure/behavior. With the advent of globalization enhanced by technology through social media, indecent sexual exposure or behavior has become apparent in Liberia. Unarguably, this aspect of cultural diffusion from the West is repugnant to the Liberian value system. It threatens the sacred values and fabric of the Liberian society. In other words, Liberian society still frowns upon indecent sexual behavior or exposure.

This unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex affects the dignity of women, mostly young girls and men (Sykinner 2015). Sykinner asserts that due to cultural diffusion, women, especially, go along the road, to school, and churches, and so on, half-naked. Wearing sexy clothes that expose special parts of their body, all in the name of fashion. In most instances, this kind of dress code embarrassed others (Sykinner 2015).

Communication barrier is also identified as having a negative impact on the culture of Liberia. In the words of Venkatesh, a communication barrier is a means by which interpretation and transmission of ideas between individuals or groups are made because of cultural change (Venkatesh 2012). Observation has doubtlessly proven that a vast number of Liberians today who speak English instead of their dialect of the county of origin have caused a barrier in communication between the young ones who migrated to the urban areas, some people living in the rural areas, and old men and women.

Consequently, Liberian society is experiencing a corresponding loss of this aspect of its traditional culture. There is an imperative and compelling need

to teach and educate the rising generation amid acculturation so that the dialects of their country of origin will not be completely lost to the Western language. By maintaining the Twi language taught in grade schools, Ghana has resisted the English language from taking total control over the medium of communication. By this, it is preserving aspects of its traditional culture. Similarly, to recuse Liberia from this negative impact of cultural diffusion, the government should find reasons to possibly introduce the Kpelle language, which was previously proposed by the Tolbert Government as the traditional medium of communication next to the English language.

Probably, exposure to other cultures is also having a negative impact on marriage. It is affecting the value germane to the preservation of marriage. Before the 14 years of civil war in Liberia, culture demanded that the immediate family have a say especially consent in marriage. Due to cultural diffusion, observation has proven that nowadays young men find their wives on their own without the involvement, or let us say, consent of their parents. They are not willing to know or investigate whom to marry; they make decisions on where and when the marriage will be held.

This has often resulted in regrets, abandonment, and even quarrels between the two parties. It can be argued that in past times before the 14 years of civil war, marriages with parental or immediate families consent survived the test of time as compared to marriages without parental or immediate families consent. In the absence of empirical evidence, observation can prove that most of the problem marriages among young people are a result of uninformed immediate families.

The movie industry of Liberia is also affected by cultural diffusion. Observation has proven beyond a reasonable doubt the diffusion of Nigerian Nollywood actors into Liberian movies. Notably, it is at times difficult to differentiate Liberian actors' dress code or costumes from Nigerian Igbo actors' traditional costumes in Liberian movies. The majority of the Igbo movies depict or portray the Igbo culture. Nowadays, Liberian movies struggle to depict aspects of Liberian culture. One of the main reasons is due to young people's ignorance of



Liberian culture, in which the blame may not be placed on them simply because it was never passed down to them by the custodians of our cultural values.

Sadly, the classic Liberian TV series “Malawala Balawala” produced by legendary actor Kekura K. Kamara has totally disappeared and been overshadowed by movies imitating Igbo Nigerian movies. The “Malawala Balawala” was the first Liberian TV series that not only entertained Liberians but, more importantly, reflected aspects of Liberia's cultural aspirations (Laca'z, 2023).

Technology is also having a negative impact on the value system of Liberia. Take, for instance, nowadays, criminal-minded people use the Internet to engage in scams or criminal activities such as hacking bank accounts, illegal mobile money transfers, and so on. For example, in 2021, The Management of the United Bank for Africa (UBA) Liberia warned customers about a new High-Tech Fraud called “Sims Swap Fraud,” which adversely affected hundreds of people (Wreh, 2021). *The message warns: Your Bank Account could be emptied without an Alert. Dear All, please be very careful. There is a new HIGH-TECH FRAUD in town called the SIM SWAP FRAUD, and hundreds of persons are already VICTIMS.*” (Wreh, 2021).

The Facebook platform has also become offensive to the culture of Liberia. The platform has been used by some young people to assassinate the characters of others, display nude images, and invade the privacy of others, among others. Another example can be seen in telephone fraud committed by inmates in Liberia. They do it by faking victims' mobile money accounts, claiming the money was mistakenly transferred, which appears on the mobile phones as transfer messages (Dweh, 2020). Vote buying manifested through trucking, and cash exchange for voting cards is also the result of cultural diffusion, precisely globalization from some parts of Africa (Jensen and Justesen, 2014). Negatively, it is affecting the political values that cannot be aloof from the cultural embodiment of Liberia. It is a complete act of dishonesty repugnant to the culture of Liberia and, at the same time, helping to undermine the growing democracy of Liberia.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to review the literature on cultural diffusion theory relative to providing enlightenment on cultural diffusion as one of the inevitable social phenomena in Liberia. On the other hand, the study has assessed some aspects of cultural diffusion as well as their positive and negative impacts on the culture of Liberia. It has also provided essential embodiments of Liberian culture. Contextually, the article has contributed to knowledge by pointing out that, despite the great importance of cultural diffusion, especially globalization, the unanticipated social vices remain critically worrisome in Liberia.

To a greater extent, Liberia's traditional values system is gradually eroding due to cultural diffusion. It is because of the diffusion that some people are holding onto the notion that Liberia doesn't have a culture. Of course, this notion is erroneous because every culture is susceptible to diffusion. However, some aspects of culture are resistant to diffusion. In the case of Liberia, there is a compelling need to take cognizance of the diffusion of other cultures into the mainstream of Liberia's culture. If not, the risk of losing our culture to the invasion of foreign culture remains imminent.

## Recommendations

From the analysis and observations presented above, the following recommendations are presented to address the problems:

1. The Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, should integrate Liberian cultural studies into school curricula at all levels to strengthen cultural identity and reduce the effects of weak cultural foundations.
2. Since technology has positively contributed to national development, the government, through the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, and the private sector should invest in digital platforms that promote Liberian culture, history, and creativity. Local content creation (films, music, online educational materials) should be supported to ensure that globalization does not erase indigenous cultural expressions.
3. Parents and guardians should be encouraged and supported through community programs to play an



active role in guiding children's moral and cultural development.

## Disclaimer

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