7

Globalization or Americanization: implications for Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Globalization has become a most used and most confused concept. There are varied interpretations as they are varied proponents. Consequently, the concept "globalization" requires deeper critical reflection to unravel its true essence. The paper aims at understanding the concept. We argue that Globalization is an ongoing process that is yet to be fully unraveled and understood. We posit that the world is currently experiencing Americanization. It is therefore inappropriate to construe the current worldwide economic attempt as already a globalized one. We attempt a distinction between globalization, Americanization and internationalization, and posit that though conceptionally distinct, they share in practice, the common aim to homogenize the globe. Furthermore, attempt is made to articulate this homogenization on the culture of sub-Saharan African nations like Nigeria. Finally, we make bold to argue that, globalization is an ill-wind and a threat to national culture – a recipe for cultural disaster. We argue that if we must globalize, it must be taken with "a pinch of salt" as it were or risk the loss of cultural identify of Nations.

Introduction

Globalization has become not just an analytical concept but a contested concept around which has formed political groupings. The concept of "globalization" thus requires deeper critical reflection to unravel its essence.

This paper aims at understanding what globalization really is. We posit that globalization is an ongoing process yet to be accomplished. What the world is currently experiencing, is Americanization. Therefore, it is inappropriate to construe the worldwide economy as already a globalized economy. Furthermore, we make the distinction between globalization, Americanization and internationalization. Although globalization, Americanization and internationalization are conceptually distinct, they both share, in practice, the common aim to homogenize the globe. We shall attempt to articulate the implications of such homogenization on culture in Nigeria and as Africans. In the final analysis our position is

that globalization is a threat to national cultures and identities a recipe for cultural disaster. We must then "globalize" with caution as we stand the risk of losing our identity as a people.

Globalization: Meaning

Globalization has been defined as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa" (Giddens, 1990:64). The Awake Journal maintains that "globalization is the term some use to describe the growing worldwide interdependence of people and countries" (Awake May 22, 2002). The increased global integration of people and countries, it is believed, has manifested itself economically, politically, culturally and environmentally because "people living around the globe are linked more deeply, more intensely, more immediately than ever before" (Awake; 2005).

Stanley Fischer, the First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at a conference on Globalization held in Cameroon maintained that:

> *Globalization is multifaceted, with many important dimensions – economic and social, political and environmental, cultural and religious which affects everyone in some way. Its implications range from the trade and investment flows that interest economists to changes that we see in our everyday lives, the ease with which we can talk to people all over the world, the ease and speed with which data can be transmitted around the world, the ease of travel; the ease with which we can see and hear news and cultural events around the world, and most extraordinarily, the internet, which gives us the ability to access the stores of knowledge in virtually all the world's computers. (Quoted in Nigerian Tribune, Thursday, 25 September, 2003).*

Globalization has helped to liberalize national economics by creating a global market place in which all nations must participate directly or indirectly: This undoubtedly led to growing activities and power of international financial investors mainly presented by multi-national corporations (MNC's). If globalization is seen from the perspective discussed above, it deals closely with financial transactions through the use of information technology. This is why the International Monetary Fund (IMF) defines globalization as:

> *The growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increased volume and variety of cross border transactions in goods and services and international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology. (Quoted by Dandago; 2002:91)*

Globalization from this perspective is rooted in the concept called "The New Economy" which is a complete change from the traditional business we have known until a few years ago. The New Economy, led by the United States of America aims at profit maximization,

free flow of goods and capital and minimal regulation as the corner stone principles of an efficient and viable economy.

The manifestations of the "New Economy" are rooted in the capitalist economic structure which is premised on the development of markets, the price mechanism, competition, private ownership, the enterprise spirit, free decision-making and a legal framework. Thus globalization has an ideological foundation.

