

Topic: The Impact of Globalization on African Culture.

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Brief Abstract:

Globalization has generated a lot of controversy with regard to the rise of a global culture. Western norms and practices are gradually being transported across the globe as the acceptable way of behaviour. In view of this, the rich and dynamic African culture has been diluted. This paper is therefore designed to outline and critically assess the influence of Globalization on African culture.

Since its conception and birth, Africa has been a cultural cornucopia-a rich harvest of indigenous traditions and culture that have attracted several people around the world to witness the manifestation and largess of such practices.

It must be said that the observance of tradition and culture and exploitation of their artefacts, many of which come in the form of statements, beliefs, legends, and customs from generation to generation have been the very definition of the African.

Introduction

Many scholars, opinion leaders and political analysts etc. have expressed divergent and dissenting views regarding the effects of globalization on individuals, nations and the world at large. I have decided to focus my search on Africa to identify how globalization has impacted on Africans and perhaps pin-point the necessary actions that need to be taken to ensure maximum benefits for Africa in this era of globalization. It is worth noting that, the impact of globalization on Africa has been diverse.

A look at the various interpretations of the term globalization reveals interaction and subsequent integration of the peoples and nations into a common system. If the central idea of globalization is interaction and integration, then globalization as a concept is not new to Africa and the world in general. Africa's interaction with the rest of the world dates back to the 15th century. The initial contact was through trade including the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and then during the period of colonialism whereby Europeans assumed political and economic control over most parts of Africa and through the era of post colonialism or independence to this present age. If we agree that any form of interaction result in a certain level of influence and hence consequences either good or bad, then it can be said that Africa's interactions and integration into the global system at any given period has played a role in what Africa is today. The consequences are both negative and positive. On a balance of probability, there is the temptation to conclude that the consequences of globalization on Africa have rather been negative.

What is globalization?

In defining and explaining globalization, Nsibambi (2001), incorporated five concepts. He defined globalization as "*a process of advancement and increase in interaction among the worlds Countries and peoples facilitated by progressive technological changes in locomotion, Communication, political and military power, knowledge and skills, as well as interfacing of*

Cultural values, systems and practices". He noted that globalization is not a value-free, innocent, self-determining process. It is an international socio-politico-economic and cultural permeation process facilitated by policies of governments, private corporations, international agencies and Civil society organizations. It essentially seeks to enhance and deploy economic, political, technological, ideological and military power and influence for competitive domination in the world.

In this report, globalization is defined "as a process of linking the regions and/or nations of the world which is facilitated by information flow (communication) inducing changes in the pre-existing socio-cultural, political, economic etc., structure and systems of nations and peoples". The adoption of this definition is in line with the aim of this report to examine the impact of globalization on Africa's culture.

Globalization and Africa

Globalization as a concept is not new to the world. Scholars believe there has been three major phases of globalization: 1870-1914, 1945-1980 and from 1980 till now (Ajayi, 2003). This however, depends on how one defines and explains globalization. With regard to Africa, international contacts and exchanges are not new. Africa's history is marked by foreign e.g. European involvement. Africa had been in contact with other parts of the world and also had significant interactions within it. Interaction with the outside world particularly Europe and America started way back in the 15th century. This has significantly altered the course of Africa history-culturally, politically, economically etc.

Africa's contact with the rest of the world started through trade, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This was the period when western merchants bought from African slave traders Africa's most valuable resources (able-bodied men, women and children). The second was the era of colonialism, when Europeans at a conference in Berlin in 1884 divided up Africa among themselves and instituted direct control and rule over African countries. This division was done without regard to ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other considerations. The next stage of Africa interaction with the world particularly Europe was during the era of independence from colonial rule. The features of pre-colonial and post-colonial era will be discussed at other section of the report.

Beginning the last decade of the 20th century into the 21st century, Africa's linkage with other parts of the world has entered a new phase commonly termed as globalization. Though the term globalization may be new, the substance and ideals are not new to Africa and the world as a whole.

