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## Big Brother Africa- An Afro-cultural Reflection

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### Article history:

Received June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016;

Approved July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016;

Available online: Aug 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

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### Keywords:

Africanness,  
afro-centricity,  
euro-centricity,  
cultural products,

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### Abstract

*An attentive examination of the various versions of Big Brother Africa unmasks worrying traits of an alien culture served to viewers as African reality television show. Controversy continues to haunt the world franchise reality show particularly on the entertainment and cultural value of the programme. And to date the show has elicited a range of responses from various professions of concern. This research is spurred by the desire to examine the afro-cultural fidelity of the popular Endemol reality show. Using a critical observation method, the study found out that the Big Brother Africa show is neither African nor strictly a reality show. There is rampant inglorious depiction of African culture. Harlotry, excessive alcoholism, illicit sexual liaisons, nudity, foul language, self-indulgence among other vices are displayed to viewers the world over to portray a culture that is not sincerely representative of the African cultural philosophy. Instead the Big Brother Africa project is a showpiece of a western elite culture detached from the average African lifestyle. Realising the power of mediascape in affecting cultural attitudes the study recommends the screening of programmes that communicate a positive portrayal of the African culture.*

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## 2.0 Introduction

Since its inception in the 1980s, the concept of unscripted reality show has provoked grand debates, from being celebrated as the hallmark of objective telecast to being scorned as an abattoir of morality. Invectives and expletives continue to characterise its reception, yet it is one

of the most viewed television programmes the world over. Although the concept has been widely received for its novelty, the world over, its entry onto the African scene, in the form of *Big Brother Africa*, has ignited a plethora of reactions. Critics from a variety of ideological persuasions have reacted to the show's handling of entertainment and cultural issues with some even questioning the reality of the 'reality show' itself, yet few can resist watching it, for whatever reason. The show has elicited a lot of trepidation among the autochthons of African culture who view it as offensive to their cultural heritage while the 'hybrid generation' views it as site of fun, self exploration and indulgence. For their apprehension, the vanguard of African moral values views the show as subtle conduit for cultural imperialism and resultantly African moral defacement while the 'culturally innocent' see nothing beyond entertainment and pleasure. But what exactly is the Big Brother concept, its aims and *modus operandi*?

## 2.1 Background

The concept of unscripted reality television can be traced to the *Candid Camera* which debuted in 1948 (Steeves, 2008). Thereafter, *An American Family*, 1973 and the syndicated reality show, *COPS* of the late 1980s paved the way for the current wave of reality television shows. This marked a sharp departure from scripted reality television of the 1970s and before. Reality telecast came as a huge relief to years of edited clips of ordinary people reacting to contrived situations ([http://www.wisegeck.org/what\\_is\\_reality\\_show.htm](http://www.wisegeck.org/what_is_reality_show.htm)). It drew its participants from the ranks of ordinary people and not professionally trained actors who could express themselves independent of editorial sanction. In its honeymoon era, reality television enjoyed prodigious amount popularity among viewers as it was full of surprises, courtesy of its self-generated and unpredictable plot development. The notion of putting strangers and recording the resultant drama was to become a location that enthused and captivated many viewers.

Essentially the BB concept is a reality television franchise created by John de Mol where entrants in to the game are secluded from the rest of the world and confined to a large house under continuous surveillance of cameras where the last housemate to survive eviction lands the grand price ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wil.Big\\_Brother\\_Tvseries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wil.Big_Brother_Tvseries)). Contestants freely interact around Big Brother assigned menial tasks, competitions and general household chores under the watchful eye of the cameras. The contestants from time to time have a moment to reflect on their activities and those of others in the diary room or the confession room. In the house, they are exposed to a coterie of familiar interactive emotions of happiness, frustration, failure, anxiety, friendship, opportunity and love (AbiolaAlabi- in Africa Magic, 2012).

