

A Philosophical Picturing of Africa in the Globalization Project

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has ambivalence opaque both in the physical and mental spheres. Like the Trojan horse, it is a recognized catalyst in the chemistry of world unification, a lubricant for unrestricted connection in technological possibilities and an opener of investment opportunities. It is also perceived as a threat to indigenous culture, legitimacy and sovereignty of nations. The inherent possibilities and potentials made globalization an attractable phenomenon, while its shortcomings made it a detestable one. This has consequently positioned Africa between two difficult extremes; the ravaging devil and the cool deep blue sea.

The paper observes that rather for Africa to be a passive participant in this global game there is the need to be an active player. This work therefore provides a philosophical insight into how Africa can successfully navigate the turbulent ocean of globalization by placing high premium on self-reliance and harnessing the gains occasioned by fusion of horizon. In this sense, the paper argues for *glocalization of the cultures* of all participants particularly African cultures with a view to providing a level – playing field for all stakeholders. This involves looking within Africa, harnessing and placing premium on African cherished values with a view to synthesizing it with the others. The article therefore employs the analytical and prescriptive methods of philosophical inquisition.

1 Introduction

Globalization is one of the concepts used to describe the relationship that conglomerates countries of the contemporary world. Although it has a long history, the concept has however assumed a household name as its effects are being felt across the length and breadth of every field of human endeavour. The activities in the science and technology particularly in the field of information and communication put paid to this assertion, as “web of information networks interconnects individuals in an almost instantaneous global communication”¹ that shrinks the spatial frontiers that once existed between countries of the world. This is in furtherance of the ideological projection of the world dwellers towards a unified economic, political and cultural environment; thereby serving as a catalyst for greater unity. Globalization, like the Olympic games thus becomes a global game in which all countries of the world are encourage or better put, meant to necessarily participate. This is in conformity with the Olympic creed which says, “the most important thing in the Olympic games is not to win but to take part ... not the triumph but the struggle.”² However, since the chance of winning in such a game is greatly determined by the level of fitness of its participants, then it follows that the dividends of globalization, like those of a game are reserved for those players (in this context, countries) with better levels of fitness.

The above reality informs the desire of this paper to critically assess the level of Africa’s fitness in the global competition of globalization. This examination is to be achieved on a three-level discourse. The first section attempts an operational definition of globalization using the analytic methods of philosophical inquisition in order to reduce the level of ambiguity and other sources of misunderstanding that could shroud the position maintained in this paper. The second section seeks to know whether Africa has any prospect of winning in the globalization game with her present level of fitness and agility. The two levels of analysis becomes a necessary condition for identifying what Africa needs to put in place to derive the maximum dividends from the globalization game. In achieving this, the section examines the tripartite dimension of the African participation in the global game, i.e., economic, political and cultural.

2 Conceptualizing Globalization

Globalization is a slippery concept; this elusiveness is due to the complexity of the concept. It is a hazy and hotly contested concept, even as an economic ideal or as a social condition. Several attempts have thus been made to conceptualize it, although not all of these are of equal worthy status. Some have defined it from the economic perspectives; others from political or cultural angles. For instance Giles Boston construed it as “the rapid expansion of markets across national boundaries, and the social and political effects this brings.”³ Boston sees the impact of globalization more fundamentally in the economy though with spiral effects on the political sphere. Tade Aina seems to have offered more encompassing description of globalisation, according to him, it

Depicts the transformation of the relation between states, institutions, groups and individual; the universalization of certain practices, identities, structures and perhaps more significantly, the expression of the global restructuring that has occurred in recent decades in the structures of modern capitalists relation.⁴

The above definition construes globalization as the re-examination of the relationship existing between not only states or countries, but also between institutions, groups and individuals that make up the global space. Such relationship transcends economy alone, though most often, globalization is construed from economic and political perspectives, its rapidly expanding effects transcend common conception of economic liberalization and multilateralism. Globalization, among other things, is an effort or process of creating certain universal consciousness and cultural values, distinct from particular values as they relate to each country of the world. In a somewhat metaphoric sense, globalization is a contemporary force pushing the inhabitants of the globe away from their national or continental peculiarities and identities, thereby making any geographical area a no-man's land. It is, appropriately described by Donald Duke as a situation where,

