



## African Culture, Globalization and Sustainable Development

Edna Adagogo Brown<sup>1</sup> and Tuonimi Eze Oko Jaja<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt.

<sup>2</sup>Rivers State University Nkpolu, Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 17 March 2021;

Received in revised form:  
18 April 2021;

Accepted: 28 April 2021;

#### Keywords

Globalization,  
African Culture.

### ABSTRACT

Globalization have become “unavoidable” African nations are Compelled to join in. It is now a new form of universal history that is fast integrating the developing countries into the contemporary global capitalist system. However, most of their old problems still persist. Infact, globalization has aggravated most of the problems of African countries, while adding new ones. The result is the development of a complex new society, a “pre-modern” “modern” and “post-modern” society. This paper examines African culture in the face of this radical transformation, its consequences and the challenges facing African nations.

© 2021 Elixir All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Globalization has resulted in the restructuring of the world economy and has overtaken the nuclear weapons and capitalism as the most powerful human invention. Although the term is relatively new, the actual mechanism towards the integration of all economics into one and the emphasis on global interdependence and exchange dates back to centuries. Alagoa has shown that the need for independence and exchange inform the group relationship between the Eastern Niger Delta Communities (Alagoa 1972). The European expansion into Africa in the 1500 was only to explode the proportion of this independent with “other worlds”. Ali Mazrui on his part maintain that globalization dates back to the early expansion of Christianity and Islam, other globalizing phenomenon, according to him were, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Revolution, the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and the imperial expansion of Europe (Mazrui 1999:68).

Today globalization is like the “Sunami” and the literature is quite extensive. Scholar have characterized it variously as “turbo capitalism”, (Harris and Seid 2000), “new-international” (Jorge Nef and Wilder Robles 2000:32) “neo-colonialism” or even as cosmo corporationalism or even the end of history.

The driving force behind globalization is free – market capitalism. The more market forces rule, the more open the economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient and flourishing the economy becomes. Globalization means the spread of free – market capitalism to virtually every country in the world. Globalization has its own set of economic rules, and the rules revolve around opening, deregulating and privatizing the economy to make it more competitive and attractive to foreign investment.

Globalization is creating a reorganization characterized primarily by a generalized deterritorialization of capital “space of place” is replace by “space of flux”. In other words, territory is being replaced by network which no longer corresponds to a particular territory but is inscribed within the world market, independent of any national constraints.

For the first time in history, economic and political space are no longer bound together. This is the deeper meaning of globalization (De Benoist 1996:119). Globalization is the extension of the entire globe of the highest achievements of the enlightenment and critical modernity. The world Bank defines it simply as “the ability of individuals and firms to transact business across national boundaries (World Bank Allas 1999:52). How has this business method affected African Nations?

### Transnational Corporations and African Nations

The transnational corporations and banks must penetrate African nations to be effective. It must have unbridled competitiveness and unregulated markets, and this have shaped the relationship so far. Therefore to obtain funds from International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank Loans, African nations were imposed the following conditions:-

- Eliminate all barriers to foreign investment, de-unionize workers, elimination of price control tariffs, and currency control. The maxims here is that competitive and unregulated market is the key to development.
- Cut down on direct taxation on income and wealth in order to increase disposable earning among the well to do. Conversely, increasing taxation on consumption in the form of value added or goods and services tax (VAT and GST).
- Paying more attention on export – oriented goods in order to acquire enough foreign exchange to service foreign debts. This is why hunger is still an issue in Africa and mist developing nations.
- Drastic cut on public expenditure, on education, health care, welfare assistance, unemployment insurance and pension, in order to check inflation and this increase export and be able to service foreign loans.
- Deregulating the private sector in order to enhance competitiveness and free exporters and importers from government control, thus giving an unbridled control to market. This has generated the biggest controversy in Nigeria – the issue of deregulating petroleum in the country.

f) Privatization of the public sector – banks, roads industries, energy, water, communication and other utilities in order to maximize profit and increase ownership by foreign companies.

g) Devaluation of the local currency to increase the value of export – goods and enable the mega companies to transfer profit into “hard currencies”.

h) The picture painted by these developed nations, the mega corporations and their allies, the financial organizations can be summarized thus, privatization + Deregulation+ Globalization = Turbo capitalism = prosperity. (Turbo 1999:25).

This political economy gives prime place to the merchant at the detriment of government and people of Africa and generate an inequitable socio-economic order. Through “conditional financial” support the lending agencies and their collaborators shape, control, and manipulate both the external and internal policies of African nations. Because African nation have no “choice” but to key in to the globalizing process, they join “not as equal players but as “captive markets” and the source of cheap human and natural resources for the transnational corporations (Harris and Seid 2000:10).

Globalization has its own dominant culture which why it tends to be homogenizing to a certain degree in the previous eras, the sort of cultural homogenization happened on a regional scale. The Romanization of Western Europe and the Mediterranean world, the islamization of Central Asia, North Africa, Europe and the Middle East by the Arabs and later Ottomans, or Russification of Eastern and Central Europe and parts of Eurasia under the Soviets.