From these definitions, it can be inferred that globalization is the aspiration to integrate all the societies in the world, all the societies on the globe. It was Herbert Marshall Mcluhan, a Canadian communications expert and media visionary who in 1964 predicted a "global village" world due to man's increasing ability to use electronic technology to abolish space and time. Far from being a rhetoric, it is a reality of the moment, whose faces keep changing, and changing with it, the face of the global society. Mcluhan may not have realized the speed and the dimensions that the "villagisation" of the world would be effectuated. It is no longer debatable that we live in a unitary world in which time, space and distance have collapsed forever. We now live in a global village, a world electronically wired for immediate communication and, if need be immediate action.

The equipment which are responsible for the shrinking of the world into a global village come in different sizes and forms. Amongst them are: Fax machine, cell phone, computer, international radio and satellite TV stations, electronic mail and the internet – which is described as the worldwide web (www). The web is made up of a network of telephone lines, television cables, communication satellite, computers and video screens at either end that have the qualities of accessibility, mobility, flexibility, speed and cost effectiveness. These equipment may be called technologies of globalization.

Latest advances in technology have made it possible that through the monitor of a computer, one could browse and send electronic-mails (e-mails) to any part of the world, and at the same time monitor and watch TV programmes and reports, play video compact discs, and use internet telephone. K. Kaiser (2001:42) admits the centrality of the internet to globalization. According him;

> *…the internet is the turbo charger of globalization. By radically facilitating outsourcing, management, regulation, logistics, just-in-time controlling, and business-to-business and business-to-consumer contacts, it has revolutionized in a manner that we could not have imagined until recently, the internationalization of production.*

From the foregoing, it can be stated that as a concept, globalization may be defined as a policy and, or a system that favours and, or promotes global interaction, interconnection and interdependence of nations using the latest advances in technology. Globalization is a metaphor for the aspiration and the determination to render an idea or a way of life applicable and functional throughout the world. Every single part of the world must therefore be the same by applying and functioning according to a specific idea or system of ideas.

Contemporary Globalization: Features

Globalization is essentially the universalization of capitalism. The primary mechanisms of globalization are open policies with respect to international trade; removal of obstacles to international capital flow or international market integration; and international spread of knowledge. (Mussa, 2000: 5 – 10). Thus, globalization simply is "openness to trade, factor flows, ideas, and information." (Yusuf, 2003:3).

Peter F. Drucker noted that, contemporary globalization has certain specific features, which define its distinctiveness. First, it is characterized by the dominance of international finance capital, which has the effect of transforming global capitalism into 'casino capitalism' (Mohan and Williams, 1998:482). Contemporary globalization is marked by the emergence, and dominance of an enormous amount of 'virtual' money. Virtual money is not the traditional investment capital. Rather, it is a highly mobile speculative capital, or 'money-dealing capital' that is global in its operations. Its dominance has resulted in the transfer of economic policy decisions from national governments to global, transnational, actors (Drucker, 1997). Second, contemporary globalization involves a gradual transformation of business companies from MNCs to TNCs take the world as one component unit, plan their business in contemplation of the world market, and see themselves as non-national entities for which national boundaries are largely irrelevant. They are, therefore, unlikely to be sensitive to the special needs, or sympathetic to the unique problems of the underdeveloped countries in respect, for instance, of resolving the external debt crisis. Third, today, although multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational companies (TCNs), the main actors in the globalization process, still invest in manufacturing, they concentrate such investments in sites that have comparative advantage in terms of advancement in the new information and communication technologies. These are the industrialized countries. This has had the effect of boosting investment and trade in the industrialized countries and by-passing the underdeveloped areas, thus resulting in regional difference in degrees of globalization. Fourth, as part and parcel of the process of globalization, the nature of international trade is undergoing a transformation. What now predominates, by way of global trade, is better described as intra-company transfers rather than trade among nations. And the products being traded on are not mainly goods any more; they are primarily services. Consequently, the factors (e.g. variation in exchange rate), which, in the past, usually shaped international trade now have little impact; they have become unavailable as policy instruments for stimulating increase in the volume of export commodities, for instance. Furthermore, the traditional relationship between trade and investment has been reversed. It is traditionally assumed that investment follows trade; but, in the contemporary globalizing world, trade follows investment. To increase trade, one must first expand investment. This has altered the logical sequence of the steps towards regional integration. Fifth, contemporary globalization features a gradual replacement of land, unskilled labour and capital by knowledge, especially technological knowledge, as the chief economic resource. Consequently, knowledge-intensive labour is now treated by MNCs and TCNs as fixed cost which, therefore, merits higher consideration in their investment decisions than lower wages and lower taxes which, in the past, conferred a comparative advantage on the less developed countries. Thus, in comparison with the industrialized countries, African states have less chances of attracting foreign direct investment, especially in the productive sector. Sixth, contemporary globalization is not solely market-driven. On the contrary, it has a