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How housemates deal with these emotions, in part, influences fellow housemates and viewer perceptions about their continued stay in the house. The house is also well supplied with food, drink, alcohol and excellent indoor entertainment facilities. And for that reason, leaving the house is a fate no housemate will resign to, yet eviction is inevitable. Depending on the rules and regulations of the version of each show, the evictees are nominated by fellow housemates, viewing and participating nations. The show is very flexible in that every show version can expose viewers and contestants to a variety of eviction criteria. A contestant with the highest nominations every week or two is evicted from the house or moves to another house. The ultimate eviction survivor wins the coveted prize.

The first BB show was shot in the Netherlands in 1999 and the concept later cascaded to other regions with various adaptations by the countries. In Europe, Germany, England and Italy they have their own versions of Big Brother though the original concept of evictions and ultimate winners is locatable in all these various versions. In Africa the show is coded Big Brother Africa, ostensibly to reflect the geographical location of its shooting. Contestants are drawn from many countries after some screening auditions particularly in those countries where MNet has a presence or a business interest. Viewing nations and participating countries that are apportioned voting quotas, together with the housemates vote and determine who stays and who goes out.

In Africa the show has a viewership of 30-40 million mainly young people who religiously follow it in spite of it being shown 24/7. They have to endure the long hours of the show, no matter what it takes. Viewers are perpetually updated on the goings-on in the house through daily summaries if they have lost track of events due to some engagements. They, occasionally, post their views on the screen to react to the transactions in the house. Intriguing! The popularity of such a show propels one into closely analysing the perceived benefits of such a show particularly the cultural benefits if any that may accrue to the viewing public. This motivation to interrogate this 'African' product is not an inescapable obligation particularly to members of the African cultural fraternity as recommended by p'Bitek, (1986) for only participants in a given culture can judge authoritatively about cultural transactions in their own backyard.

### **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

Any research meriting serious academic attention should openly confess the various theoretical lenses that guide its position on any subject. Likewise, the study to estimate the afro-cultural fidelity of the BBA is beholden to a number of theoretical persuasions. Situated as it is in the postcolonial African context, the study is a halfway house between the post-colonial and the afro-centric theory of appreciating cultural products. These theories are inspired by a common energy to analyse the portrayal of African products by Africans themselves and how outsiders exploit the mediascape to depict the African issues. The Afro-centric lens is employed to give the research the authority to measure African products by African scales.

The Post-colonial theory is an interdisciplinary confluence of critical strategies used to examine the culture, literature, politics and history of post colonial states and how the perceptions and

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relationships between the coloniser and the colonised impact on the nature of the cultural products and narratives of the latter. Essentially the theory draws on a number of perspectives from critical traditions such as Marxism particularly the issue of materialism to hegemonic dialectics. There are a series of critical concepts that form the prisms through which issues are viewed under post-colonialism. These are; hegemonic discourse, hybridity, agency and erasure. *Erasure* focuses on the absence or the eclipse of the African subject by the 'dominant culture' in narratives or artistic works otherwise located in African context. *Agency*, according to Steeves (2008), the notion looks at the voice of the colonized in the post colonial dialogues, issues to do with: 'Who can speak? Who can represent?' These are critical questions in finding the voice that is dialoguing and interrogating who is behind it. The relevance of such questions is visible in our quest for representation of the African voice.

*Hybridity* is one of the most disputed terms in postcolonial studies which focuses on the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation. It deals with the national identity of the postcolonial state being more of a mix between the colonised and the coloniser's culture. Hybridisation takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic. Hybridity may strike two mutually exclusive connotations of negativity and positivity in terms of how the cultural mix benefits or suffers from the engagement of the colonised and the coloniser. Some postcolonial works regard hybridity as provoking binary images of primitivity and modernity on the postcolonial state instead of mutuality of cultures. This study has a focused inquisition into the problematics of the postcolonial cultural mix as portrayed by the reality television show in context. Questions like, 'whose culture is dominant in the BBA reality show? How accurate is the portrayal of the African culture?' become legitimate concerns in the interrogation of hybridity of the ultimate postcolonial product.