An English princess with an Egyptian boyfriend crashes in a French tunnel, driving a German car with a Dutch engine driven by a Belgian who was drunk on Scottish Whisky, followed closely by Italian Paparazzi on a Japanese motorcycle and treated by an American doctor using Brazilian medicine,⁵ *in an African hospital.*

The implication of the above is that globalization, being a world-wide phenomenon, has created a kind of global interconnectivity, reducing the world to the so-called global village. To this end, Alloy Ihuah construes globalization as entailing mobility... interdependence of national cultures and politics...⁶ It is a wind blowing across the length and breadth of the contemporary world; a wind which represents a process of integrating economy, culture, technology and governances across national borders.⁷

In Ibrahim Babangida's view,

Globalization is the liberalization and intensification of international linkages in trades, finances, markets, productions, researches, transportation, energy, medicine, education, politics and culture that is accelerated by discoveries in micro-electronic information processing, communication and biotechnology.⁸

It should be noted that the forms of co-operation and linkages fostered by globalization have created a kind of interdependence in the global arena, such that states are no longer able to insulate themselves from the effect (which could either be positive or negative) of political and economic policies developed elsewhere or by transnational institutions. Such level of interconnectedness could be illustrated with the recent American economic melt-down which adversely affected every other parts of the world. By implication, isolation has gradually become a non-existent event and vocabulary in the globalised world.

It has been argued by some scholars,⁹ that the possibility of globalization, understood in the above sense, could be attributed to the effects of the latest development in information and communication technology in facilitating political, economic and cultural proximity relations generally. For instance, Ihonvbere believes that World Wide Web (www) is probably the best symbol of globalization whereby the internet has become an economic, political and social tool employed by people from all corners of the world to connect into the opportunities provided by the new global movement.¹⁰ Put differently, while it may be political, technological, cultural as well as economical, globalization has been largely influenced above all by development in the systems of communication, which according to Anthony Giddens, dates back only to 1960.¹¹

The question at this juncture is that, since Africa, which is an integral part of the newly globalize world, has been absorbed into the global network of ideas, economies, politics and cultures, what does she stand to gain? What is her level of preparedness and fitness in this global "war of all against all"? Does she have the potentials to measure up in this game as times unfold? Is her present level of fitness capable of delivering her the much needed dividends of globalization, or she is just a spectator, not expected to win any prize, except those classified as consolation prizes which usually come in terms of loans, grants and aids to less privileged countries? What does Africans need to put in place to be a positive beneficiary of the dividends of Globalization? Or she should take delight in participation as we have in the Olympic creed? These shall constitute the object of enquiry of the next section.

3 African Survival in a Globalize World.

Put within the African context, globalization appears to be a Trojan horse, aimed at achieving certain goals, all of which are inimical to the African chances of winning in the global game. Globalization, what else it may be, is marked by the centrality of capitalism, the expansion of the capitalist world market into areas previously excluded from it.¹² As a capitalist ideology, globalization is ridden with the attendant problem of survival of the fittest, which, if applied to relations between the countries of the world, breeds inequality among

these countries. This creates a class-based globalized world, where the survival of those countries occupying the bottom ladder (in which Africa is a leading continent) solely depends on their developed counterparts mainly the West.

Globalization, though appears conceptually attractive, is practically not what it appears to be, especially within the context of Africa. Almost all African countries are underdeveloped countries, and therefore stand incapacitated in a situation where their progress is tied up to their ability to compete with the developed countries of the first and second world countries, that are industrially and technologically advantaged than those obtainable in the former.¹³ The implication of this, as rightly observed by Francis Ogunmodede, is the crumbling of local production together with the growth of the disadvantaged countries.¹⁴ Among other damaging impacts, the introduction of foreign goods and services, into the disadvantaged African market squeezes out life from its local industries, and consequently makes Africa a consuming rather than a producing continent. This undermines African fitness in the global competition of globalization.

At this juncture, certain questions cannot be ignored. First, why globalization? What does the proponents have in mind regardless of how they painted it. Second, how do the inventors intend to achieve their aims through the project. ? This has to do with method. In other words, what mode of operation does the inventors of globalization employ in the attainment of their original goals?