Africa, a brief introduction

Africa is one of five of the world's continent. It is the second largest continent in the world both in area and population. It has an area of 11,699 square miles, more than three times the size of USA. In 1990, Africa had a population of 642 million representing 12% of the world's population. Africa is made up of over fifty nations with an estimated one thousand different languages spoken and as many distinct ethnic group. Africa is perhaps the most linguistically and ethnically diverse of the entire world's continent.

Africa is endowed with immense natural and human resources, as well as great cultural, ecological and economic diversity. In terms of natural resources, Africa is the world's richest continent. It has

50% of world's gold, most of the world's diamonds and chromium, 90% of the cobalt, 40% of world's potential hydro-electric power, 65% of the manganese, millions of acres of untilled farmland and other natural resources (Walter Williams, 1997).

In spite of these impressive facts on Africa, for much of history and even in contemporary times most non-Africans have referred to it as the "Dark continent". In the past this reference was a reflection of the ignorance of the people of the west of Africa's immense potential. However in recent years, reference to Africa as the Dark Continent is mainly due to the over emphasis of negative reportage on Africa by the western media. The headline news on Africa has focused on decay in African states, endemic corruption at all levels of government, chronic human rights abuse, hunger, famine, poverty, civil wars and recently HIV-Aids.

These stories, of course, are not mere fabrication. African countries confront very real and severe challenges. For instance, Sub-Saharan Africa home to about a tenth of the world's population is the location of half of the world's civil wars, refugees and most of its famine.

What the western media has failed to notice and to include in their reportage is that, in spite of the political, social and economic challenges confronting Africa, Africa is not in the throes of total disintegration and decay. Reports on African issues are most often ahistorical with no attempt to provide a historical context of antecedents of the issue. Many believe that most of the political and economic issues of contemporary Africa have deep seated roots in the colonial and post colonial experience i.e. effects of the cold war and globalization. The capacity and reach of the African states, the absence of democratic structures and practice, the ethnic, civil and religious conflicts that have plagued post colonial Africa is a reflection of the legacy of colonialism.

Globalization and African Culture

This segment of the paper is designed to outline and critically assess the influence of globalization on African culture in general. The most popular and controversial debates about globalization has to do with the rise of global culture (Guillen, 2001). Actually, there are only a few scholars who accept that a global culture is in the making. A "culture ideology of consumerism" -driven by symbols, images, and anaesthetic of the lifestyles and self-image-has spread throughout the world and is having some momentous effects including standardization of tastes and desires, (Guillen, 2001, Leslie Sklair, 1991).

Also, anthropologist Arjun Apadrai (1996) argues that "individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern", and that "consumption of the mass media worldwide provoke resistance, irony selectivity, and in general agency. National cultures and values change over time, though in "path dependent" rather than convergent ways (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Other writers such as Meyer and Hannan (1979) do describe world-culture as binding society and individuals together "by rationalizing systems of (imperfect) egalitarian justice and participatory representation, in the economy, polity, culture, and social interaction.

According to Yashar (1999) it is obvious that no aspect of globalization-economic, social or normative- can account for the rise of ethnic-base activism since the 1960's. Rather, globalisation changes the characteristics of the state structures that activist face when making their claims.

Frankly speaking, I am quite sceptical of a singular "culture" to be adopted throughout the world.

If by 'culture' is meant a collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values, and symbols, then we can only speak of cultures, never just culture; for a collective mode of life presupposes different modes and repertoires. Hence, the idea of a global 'culture' is practical impossibility, except in interplanetary terms (Smith, 1990).

Schein (2003) defined culture as, "a set of basic solutions – shared solutions to universal problems of external adaptation (how to survive) and internal integration (how to stay together) – which have evolved over time and are handed down from one generation to the next".

Among the various definitions of culture, Dominique Wolton has relied upon three concepts. In his words, "the classical French notion of culture is centred on the idea of creation of the 'work'. The German notion is closer to civilization and includes representations, symbols and patrimony as shared by a community at moment in its history. The Anglo-Saxon sense, more anthropological, includes modes of living lifestyles, common knowledge, images and myths.