strong political dimension. Globalization today also means 'global governance'. To begin with, globalization today is as much the product of the inexorable march of market forces as the by-product of states consciously and deliberately promoting the internationalization of the strategies of their corporations and, in the process, the internationalization of state capacity. More important, contemporary globalization involves a conscious effort by the governments of the industrialized countries to govern the world, using such multilateral agencies as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Group of Eight (G – 8), and the United Nations Security Council.

Globalization as a Problem

It must be emphasized that total and comprehensive openness to market forces can inflict very serious damage on the society and economy of an underdeveloped state. To begin with, it has been pointed out that the introduction of market forces, including the price mechanism, into a society tends to dissolve traditional social relations and institutions, subject the economy to cyclical crisis, and, through the stimulation of narrow specializations, results in external dependencies which increase national vulnerability (Gilpin, 1987:22-23). Moreover, theoretically, every nation can take advantage of global market opportunities to accelerate the rate of its growth, in practice, the spread of economic activities and, therefore, the rate of growth in a market system, tends to be uneven. This is because nations are differently endowed and positioned and may not be able to take equal advantage of the market opportunities. This is why states tend to intervene in order to guide or control market forces to the benefit of their own citizens and companies *(Ibid)*. This explains why a market economy, and this applies to the contemporary global economy, is not really politically neutral. The operation of a market economy tends to empower some actors and weaken others; and increasing economic (vertical) integration tends to establish hierarchical power relations among the actors. In response to this phenomenon, states are tempted to take steps to enhance their own economic independence of other states *(Ibid)*.

The challenge, which many countries, especially sub-Sahara Africa States, are confronted with, is equivalent to swimming between Scylla and Charibdis. On the one hand, they cannot really opt out of the global market economy, knowing that it primes specialization, a division of labour and competition, which, over all, stimulate economic growth and increase the wealth of market participants. On the other hand, since the gains of participation are unevenly distributed, and the same process that develops the strong and smart also under-develops the weak neophyte, there is need for caution in integration with the global market *(Ibid)*.

Globalization as Americanization of the Globe

"Americanization" of the globe is the worldwide spread and dominance of American influence and culture. Just as US goods flooded world markets in the post-world war II era, US culture is now penetrating every continent through the dramatic growth of mass communications such as music, television, films and the internet, as well as through the

penetration of American corporations into foreign countries. The US is de facto leader of the global system it has created. America is the centre of gravity of the world.

Vicky Baker noted that of the top 100 companies in the United States, almost none-including Microsoft-derive more than 30% of their profits from outside the American continent and only one-Coca-Cola-may be described as a truly global company. Only 10% of Americans have passports (Baker; 2002:62). This suggests that even the process of Americanization is only really starting. Yet it is not debatable that America dominates our life style and thinking, and after September 11, 2001 is more and more dominating world events.

The US dominance is really based on dominance of world financial arrangement as America dominates, controls and manipulates the global financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) which determine and regulate global trade. The US dollar has become the standard currency of the world. Coca-Cola and hamburger has become the snack of choice. Whereas in the last century the world witnessed a certain degree of homogenization mainly of the dominant classes in various societies – in Africa, educated Africans mimicking their colonial masters – we have today masses of even the poor preferring the hamburger or meat pie and Coca-cola or Pepsi to their native foods and drinks.