To the first question, it seems the West, the chief proponent of globalization, institutes the phenomenon as another attempt at achieving their expansionist philosophy. Globalization is a well-planned package which aims primarily at the territorial expansion of its proponents. It used to be slave - trade, later colonialism and now globalization. In whatever guise it rears its ugly head; globalization is always couched in terms of the desire of its advocates to extend their scope of influence beyond their territorial boundary. This explains why after colonialism was ousted in the 20th century, the West quickly entrenched other catalogues of strategies of ensuring the continuity and consolidation of their perceived superiority – in the economic and socio-political spheres of other human groups, specifically Africa.

Viewed critically, this kind of acclaimed superiority of the core states over their peripheral counterparts has a way of destroying the latter's competitive instinct, milking it of the last drop of winning potentials in the global game. This attitude has been identified as constituting the basic assumption behind imperialism,¹⁵ which is one of the causative agents of African underdeveloped status. How then do the “globalizers” go about achieving their goals?

Several methods have been employed by the core states to ensure that Africa and other Third World countries remain perpetually down the ladder of development. One of these methods is the deification of certain institutions, such as International Monetary Fund, (IMF), World Bank, and other of such institutions,¹⁶ whose policies and practices affect Africa the most. These institutions are reputed to having the Almighty formulae for African underdevelopment. By this act, the West clearly steer African thought away from the original causes of their problems. And since these institutions have themselves not been found wanting in the global quest and campaign for poverty-stricken Africa to religiously follow and enthrone new-liberal economies for which globalization is a driving force, whatever ‘development policy’ they come up with for African countries is generally accepted without scruple or suspicion. This is in addition to the ‘magnanimity and philanthropic gestures’ of those financial institutions which comes in forms of loans and grants which has left Africa incapable of asserting control over her economic and political sovereignty. This was aptly noted by G. Iweriebor in the following:

Since the 1980s, African countries burdened by a mountain of debts have been rapidly losing what little political independence they had gained, through the Western agencies of multilateral imperialism: the International monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank). These imperialist agencies have preferred programmes of so-called economic recovery using a combination of strategies for weakening African economies. This has been brought about by advocating drastic reduction in the size of the public sector, retrenching staffs in the field of education and health service and imposing general development programmes.¹⁷

These institutions and their financiers ensured that there is lopsidedness in the powers possessed by the boards of these financial institutions in favour of the West, in spite of the fact that the activities of these institutions impinge more on Africa continent. For instance, Boston observes that, “the combined share of the vote of all sub-Saharan African countries adds up to around 5 to 7 percent. The people with a real stake in Bank and Fund activities do not have... a real stake.”¹⁸ In other words, the dividends of the much cherished democratization of

governments and institutions by the West is not extended to non-Western or African continent so that there would be firm control of the activities of these developing nations.

In agreement with the foregoing, D.A Alo cites the appointment of Professor Charles Soludo and Okonjo Iweala as the Chief Executives of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and Ministry of Finance respectively, as a confirmation of the World Bank control of these key and sensitive areas of Nigerian economics.¹⁹ The same could be said of other African countries where World Bank and IMF have taken over the process of preparing, supervising and implementing the budget, either directly or indirectly through their individual agencies. The paradoxical consequences of the politics prescribed by these world bodies are visible enough in Africa: they manifest in the forms of hunger, retrenchment, abject poverty, high level of illiteracy and general underdevelopment. The apparent conclusion inferable from this is that, the more Africa gets immersed in the global village, the more impoverished it becomes.

Another measure taken by the advanced West to undermine African fitness in the global game of globalization is the issue of debt burden. Gerald de Bemis,²⁰ observes that the economies of the peripheries are not buoyant enough to compete favorably with those of the central because of debt crisis. Explicating further, Bemis identifies two stumbling blocks on the road to a successful reimbursement of the high debts incurred by African countries. He writes:

On the one hand, the reason that the debtors had put the peripheries in debt was to be able to sell to them. It would have been unimaginable if they, all of a sudden, wanted to buy from them since it would especially have created a large number of problems in their own countries (bankruptcy, unemployment, etc). On the other hand, the peripheries do not have any thing else than a narrow line of products to sell, either agricultural or mineral based products, since some manufactured products do not have the degree of sophistication that corresponds of the demands of the central.²¹

With a huge debt, Africa cannot resist the temptation of accepting the concerned opinion of the institutions to which they are indebted without considering the long term consequences of such attitude. No wonder L. Banjo describes the financial institutions giving out this loan as “wicked machines of the imperialist, which completely have their pedigrees in the ideological frameworks of the West and its monopolistic view of what the world, should look like.”²² The net result of these debts is the deflection of African effort towards the reimbursement of the debts rather than how to exploit the opportunities opened by globalization to its (African) own advantage.