The concept of *hegemonic discourse*, traceable to Althusser (1971) and Gramsci (1891- 1937), posits that there are two processes by which the hegemonic class secures consent via domination and intellectual moral leadership where the former is achieved through force and the latter through subtle political, economic and ideological manipulation to secure active consent by the postcolonial state. This influence is slyly couched and encoded in various modes of expression, like the media and the arts to project a situation where the norms of the dominant culture are glorified and packaged to the colonised as normal (what Jamal Ashraf calls 'normalised givens') whereas the cultural concerns of the postcolonial state are bastardised. Conscious of the hegemonic strategies of the colonizer, this study seeks to sift the hegemonic cultural tendencies located in the BBA reality television show. This cog of the postcolonial theory becomes very pertinent in locating the influence of the alien culture on the local cultures and national narratives.

The research leans on the Afro-centric theory for its measurement of BBA's Afro-cultural fidelity. The theory draws us closer to estimating BBA's proximity to representing the African culture. For an inordinate amount of time, cultural products located in African socio-geographical space have been subjected to European mensuration criteria. Many cultural products have been rejected or accepted with out passing an honest Afro-cultural standard. The Eurocentric cultural logic has

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pejoratively described African products as lacking in complexity and exquisite finish. Beneath such condescension attitudes lay a pernicious and malicious assumption that artistic creations can only be defined from the perspective of Europe. Western cultural standards were clandestinely served to unsuspecting Africans. The net effect of it was that many African artists blindly pursued European sensibilities without affording themselves a minute of introspection into their own product, let alone using their own apparatus to calibrate own artistic products. Cognisant of the need to bust the Eurocentric cultural plot and its attendant effects on the African artist and consumer, the Afro-centric theory was born.

Essentially the theory is a deliberately afro-focused perspective of the arts. According to Asante (1998), it seeks to place African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves Africans. Asante (2008) states the five characteristics of Afro centrism as follows:

- an intense interest in psychological location as determined by symbols, motifs ritual and signs;
- a commitment to finding the subject of Africans in any social, political economic, architectural literary and religious phenomena, with implications for questions of sex, gender and class;
- a defence of cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, education science and literature;
- a celebration of centeredness and agency and commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives about Africans and other people;
- and a powerful interpretive from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people (Asante, 2008).

Some of these motifs are crucial in asking critical questions in this research such as, how are Africans portrayed in the BBA? How do Africans view themselves? What alien cultural items are locatable in BBA and what effects do these have on Africans? Besides, Asante (2008) warns that not everyone born in Africa, who follows African styles, practises African religion is Afro-centric. They have to be deliberately afro-focused in their disposition than just by hair, colour and biology. The most critical question here is; how representative of the African culture is every African character in BBA? The afro-centric theory becomes a cardinal asset in the search for the Africanness of the product purportedly by African characters.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

The search for the Africanness of the BBA adopted a critical observation method as informed by the Afro-centric and Marxist critique of media products. Essentially the critical observation method is a technique where the behaviour of the research subjects is watched and critically scrutinised and recorded and interpreted to generate explanations and understandings (Hanan, 2006). Borg, Gall and Gall (2010) recommend the method in ethnographic studies for its originality but advise guarding against subjective and impressionist tendencies.

Since it was practically difficult to view the entire universe of BBA episodes, shot 24/7 over 100 days for each edition, from 2003, the research purposively sampled at least 3 days (mornings and evenings) a week for the last two editions of BBA, the 2011 and 2012. It was practically

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impossible to view the whole show given that it was screened 24 hours a day for 90 days in each version of the show. Other versions of BBA were referred to as far as the memory of the researchers could recall. The study technique required that the researchers critically watch the various episodes of the BBA versions noting down any snippets on culture in the behaviour, tasks and activities in the reality show. These were interrogated for their fidelity to African cultural realities and beliefs using the postcolonial and afro-centric theory as frames of reference.

Viewers' screen comments were also useful in assessing the reception of the programme among African viewers. The observation method was also corroborated with views of position papers and articles on the reality show as a way of allaying the subjectivity fears of the observation method. These data gathering techniques were colluded to estimate the total portrayal of the African culture in artistic creations.