The American (or British) suit and tie or Jeans has become the global dress and the English language or rather, American – English has become the world language. Educated Africans, Chief Executives of business establishments, political leaders and many who can afford it have a computer or lap top on their tables (and cannot be effective without it), which is programmed in American – English. There is undisputed US cultural/lingual domination of the internet, an invention of the American military. It has been noted that 85% of web pages originate in the US and only 15% from other countries and the US controls 75% of the worldwide packaged software market. By its monopoly of technology and the media the world is bombarded by news slanted in America's favour, music and films through international radio and satellite TV stations such as CNN, CBS and US TV shows and movies have become very popular in many countries even though, most are characterized by violence and are anti-intellectual. America has a monopolistic access to the world's natural resources as well as monopoly over weapons of mass destruction. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks are widely cited as the impetus for the interventionist foreign policy of President George Bush II which has led to the turning of Iraq into an American base, and perhaps a launching of a new era of direct US rule of the Arab world. America also has troops throughout the world, perhaps also, as occupation forces to control all other countries.

Lastly, if the Nobel Prizes are a good indicator, Americans are the worlds best doctors, physicists, economists and chemists as six US citizens were bestowed the top honour in medicine, physics, chemistry and economics as the Nobel Prize committees announced 2003 winners, continuing a trend of American dominance in the science awards. Since the first Nobel Prizes were awarded in 1901, 277 of the 661 winners – i.e. 42% - have been Americans. Many of the other winners have been researchers at US universities. 35 of the 56 economics winners have been Americans.

Perhaps this can be explained as the results of American investments in their University system as the Noble Prize committees are not expected to take into consideration where people are from in conferring the awards. However the statistics also show that the Americans are not as good at writing or making peace as they are not as well represented among peace and literature prize winners, the most well-known to the public. In 2002 former president of America, Jimmy Carter became the 19th American to win the Nobel Peace Prize. There have been 110 laureates in that category. The worst American track record is in literature, with 11 of 100 winners, including Wole Soyinka in 1986.

There is in our view a legitimate fear that the "Americanization" of the globe will lead, not to positive globalization strictly speaking, but to the establishment of the American World Empire. Thus current debate on global affairs ought to focus on "America and its role in the world". The real question is as to how the US should wield its unprecedented power.

Americanization, Internationalization and Globalization

So far we have explored two key concepts of our discourse: Globalization and Americanization. We have maintained that the present global trend is one of "Americanization." Where that will lead us to, remains and uncertain. But we must note that Americanization will not necessarily lead to globalization, at least at the conceptual level.

However, one other idea, which needs to be similarly explored, is the concept of "Internationalization." Globalization, Americanization and internationalization are related and connected.

"Internationalization" suggests "transcending national limits", and extending to several nations and their relations between themselves (Kirkpatrick; 1983:658). Our contemporary world consists of nation-states, and if globalization must succeed or be achieved these nation-states must be penetrated, and this can only be done through internationalization. Thus internationalization is the first step in the process. Although Americanization, globalization and internationalization are conceptually distinct, they all share, in practice, the common aim to homogenize the globe.

Internationalization is pursued under the aegis of the United Nations Organization, which has produced many instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose aspiration and determination to be worldwide is beyond doubt.

The United Nations Organization which has the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as some of its specialized agencies as the chief facilitator of internationalization is in crisis because of its perceived American influence. Former secretary-general of the organization Boutros Boutros Ghali warned that nothing more than drastic reform would allow the organization to start rebuilding trust outside the west. According to him:

> *Many countries of the third world see a basic discrimination adopted by the United Nation system. The resolutions which are not respected by the Iraqis deserve the bombing of Baghdad. The same resolutions which are not respected by the Israeli's deserve nothing. So the perception in a great part of the third world is that the United Nations, because of the American influence or because of any other reasons, is a system which discriminates against many countries of the world (Scott; 2003:25).*

Ghali advices that the UN must find a new way of co-existing with America. Ghali also noted that:

> *They (America) cannot be the policeman of the world. One because the public opinion will not accept this role, and, second, because they do not have the capacity. You may have war tomorrow between North and South Korea. It is practically impossible even for the superpower to get involved in all the international disputes (Scott; 2003:25).*

Denis Holliday, the former UN assistant secretary general echoes Ghali's comments. He maintains that the UN Security Council had been taken over and corrupted by America and the UK. According to him:

> *The UN has been drawn into being an arm of the US – a division of the state department. Kofi Annan was appointed by the US and that has corrupted the independence of the UN. The UN must move quickly to reform itself and improve the security council. It must be make clear that the US and the UN are not one and the same (Scott 2003:25).*

So far I have been arguing basically two claims:

- **i.** Globalization is an experience in process and not yet an accomplished fact. Therefore it is inappropriate or misleading to construe the worldwide economy as already a globalized economy.
- **ii.** What the world is currently experiencing is "Americanization" which began with the attempt at internationalization.

Without in any sense offering a prediction as to what will ultimately result from the Americanization of the globe, we should like to maintain that one of the aspects of Americanization is US cultural hegemony. Americanization is a threat to national cultures and identities, a recipe for historical and cultural genocide. If we see culture as an aggregate of the way of life of a people and of their perception of themselves as a people, and language not merely as a means of communication but most importantly as a means through which culture is transmitted, then it is easy for us to appreciate the role of language and culture in the shaping of the distinctive identity of the people concerned. In effect, language and the culture which goes with it have generally been recognized as determining elements of the individuals identity. The need then for us to be culturally relevant in an age of US cultural hegemony cannot be over-emphasized if, in essence, we are really interested in the preservation of our own identity as a people.

Globalization: The Challenge for sub-Saharan States Millennium

In the 21st century, the strategy for national development pushed by the industrialized capitalist countries and multilateral financial institutions, especially for Africa, Asia and Latin America, is the full integration of their economic with the world capitalist economy through extensive and rapid liberalization. Countries are made to believe that there is a new global consensus on this 'best' strategy (South Centre, 1996:3-13). To consolidate their full integration with world capitalism, these underdeveloped countries are urged and/or pressurized to open up their economies to international import and export trade. They must encourage an accelerated inflow of foreign direct investment and generally enhance capital flows across national frontiers. They are made to believe that, in a globalizing world, foreign aid is no longer critical for development; therefore, the role of multilateral institutions should be largely to create global framework that facilitates the unfettered functioning of the global market *(Ibid)*.

Given this situation, the diplomatic challenge, which confronts these nations is how to conduct their foreign policies in a manner that reflects the nationalist impulses of their people for self-reliance in the face of an overwhelming international pressure on them to pursue a policy of neo-colonial dependence. The contemporary diplomatic strategic puzzle for them is how to realize the foreign policy objectives enshrined in their national constitutions, in an ideologically united world, which, while globalizing, is committed to consolidating the existing, inequitable, international division of labour. For a country like Nigeria, these constitutionalized foreign policy objectives include: "Promotion of a just economic world order", "Promotion of African integration and support for African unity", "promotion of international co-operation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations" and "promotion and protection of the national interest" (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999: Section 19). Section 19 is complemented by Section 16 (1), which stipulates, *inter alia*, that "the State shall, within the context of the ideas and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution", promote "national prosperity and efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy", as well as "manage and operate the major sectors of the economy". The challenge is enormous.

This must have informed the official position of Nigeria in 1999. President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, cautioned against embarking on full and extensive globalization, he advocated strategic, selective insertion of Nigeria into the globalization process. As he put it,

> *While we must embrace globalization, we realize that we have to be very careful in applying the principle of liberalization. There are already Nigerian industries which are on the threshold of international competition, especially against imports from countries which are adept at dumping (Economic Policy, Vol. 1, 1999:17).*

However, a new position was adopted in 2001. As President Obasanjo, argued;

> "*Nigeria must demonstrate the preparedness to exploit the inherent opportunities offered by the phenomenon of globalization in the area of technology acquisition, trade expansion, manpower development and capital transfer through foreign direct investment. And to do so, Nigeria must embark on full-scale privatization of its economy, and adopt "creative negotiations with the relevant international agencies".*

Cultural Relevance Amidst US Cultural Hegemony

We have argued earlier that the process of globalization is natural and inevitable. As it stands today, globalization is so pervasive, no one can shut herself out of the globe. Failure to embrace globalization is a direct invitation to marginalization. So, globalization is a positive development that no country can ignore because we must see ourselves in community with all other people at local, national and global levels. No place can choose to remain an island.

