

EXPANSION OF THE GLOBAL HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC IN ZIMBABWE

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This study focuses on the transformation of the customs of the Shona as part of the local response to the rapid expansion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Zimbabwe.

Southern Africa is the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The active inter-regional movement of people, which has roots in the migrant labor system of the colonial era, is one of the main causes of the high HIV infection rate. This movement has grown under globalization and the rapid increase in the economic presence of South Africa in the region. The more serious the epidemic has become, the more it has attracted aid and donor agencies from outside the region; this has brought global influence to bear on local society, not only in terms of funds, new medical information, and technology but also with respect to societal norms and ways of thinking. As a result, people in the region have experienced rather drastic cultural changes over the last two decades.

In Zimbabwe, there have been four stages to the response to the epidemic: denial, complacency, panic, and acceptance. The transformation of customs occurred mainly after the acceptance stage, in the late 1990s. While this transformation has involved the resurrection of some local customs, others have been eliminated or modified. This transformation reflects the people's response to, and their efforts to face, the epidemic; customs based on an old local system have come up against global influences as part of the struggle against the epidemic. Consequently, this process of transformation may be seen as an expression of the new position of people under intensified globalization.

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