## **5.0 PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN CULTURE**

Any intense exploration of the BBA reality show raises more questions than answers on the real motive of the reality show. One is thrown into a thought shower of the intentions, location and fidelity of the show on African cultures. A popular reality show featuring African characters on African space, aired to African viewers - a self-avowedly African phenomenon- would honestly not warrant an investigation into its Africanness. Yet one may not easily be released from the obligation to interrogate it anyway cognisant of the nefarious cultural expressions served to unsuspecting African viewers in the name of reality television. The culture presented can hardly be regarded as sincerely African by any stretch of imagination. One is pushed into interrogating the entire concept of reality television, the corporate motive and the caricature of African cultural essence. Is the BBA a reality show? Whose reality is it showing? Is the show promoting African agency? Or is it an intrusion of cultural imperialism through cultural products? Who is the BB? A whole range of questions begs our solemn reflection.

One Western scholar opines that "much of the public criticism of BB has been, in essence, how the format allegedly threatens the core values and rights of our Western societies. For example, critics say that the format manipulates participants into confessing their innermost secrets and seduces the audiences into believing in inauthentic events" (Billereyst 2004:95 cited in Aslama 2009:86). From these observations one may question the credibility of this 'reality show'. BB has been used to symbolise an enormously broad array of current cultural phenomena, ranging from hybridisation of conventional TV genres and the rise of reality television, to BB as a metaphor en-vogue for broader socio-cultural trends such as "surveillance culture" or "confessional culture". BB has also brought up epistemological issues in media studies like the multimedia nature of the format, and its 'interactive' lure resulting in intense audience involvement which has also prompted questions about the need to revise the concept of 'active audiences'. Below are some of the objectionable aspects we found offending the African person and the concept of reality TV itself that push one to think the show is a unscrupulous project designed to subvert the cultural identity of Africa.

### **5.1 The concept of reality**

The idea of reality in the BBA show impresses on us the feeling that the show is an unfettered flow of natural interaction of randomly selected Africans in the house without the interfering

hand of the script writer. One may also think that the housemates are purposively sampled based on them meeting some basic African cultural traits, yet a closer analysis on the calibre of people who eventually get into the house shows that the a certain cultural standard of another culture may have been used as an audition instrument. The show is considered open to all, where members of the African community meeting the age restriction of 18+ years are selected after 'meticulous' screening. Most of the specifications of the contestants sell out the game show as premeditated, precast than unscripted as the type of the entrants rhymes with the preconceived programme product. This provokes us into doubting the reality of the so-called reality show from the onset. One would think that the BBA show was composed of a cross section of ordinary Africans reflecting ordinary African social issues.

The idea of confining people to one house and showing their interactions under the watchful view of the cameras, performing predetermined tasks dilutes the naturalness of settings. This makes the show neither reality nor unscripted but contrived. Since a lot of debates have been raised concerning the authenticity, ethics of mediated exposure on one's privacy and about the manipulative nature of BB shows throughout the world especially in Europe, it would rather be naïve to accept it as a reality show. According to Hill's observations (2002;2005) on British audiences of reality programming, especially by the notion, echoed in the Finnish fan interviews that viewers do not read those contents as 'real' but rather, search for what they assess to be authentic moments. Audiences seem to be media savvy, equally scrutinising and speculating as to the authenticity of the 'performed selves' of housemates and of the more or less invasive role of the production team. So BB is not conceived as 'reality show' by both the housemates and the audiences