Obviously, the global neighbourhood that the worldwide flow of people, ideas, money and technology has created is good for mankind. It has facilitated the sharing of ideas to solve human problems. Indeed, it is a "brave new world". People and cultures have discovered and can understand one another better. The problem with the globalization of culture, or rather Americanization of culture is that US produced material, disseminated through newly liberalized telecommunications networks, would crowd out locally produced content, and in the process destroy unique national cultures and impose US market norms and values. This state of affairs calls for concern. (Jaja, 2003).

We have argued that globalization per se is not undesirable. That being the case African nations must be ready to compete on the platform of international standards. Since the use of information technology is the engine that propels globalization, nations must embrace the new syndrome. But in regard to language and culture we must device a strategy of cultural protectionism even as we globalize. It is here that the promotion of our culture can bail us out. If we are happy to be the people that we are, then we should be proud of our culture and promote and project such on the global scene employing the internet. On the internet our culture, our programmes, our creations must be strongly presented if we must avoid economic and cultural marginalization and genocide.

It is a sad commentary that in many of our homes, the mother tongue is not in use and is not even understood by the children (Jaja, 1996). Children of tender ages are intentionally sent to expensive nursery schools where the language of instruction is exclusively foreign. The reason advanced often for this development is the belief that such children stand a better chance of benefiting from the gains of globalization in the areas of science and technology through the use of foreign and world languages such as English and French. Much as this may have its advantages, we should not forget that this approach will lead to our children becoming complete strangers to their cultural heritage.

In our view, globalization must help to show that people are different; and Africans must insist on mutual recognition and parity. As we globalize we must develop a framework for cultural equality. We must recognize though that cultures are not static and weak, cultures are dynamic, and so foreign elements can be adapted and incorporated into indigenous cultures. But again, we must be critical of what we receive. We can adapt, incorporate, but still resist cultural hegemony and cultural domination. Whether America or the nations of the west like it or not, we must ensure a multi-cultural world in the face of globalization. (Jaja, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us restate that globalization is an aspiration, a race which has only just started. As we Africans line up at the starting blocks we must insist on and ensure a multi-cultural world which sustains our identity. We in Africa, should not think that globalization is a train heading towards a set destination that may – or may not – stop at the station to pick us up. Rather let's think of globalization as a delicious cocktail into which every country and continent can add a vital ingredient. Africans have the opportunity to influence the flavour and texture and even the colour of the cocktail. The world will continue to taste it – and it will go on being topped up, its flavour changing according to who is mixing it. Let's recognize that the cocktail need not only consist of Brandy, bourbon, gin, champagne, vodka and whiskey. Let's make sure it also contains our indigenous *burukutu, ogogoro* and *palmwine.*

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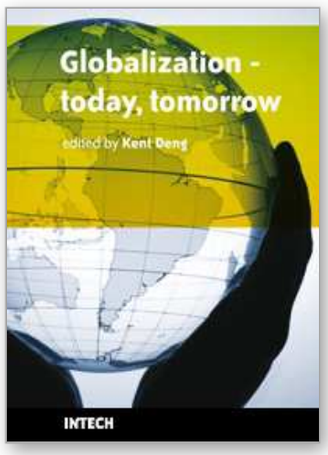

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This is a collective volume on present-day globalisation with nine chapters from authors of several academic disciplines. It covers wide aspects, ranging from the nature, impact, challenges and implications of globalisation to responses from a country or community when facing globalisation today or tomorrow. Policy suggestions are also made. This book will hence help the reader to understand the currently debated issues.

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