On the political terrain, globalization seemingly has the advantage of being at home with the tenets of the communitarian nature of the Africans especially with the increasing popularity of liberal democracy, however, liberal democracy was entrenched by the Western ideologist into African polity so that the Western power, despite having reluctantly relinquished power to facilitate Africa’s political independence, could still have unhindered influence on the affairs of its former colonies. The result of this could not be more conspicuous: neo-colonialism; which in the opinion of Chukwudum Okolo, is different from colonialism only in degree, and essentially constituted so that the state that is subjected to it, is merely independent in theoretical principles with all the outward trappings of sovereignty, while in reality its economies and therefore, its decisions and policies are directed by foreign power.²³ Democracy, is being used as a tool to propagate the ideals of globalization to non- democratic states especially, Africa. The Arab spring- a euphemism for the revolutionary demonstrations and protests, riots and civil wars in the Arab world of the Middle East and North Africa cannot be divorce from the globalization agenda. This and many others perhaps informed Anthony Giddens position that, democracy, being a tool in the hands of the imperialist, has been used to preach the good news of globalization to Africa although it has handed her on slippery ground because it has been hard for them (Africans) to accept and practice.²⁴

Culturally, globalization is a charade directed at destroying the African identity. The harmful effects of globalization on African culture cut across all African cultural practices: dressing, food, language, indigenous medicine, music, technology and other African cultural practices. Among these aspects of African cultural life, language seems to be the most affected. There is no gain saying the fact that globalization has given rise to the need for diverse people all over the world to communicate using the language they can understand. In this respect, English language has expectedly become the choice language for global communication.²⁵ Anthony Giddens seems to have paused at this contemporary reality when he writes:

Globalization has brought with it the need for millions of people of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to communicate simply and effectively

using a language they both understand. For better or worse, English has come to fulfill this need... What learners want is to do business in English, study abroad or make friends.²⁶

The globalization of English language is gradually eroding away African indigenous languages. Being the language of revolution, especially in the modern world characterized with growing science and technology, English has been elevated to the status of the global language as most business transactions on the internet, television, telephones, aero communication, for instance, are conducted in English language. This fact has largely been responsible for the dispersal of the language all over the world.²⁷ The more popularity this global language gains, the more insignificant the local languages become. In most homes especially, in Nigeria discourses are conducted with children in English language. At school emphasis is laid on the use of English language while the speaking of any Nigerian language is criminalized. It is cognitively appropriate to see why people are getting conscious of the fact that, like biological species, languages are equally endangered, the imposition of English language has a way of plunging Africa down the ladder of development. If a people's language forms the foundation of their philosophy, the destruction of such language has the propensity of destroying this philosophy, and consequently their developmental instinct. This is the case especially when we view development as being a product of human intelligence made explicit through the background language. Besides, the global propagation of English language helps the 'globalizers' to sell not only their products (goods and services) but also their ways of life to African people, which further kills the African fitness in the global competition.

Another harmful effect of globalization on the cultural heritage of Africans is the confusion of the Western culture with modernism: westernization and modernization are not synonyms. This has led to the adoption of the western lifestyle by Africans. *Africanism* is gradually paving ways for Western values of music, fashion, architecture, communication of sexuality, sport, morality, politics, religions, and street socialization rather than family-based socialization.²⁸ This way Africans are stripped naked of their traditional identity thereby creating white' men in African flesh. When this begins to happen, it becomes easy for the Western overlords to manipulate the African affairs even without physical contacts or the least suspicion. This is aptly put by Assisi Asobie; who charges that:

For anyone to think that globalization is not an imperialist policy simply because there is no evidence that imperialist met somewhere and conspired to proclaim and impose globalization on countries has a child's ignorance of affairs of men... who dominate the globalization? Who set them up? Whose interest primarily do they serve?²⁹

The answers to the questions in the above quotation are not far fetched. We may answer the question by simply saying: "the West". And since this is a fact, it becomes lucid that globalization is more of a programme than a process or a phase in human history. Hence, in the final analysis, globalization is an ideological strategy, and a calculated effort for maintaining a relation of inequality between the advanced industrialized countries and the less privileged ones of which Africa is a leading continent. Globalization can thus be best described as a holistic programme of capitalism packaged to open up African countries to exploitation and domination through trade, investment,³⁰ and other means.