## **5.2 Celebrity 'making' and celebrity culture**

It is the sworn endeavour of BBA show to transform show entrants into instant celebrities guided by the view that anyone can become a celebrity if they are given an opportunity. Given this thrust of BBA, one is pushed into exploring the whole concept of celebrity and subsequent celebrity culture. What then is a celebrity? Whose celebrity? And what is being celebrated in the celebrity? What is celebrity making? A celebrity is generally any person that has a prominent profile and commands a great degree of public fascination and influence (Pandey, 2014). The term is applicable to a range of professions and careers while some people may be famous for their extravagant lifestyles or for their misdeeds. Even notorious criminals may attract media and public attention to a point where they become celebrities. A celebrity normally becomes the career or character model to the majority of their followers. The BBA project intends to transform ordinary people into celebrities but one has to ask; what celebrity making process disarms a person's moral economy in pursuit of celebrity status as an end in itself? A television programme that negatively markets the image of Africa ostensibly to create African celebrities yet creating alien models of their culture is culpable of cultural homicide. The resultant celebrity becomes the antithesis of the African virtues and values. A celebrity who walks naked, speaks foul, abuses alcohol and engages in public sex can hardly be an African cultural model. One wonders what cultural norm is responsible for this mayhem.

One also questions the whole criteria that are used to select people into the house bearing that the majority of the housemates are celebrities, way before they get into the house. The screening

process looks for candidates that are assertive, original, creative, goals oriented and are willing to play the game, it is said. In addition candidates should be above 18 years and be nationals of viewing African countries and be fluent in English. However, upon closer exploration it is intriguing to note that the entrants are hardly ordinary Africans reflecting ordinary African values but already display an exotic tincture in their demeanour having acquired celebrity statuses in the arts industry and other professions way before they get into the house. In BBA2 Code Sankala is a musician in Malawi, Maureen Namatovu is a fashion designer from Botswana, Justice Mothabani is a print journalist from Uganda and Tatiana Durao is an actress in Uganda. Sheila, a BBA (2008) representative who is a former beauty queen in the Miss Kenya Tourism and was dethroned due controversy becomes housemate in the show. Surely, a controversial character can not be a model of African culture. Karen Igho from Nigeria who does modelling in her country lands the ultimate prize in the BBA despite her being arguably the worst character model in the show due to her excessive sexual escapades, noise, and drunkenness in the house. The general composition of contestants in the show is such that the majority are celebrities before they are made ones. Bearing in mind that most of our celebrities display a western orientation, chances of getting an untainted African cultural ambassador in the show are thinly spread.

The show seems to promote the notion that one does not necessarily need to work hard in order for them to make it in life. They can become rich and famous by simply idling in the show and survive nomination. Throughout Africa, riches are intricately associated with one's sweat. Africans delight in wealth that is traceable to one's efforts.

The show is ostensibly knit around the concept that given an opportunity, anyone can become a celebrity yet, of course, the marketing intent is not openly displayed. That marketing is in two ways; marketing an alien culture and foreign products under the guise of reality show. A reality show that ostensibly aims to mould housemates into celebrities while serving viewers an alien culture is doing harm to the people's culture.

### **5.3 Language**

The show lays a demand that entrants qualify into the show on them meeting a minimum language requirement. They have to be fluent in English and anyone, later in the house, found conversing in their language will have to pack their luggage out of the house. An 'innocent' rule of the game meant to ensure viewers and fellow housemates do not lose out on what housemates would be saying? On a very superficial level yes; but one has to look at the overall effect it has on the malleable minds of most youths who view the show particularly on their respect for their own languages. It impresses on their psyche that their languages should not be used and if used bring undesired consequences on the user. Pride in one's language is severely shattered as a result. Accordingly Korth, (2005:23) observes that;

Language plays an important role in defining group belonging. Stereotypes about a certain population group are often based on their language and dialect. Favourable and unfavourable stereotypes and attitudes influence a person's self image and can influence his/her language use as well.

Negative attitudes about one's language are developed by such deliberately crafting such rules

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that seal out indigenous languages from public discourses. Speakers of the indigenous languages end up downgrading their languages in the process. More so, when one looks at the age-old language/culture dialect, one appreciates the negative effect of using a foreign language to project one's own culture. If housemates are forced to use a foreign language, it is likely that they would best portray the culture of that language.