Culturally, globalization has tended to involve the spread of Americanization. From the Big Macs to Mickey Mouse (Jaja 2010:131). How has Africa culture fared in the face of globalization?

#### **African Culture and Globalization**

Culture is a universal concept and experience. It is perceived as a way of life, or the totality of all human efforts and achievement in the struggle for survival (Alagoa 1972). It is a collective and integrated whole comprising everything about man’s ideas, behaviours and products, or anything relating to his social being. It finds expression in his religion, language, philosophy, music, dance, drama, architecture, political organization, technology and so on. Man creates the things and make up culture and he absorbs these things by living within a cultural setting. Culture, therefore is not divine or natural, rather it is the product of the mind and hand of man.

African culture therefore is the product of the hand and mind of the African with the cultural setting of Africa. No other definition can surpass that of the popular anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor. According to him;

*“Culture or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquire by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1871: Fried 1959).*

Culture offers people a configuration of meanings and behavioural norms, it controls their perception of reality, programmes their thinking and acting bestows on the group a shared identity. Culture is an essential part of human phenomenon, it is the sum total of what a people do in art, work, play, in language, religion and science, in what they have a values, monuments and achievement. Nothing escapes

the purview of culture. In short, culture is everything and everything is about culture (Okeke 2001:5).

It is therefore clear that cultures are whole system that must be respected, they cannot be broken down into “elements” or “components” without doing violence to them. The struggle with cultural specificity and human universality and the inclination to marginalize based on cultural differences is a common phenomenon that should be discouraged. Thus our culture is our vantage point from where we see other cultures. We inevitably learn other cultures as an extension of our own. And we cannot empty ourselves of our own culture. Our attitude in approaching other people, another culture, another religion is to “take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is “holy”. But this is not the attitude of globalization.

Globalization has its own defining technologies: Computerization, miniaturization, digitization, satellite communication, fiber optics and the internet, which promotes the defining perspective of integration. Once a country makes a leap into the system of globalization, its elites begin to internalize this perspective of integrating and always try to locate themselves in a global context. A process that is disastrous for the nation.

Traditional African culture is family based and group-oriented. The extended family was a community of blood relatives and relations by marriage. Africans had an unrivalled sense of the sacredness. The ancestors, though spirits are involved in the day to day life of the living and the fear of punishment by the ancestors controlled excesses in all aspects of life. But with globalization and the influx of Euro-American culture, a redefinition of reality is taking place.

Globalization does not sell just commodities and goods. There is commodification of everything, from sounds, signs software to homogenization of life-styles:- cultures, intellectual property, ethical values, religious sentiments are now commodities for the free trade mechanism. In fact “all things are now being transformed into currency. What enters the system as a living thing comes out as a commodity, a dead product” (Alain 1996:119).

Today, through a flood of print and electronic materials Euro-America is able to promote their alien culture, perpetuate liberal ideas and hand on their sexual mores. In short modern communication has created a new culture, a global-pseudo culture that tends to subordinate religious and moral values to consumer materialism. Jaja argues that the “Americanization” of the globe will lead, not to positive globalization strictly speaking, but to the establishment of the American World Empire (Jaja 2010:119).

Most of the television programmes in Africa, apart from the home videos are from Euro-America and they promote liberal sexist ideas. Sex therefore in the global consumer culture has become a commodity for sale on similar footing with tobacco, coke and alcohol. It is peddled by pornography in the mass media especially, “ the adult movies”. Today most human activities are characterized by “instantism” – instance coffee, instant popcorn, instant tea, instant milk, fast food and of course instant sex.

This blatant hedonism is undermining the ethical teaching of trading Africa regarding sex. Sexual activity in traditional Africa was the subject of much symbolism and ritual, essentially a dialogue with the future and a communication with the unborn (shorter 1985:21). All these have a experienced the exterminating influence of globalization. This means that globalization achieves much more than

cultural imperialism, it foregrounds cultures as an instrument of imperialism. In other words, culture acts both as a sword and a mask (Panikkar 1997:53).

I think enough has been said on African culture and globalization. It is pertinent to conclude this paper by examining globalization and sustainable development.

### **Globalization and Sustainable Development**

How can sustainable development be sustained in the face of globalization?

The very notion sustainability, with its concern for mankind and the planet reflects a process of globalization, emerging forms of governance and changing values. Favourable shift in investment, income and job opportunities in some parts of the globalized world area accompanied by loss of jobs elsewhere, unpredictable withdrawal of capital and deepening divide in needed skills and innovation, all adding new sources of instability for the African poor.

Preserving the life support system of African nations are made more difficult by the rapid and continuing global environmental changes in the air, oceans, land, and freshwater system. Because most of these are linked to human actions, including actions to meet human needs, slowing, stabilizing or reversing such changes takes a great effort.