4. Rethinking Africa's role in the Global Order

It is apparent from the foregoing analysis that African fitness in the game of globalization needs a re-definition. This re-definition is to be achieved by re-examining the relationship between the West and the rest (especially Africa); a relationship whose history has never breed justice. Slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, and globalization, each of which better describes an unfortunate relationship between the West and the rest, especially Africa, they have all been destructive to African chances of survival in the global struggle. For instance, as African were recovering from the shock of slave trade and its attendant negative effects, Africans were bedazzled by even a worse surprise in the form of colonialism a system, which denied them the access to their own affairs for more than a century. B. Ijoma captures these negative transformations in the below expression;

No eternity is long enough for Africans to forget the brutality, the horrors and human degradation that followed the slave trade... colonialism was a process of acquiring our lands by controlling our political and economic destiny; Colonialism was the sum total characteristic features which sought to wipe

away our values and culture. After independence, the Whiteman introduced modernism, which is another way of asking Africans to abandoned their values and culture, and accepts Whiteman's ways of living and doing things. Modernism is a subtle way of destroying the African personality. Globalization is an advanced form of modernism.³¹

Globalization, like chameleon appears in myriad of colours, the only noticeable denominator is the destructive landmark it has to African yearns for development. While the phenomenon appears fascinating as it promises wealth and reduction in the level of poverty for all, in reality, it is the enactment of imperialism in all facets of the African life. Only the strong and powerful nations can withstand and control the invisible forces of globalization in maximizing profit at the expense of their weak counterparts. It is cognitively appropriate to say it is a game for the "swifter, higher and stronger" like the Olympic Games.

How then can Africa benefit from globalization? The answer seems to be for Africa to improve her level of fitness in the global game. But how can this be attained, especially since for nearly two decades, the continent has been ravaged with different globalization 'doses', which instead of resulting in the expected upward movement on the continuum of development, have worked against development in Africa? To suggest, pulling out of the global game is to embark on an impossible mission. To suggest on the other hand, that Africa should break off all forms of relationship with foreign powers is again another way of alienating from the globalize world. It is a situation with grave complexity. Thus, the only option left for Africa in harnessing the opportunities offered by globalization to her own advantage consists in African developing a specific attitude towards their own culture; Africans must learn that understanding a different culture should not imply dogmatic acceptance even, if it has some assumed value that should command attention and respect, such culture should pass the acid test of criticism before being swallowed hook, line and sinker. This does not suggest clinging obstinately to cultural dictates that would be a clog in the wheel of development. The suggestion here has a striking similarity with the spirit of give and take among individuals and cultures which Hans – Georg Gadamer refers to as "Horizon fusion"³². By Horizon fusion, it implies that my own particular horizon, converse with others' from a completely different cultural horizon without completely colonizing his or her horizon, or being colonized. In addition to the above, Africans must develop and take pride in their own products as a basis for interactions; they must look inward for their development as a spring board for contributing uniquely to world development. It is pertinent to note that one can meaningfully contribute to others development when one has discover himself, this is what Kolawole Ogundowole refers to as self – reliancism; "striving for self – reliancism leads to the discovery of the other people."³³ This transcends individuals, succinctly put, it equally requires good leadership and committed citizenship, which manifest in the appreciation of goods and services that have local origin, coupled with a right attitude of the Africans toward the African experiences. Ultimately, the global initiatives for Africa's development must not only involve the people, they must originate from the people and sustained by the people, and not the foreign benevolent guardians or partners.³⁴ Then, Africans will be able to make their mistakes and learn from them. Like the Olympic game, globalization is a game for the *citius, altius* and *fortius* that is, the swifter, higher and stronger, Africa is capable of achieving this feat.

5. Conclusion

The analysis given in the article opines that Africa is capable of harnessing the dividends of globalization when she looks more within rather than without in her quest for development, this should be complemented with the synthesis of appreciated cultural values of others within the globalize world. What makes nations and by extension people to be developed cannot be solely based on exogenous sources, the relevant exogenous sources must be complemented by the peoples' endogenous source. To forestall unnecessary dissipation of energies on technological development and democracy, Africans must be introspective with a view of harnessing the culturally beneficial and rewarding heritage.

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