#### **5.4 Nudity**

One aspect of BBA that has been roundly castigated in most BBA versions is the culture of nudity it seems to promote among viewers. In all versions of BBA from its inception to present day, nudity is one hallmark of the reality show. It is common to see housemates going about semi-naked or worse. The bath hour has become one of the fiercely debated areas in the show since it screens people bathing naked in front of camera, live on television. The first version of the show, the BBA Uncut, in 2003 opened a deluge of criticism for screening explicit nudity to viewers. Most housemates, with the exception of Tapiwa Mhere from Zimbabwe, who showed a descent measure of restraint by bathing with their pants, were screened stark naked. Housemates like Mwisho, Larato among others bared it out several times bathing in full view of high definition cameras. In BBA 2 Meryl was distinguished as the nudist of the house with some viewers suggesting she was in the house for a nudity award. Blog comments on Big Brother 2 from viewers of the show exhibit mixed reactions ranging from utter disgust to lustful appreciation;

*'Their nudity is quite appalling and disgusting. Is that the true picture of an African woman? What a mess to womanhood?'*

*'Go ahead brother. After seeing these hot pictures, I urge you to harmer those girls. Start with Meryl. If you miss the money don't miss the goodies.'*

Explicit showers attracted wrath of many female viewers while males lustfully waited for the shower hour for their own erotic gratification.

Amongst most African peoples seeing someone naked is considered taboo (Tatira, in Mapara and Mudzanire, 2013). Africans set it as a taboo for their people at a very tender age that they should not watch naked people because they would grow a pimple on the eye. It was feared that watching naked people would lead to rape cases. Today, Africans are abused by the technology of the west to engage in pornography which has contributed immensely to loss of love and trust among couples and in some cases increase in incestual liaisons. Where is this culture coming from? In some parts of Europe and America, and sadly creeping into Africa, nudity is celebrated as a game show. In some western nightclubs patrons pay to watch nude pole dancers-some kind of pornographic tourism! Considering the rate at which pornographic material is exported to Africa, one may surmise that it is only a matter of time Africa catches up with this madness.

Such debauchery and shamelessness is not common among Africans. The average African is shy and less expressive. Considering that housemates sleep in one room irrespective of sex, one wonders what big brother expects the housemates to do. They have to change their undergarments in the presence of members of the other sex. In Africa, boys and girls or the unmarried in general do not share a bedroom, let alone a bed yet here viewers are made to believe that they can sleep with anyone anywhere. Decency is a severely devalued. When the cover of decency is shuttered people behave in a manner that is nihilistic and those who idolise

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them end up worse than their idols

The few inmates who choose not be nude are not any better since they clad in attire that lacks a respectable measure decency. The male appear with all sorts of dress codes, hairstyles and tattooed bodies that are not common among most Africans. Some men have their trousers dropping leaving their backs half bared or they go shirtless, exposing their tattooed muscular frames in a manner that makes family television viewing uncomfortable. Some ladies appear in clothes that leave very little to imagination- clothes that expose the unnecessary details of one's body. One wonders what culture is responsible for this. *Ndiani anotiroya zvakadai ?* (Who is bewitching us like this?). Our culture forbids us naming the witch but exposing their deeds.

### **5.5 Explicit sex and sexually suggestive behaviour**

The BBA reality maybe castigated for allowing activities that are considered private to look public thereby paving way for young people to engage and experiment in them without any measure of restraint. The rampant candid portrayal of sexual transactions in the house has been met with reservations from a number of viewers. In almost all the versions of BBA it is not uncommon to see people who have just known each other in the house engaging in sexual relationships - just a few days into the house!

Sex and sexually suggestive behaviour are rampantly paraded on TV as if they were virtues to be striven for by viewers. Yes, the producers are slyly protected by the age restriction signal on the screen, but that alone is not prohibitive enough to scare away underage viewers. If anything, it probably attracts their attention to obscenities. In most versions of BBA candid sex scenes abound. In the 2003 Gaetano Kagwa set the most controversial scene when he and a South African Abby Platjes appeared to have sex live on air much to the chagrin of viewers. Richard in BBA was embroiled in sexually suggestive scenes in the house. Sheila in the 2008 version should be remembered for her extroversive sexual escapades in the house with Takondwa and for her bisexuality. The same goes for Tawana in the same version of BBA who stirred controversy when she lent herself to sex with various housemates. Ernest and Boke in BBA 6 were heavily censured for having sex in the house in front of camera. Also rampant are sexually compromising scenes in the house. Nowhere in Africa is sex a spectator sport where viewers sit around clapping in approval of the scenes as they unfold