There are Raquel environment changes and changing problems. The atmosphere and oceans, lands and freshwaters, species, ecosystems land living resources, and the great biogeochemical and hydrological and hydrological cycles have been fundamentally altered. Flows of materials and energy that are removed from their natural settings or synthesized now rival the flows of such materials within nature itself. For African people resident in the poorest nations and the poorest sections of large cities in industrializing nations, the dominant problems are often health problems of lack of clean water and sanitation and indoor air pollution. As income increases and indoor plumbing and vented cook stores rectify many of these problems, outdoor air and water pollution become the characteristic problems of cities and watersheds.

However, for the richest African nations there are substantial reduction in local air and water pollution but an increase in transboundary air and water problems the emergence of global-scale problems such as climate change. The core problems here are the following:

- 1) Decreasing and increasing air pollutants.
- 2) Declining but stabilizing stratospheric ozone.
- 3) Increasing concentrations of "greenhouse" gases and global warming.
- 4) Warming oceans and degrading coastal zones.
- 5) Decreasing ocean fisheries.
- 6) Decreasing tropical and increasing temperate and boreal forests.
- 7) Intensification and expansion and pasture lands.
- 8) Modification of grassland and pasture lands.
- 9) Decreasing biological diversity and increasing biological invasions.
- 10) Growing but slowing water withdrawals.
- 11) Growing regional and local scarcity of freshwater (Ollor 2010-2).

The aim of sustainable development is to optimize the realization of a society's many different social, environmental and economic objectives at one and the same. This can only be achieved through an adaptive process of globalization, but it will require bargains, struck amongst the different interest group concerned. It must however, be emphasized that

different perspectives on environment and development are both inevitable and legitimate. Finally, the bargain that must be struck, must take an economic approach and identify the human and natural "capital stocks" that are needed for development. Explicit policies are required to maintain and enhance African natural capital and the services it provide for development, such as raw materials, freshwater and a stable climate. Every African should do his part by adding some scientific rigor to analyzing sustainability and to use appropriate metrics to determine comparative merits of alternative, that way the benefits of pulling sustainable development into practice will decrease the debilitating effects of globalization.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen the imbalance in the present stage of globalization. A situation where less than 15% of the world's population controls, uses, consumes and even destroys more than 80% of the world's non-renewable resources of the world does not augur well for the world corporate existence. The global system as it exists is grossly exclusive. The interest of African Nations whose natural resources and manpower is greatly exploited and cultures receiving devastating knocks seem to receive little consideration. There is therefore the need for a re-orientations, a change of attitude, and an urgent need for a culture of mutual respect and inclusiveness for countless African cultures and millions of underprivileged Africans whose way of life have been destroyed by the effect of globalization. What is required is not "sympathy" but a commitment of sustainability in the process of interconnectedness.

### **References**

- Alagoa, E.J.A (1972). *A History of the Niger*. University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan.
- Cookey, S.J.S. (197). *King Jaja of the Niger Delta. His life and Times* Nok Publishers New York.
- De Benoist, A (1996). "Confronting Globalization" in *Telos Summer Issue*.
- Fried, M (1959). *Reading in Anthropology. Vol III Readings in Cultural Anthropology*. New York Thomas Y. Cromwell.
- Harris, L.R. and Seid, M.J. (2000). "Critical Perspective on Globalization and Neo-Liberalism in Developing Countries" in *International Studies In Sociology and Anthropology*. Boston.
- Ikime, O. (1974). *Leadership in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Africa* London.
- Isichie, E.O. (1983). *A History of Niger*, New York Longman.
- Jaja, J.M. (2008a). "Cultural Dynamics and Globalization in Multi-Ethnic Nigeria" in *European Journal of Social Sciences* 5(4).
- Jaja, J.M. (2010). "Globalization or Americanization" Implication for Sub-Saharan Africa In Kent G. Deng (Ed.) *Globalization. Today Tomorrow*. Seigo, Rijeka, Croatia.
- Jorge Nef and Wilder Robles (2000). "Globalization and Neo-Liberalization, and the State of Underdevelopment in the New Periphery" *International Studies in Sociology and Anthropology*. Boston.
- Kluchohn, C (1951). "The Study of Culture" in Daniel Larner and Harold D. Lasswell (Ed.). *The Policy Sciences: Stanford University Press*.
- Mazrui, A (1999). "Globalization and Cross Cultural Values. The Politics of Identity and Judgment" *Arab Studies (Quarterly, Summer, 21)*.
- Okeke, I (2001). "Commentary on the Pope's Message for the World Day of Peace".

Olaniyan, R. (1982). *African History and Culture: An Overview*. Lagos: Longman Nigeria.

Ollor, W. (2010) *Education for Sustainable Development. Essays in Honour of Sylvanus J.S. Cooley*. Published by Hellor Consult, Ollor Villa, Akpajo Rivers State.

Panikkar, K.M.(1997) "Globalization and Culture" *Voices from the Third World* December 20.

Shorter, A. (1985). *Celibacy and African Culture* Paulin Publication, Nairobi Kenya.

Turbo, L.E. (1999). *Capitalism Winners and Losers in the Global Economy*. New York Harper Collins.

Tylor, E.B. (1871). *Primitive Cultures Vol. 2* London John Murray and Co.

World Bank (1999). *World Bank Atlas* Washington.