However, most former housemates do not see anything wrong with the programme in this regard. Vimbai Mutinhiri is reported to have lend her support for the programme when she commended that,

Bib Bother is not a moral standard, it is for entertainment, you do not have to live by it, just enjoy it as entertainment...we are not here to set moral standards. The main aim is to find a way to get the prize money (The Herald 22 January 2013)

What is objectionable about the ex-BBA 'celebrity' is that her conception of entertainment is divorced from the afro-centric conception of entertainment. Entertainment in the African sense is premised on pragmatic utility and should be morally enhancing. In other western societies entertainment is anything that tickles the mind regardless of the moral relevance of such entertainment. Worse still, to think of landing a prize at the cost of culture is to bare one's cultural integrity. Makhosi Musambasi, another former housemate in Big Brother UK,

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unashamedly said that there was nothing taboo about seeing people having sex on TV when our forefathers used to marry many wives ([www.thezimbabwean.co/entertainment/music-and-dance/53257/realitytelevision-a-cause-for.html](http://www.thezimbabwean.co/entertainment/music-and-dance/53257/realitytelevision-a-cause-for.html)) The defence for candid sex is set on the pretext that our forefathers used to have many wives which in itself is not squarely related to the allegation in context. Polygamy and candid sex are juxtaposed as if they were synonymous. The African conception of polygamy is not the same as promiscuity let alone loose sexual conduct.

### **5.6 Alcoholism and the culture of indulgence**

Levi-Strauss, 1978), in Karp (1987), notes that in African contexts, eating and drinking are activities that are redolent with symbolic significance. In the complex of belief, custom, and attitude surrounding beer drinking, traditionally, Africans expressed an implicitly held set of ideas about the nature of their social world and their experience of it. There was no such thing as vain alcohol consumption in most parts of African prior to the advent of colonialism. Then, beer consumption was associated with social functions and traditional ceremonies. There had to be a social theme around which alcohol was consumed (Karp, 1987). Yes, nowadays alcohol consumption is no longer an occasion specific activity but the extent to which alcohol is consumed in the house seems to portray Africans as wasteful and pleasure-seeking idlers whose mission in life is futility. Housemates are supplied with lots of beer and food stocks. They drink from one morning to the other none stop- from one hangover to the other, if they so wish or can manage. They smoke profusely; they live a life of extravagance unmatched in the average African lifestyle thereby creating artificial shortages in the minds of most viewers. We have seen female housemates drink, smoke, get drunk and strip in front of live television cameras ([bigbrotherafrica.com](http://bigbrotherafrica.com)). What a message to the uninitiated young girls of Africa? They would obviously lead our girls into experimenting with such lifestyles. The average African woman is positively reserved and well collected.

### **5.7 Abuse of power**

Holmes (2004) in Aslama (2009:82) observes that "... the greatest moral concern seems not to stem from audiences' notions of 'bad taste' or shocking events in the BB house, but from the underlying assumption of the imbalance and abuse of power. On the one hand, it is thought that the BB participants are opportunistic hedonists who aim for celebrity status at all costs; on the other hand, it is believed that the production team coldly manipulates the participants, and is mainly concerned with maximising revenue. BB producers and even voting audiences are seen as players of a game where participants are seen as mere objects. The objectification of other human beings is to a larger extent foreign to African cultural values. It is really puzzling to understand the motivation that inspires African people to agree on extensive or even continuous broadcast surveillance which exposes their privacy.

The concept of big brother strikes a variety of mental pictures to different groups of people spaced in different professions of concern. Though traceable to George Orwell's enigmatic dictator, in his then futurist novel, *Nineteen Eight Four*, as has already been alluded to, its use in a variety of contexts has excited the attention of this research in its search for the prime source of

the culture on show in most episodes of the BBA show.

In international politics the term has gained currency in describing the totalitarian and dictatorial tendencies by the dominant powers that impose their authority on weaker states willy-nilly. The historical background during which Orwell wrote his book included several leaders such as A Hitler, W Churchill, F.D Roosevelt and Stalin (often cited as having developed a cult of personality around him) (<http://wiki.answers.com/Q/>). The leadership styles, then, gravitated towards autocracy, hence the concept BBA appears to lampoon those despotic tendencies by the world powers. In today's political language, Britain, United States of America, France, Germany and Russia have been tagged BB states to depict their wanton imposition of authority on weaker states in global geopolitics. They have invaded the privacy of many nations ostensibly to restore political order. They are the self-appointed champions and authors of democracy, captains of world order, and the reality definers of many spheres of life.

Big Brother's omnipotent, omniscient, eternal and non verifiable nature and his absolute demand for obedience (though some may see this as divine parody) have a muted reference to the various manifestations of Big Powers in international socio-political affairs. The big powers have masked their intentions and influence in global socio-political issues to an extent where they appear invisible yet present. They have crafted a variety of tactics that they exert their influence stealthily. Clandestinely, they have maintained their hold on the mental spheres of their victims to a point where their victims have lost their psychology, sensibilities and patriotic compasses. It is not surprising to find the presence of these big brothers in realms where they may not be physically identifiable.

The Eurocentric tragic trilogy of slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism has left an indelible imprint on the African socio-political landscape (Mudzanire, 2013). While the first two aspects of the trilogy could be rendered bygone vices, and the later fairly hushed and muted, their impact on the African modes of cognition and tastes is palpably enamoured in the average African person today. African people have zealously traded their dignity, integrity and corporate ego on the altars of cultural universalism- a masked version of cultural imperialism. Are Africans then willing accomplices of their own victimisation? No. The invitation to universalism has been extended to a culturally dispossessed people whose cultures have been bastardised to a point where their self image and pride have been severely shattered.

In the corporate world the term BB has featured to reflect the influence of major corporates in the intricate politics of contemporary capitalist economic order, where Sparks, (2007) observes the neoliberal ideology has increasingly favoured competition. The Big Brother economic giants dictate what the market should have including the content of the whole range of artistic creations on television. Programmes that may be vital in imparting noble African values may not be aired on television if they fail to secure sponsorship while those that are not very relevant to the cultural concerns of the people end up being the ones given space on television. Their monetary authority may override cultural issues on television broadcasting. This has become the immoral side of contemporary broadcasting where corporate profit comes ahead of morality. The big brother seeks his profit at the expense of preservation of nations' cultural basics. A civilisation that walks naked, speaks vulgar, and has no proper cultural orientation cannot be justified on the pretext of reality show.

Contrary to the BB advertising, "the most authentic person wins", participants talk about BB

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Finland 2005 recognise the power of the producers and even audiences to influence their actions in the house and their mediated representations, and they even occasionally complain about those powers. Still, the participants engage in serious talk about “being themselves” and about knowing the real truth regarding the events and relationships within the house. The culture of deception reigns supreme here for both audiences and housemates.

Afro-centric conception of entertainment captures the concept of utilitarian recreation. Whatever forms African entertainment takes, the overall motive was that of a morally enhancing pastime. Morally unkempt behaviour was never an accidental by-product of African entertainment, yet today it seems the contrived product of any recreational activity. The BBA more than entertainment can be envisaged as a symbol of moral decadence where the collapse of the traditional authority has demoralised Africans to a point where they know less and less of what is right or wrong.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

In the sum total of it, Wikipedia’s 2014 definition of a celebrity “as a person who is famous for contributing nothing to society but regardless are worshipped like gods...and is easily recognised by the general mindless consumer” aptly captures the essence and reception of the show in Africa and in other places of the globe. The show is guilty of the most heinous offense of cultural genocide to millions of unsuspecting viewers

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