Culture is the totality of the way of life of a group of people that has been developed, shaped and practiced over the years. The development of these cultural norms and practices are shaped by the environment and the needs of the people. Over the years as societies develop and modernize, these cultural practices undergo changes to reflect the changing times to better serve the needs of the people. This means that culture is not stagnant. It is constantly undergoing evolutions based on the changes in the environment in which it exists (Baffoe 2005).

We must admit, the term "culture" has been defined in many ways. One of the most recent working definitions is "Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another... the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment" (Hofstede 1980, Adler 1983). In general, people are seen as being from different cultures if their ways of life as a group are significantly different, one from the other.

Culture is not an abstraction; it is a living open totality that evolves by constantly integrating individual and collective choices that are taken in interaction with other, similar wholes. It expresses itself in diverse ways without being reducible to 'works'. Culture is the product of a complex inheritance constantly submitted to scrutiny and the need to adapt a constant conquest to achieve (Jean, 2002).

That cultures are embodied in particular identities should not hinder the quest for common values. Each culture is an effort to reach the universal, but none can claim to have a monopoly on it. Universality is not synonymous with uniformity. No society could work without a system of representation and action common to its members that distinguish it from others. Relations between societies, either within a nation-state or at the extra-national level, begin with the representation one has of the other (ibid).

Colonial Environment and African Culture

Over-reliance on western education as a result of colonialism has created a distorted value system. The colonial initiated education –as-prestige economy gained support by wider society. State approved farming schemes gave way to cash crops as opposed to traditional food farming at the expense of local food security. Farming activity became menial and was reserved for the largely

uneducated and the unskilled nationals. English language fluency was mistaken for intelligence. Among other examples, government accountability to its citizenry did not matter if it enjoyed international recognition (goodwill) by maintaining the colonial status quo. Formal education became a passport for gaining prestige, hence competition for places in higher education translated into competition for prestige.

As a result, the importance of human development function was overlooked. The case for local languages, the most efficient medium of education, became outmoded because of displacement. Literacy as a human development tool was made subordinate to literacy for prestige; (Paa Kwasi, 2005). These encouraged nearly all forms of language policy in Sub-Saharan Africa that is communicating with the international community. The international community for each country most notably consisted of the former colonial powers and other countries which spoke the same language as the respective colonial power. Human development then became valuable only when it was acquired in the colonial power's language and ability became only valuable to "the national development effort" if acquired in the colonial masters language e.g. English, French etc. Consequently, educational qualification in an African language became less value than qualification in the colonial language because of the influence the imperial countries exerted over Africa as a result of their science supported civilizations.

According to Prah (1995) and Paa Kwasi (2005) the advent of colonialism gradually eroded the place of African languages in African economies by granting the highest prestige value to school-education in colonial languages. The decline of political colonialism further entrenched the valuation of colonial languages above African languages. The colonial powers handed the reins of power to their western educated protégés instead of the pre-colonial traditional elites in all newly independent Africa. This means the perpetuation of the colonial language policy of using no African language at highest level of government (African education commission 1924).

The Dynamism of Culture

Each culture has its own personality. The fact that we are all human does not mean that we are the same. To ignore this would mean destroying God's own beautiful rainbow made from many colours of cultural diversity. Culture is learned. This is considered the most common attribute. Such learning does not take place through natural inheritance. It is not genetically transmitted. Rather, it takes place by gradual process of absorption from the social environment or through deliberate instruction as stated by (Fridah, 1998).

No culture is possible without a language. It has been noted that culture is bound up with language. This is an essential pre-requisite and hence to kill a language is to kill a culture. The influence globalization has had on culture is immerse and diverse. It has impacted on people's cultural attitudes in different ways.

Culture is never static it is dynamic. Day in day out, we are being transformed. It changes exactly the same way as human beings change. This transformation is gradual not sudden or abrupt. Fridah (1998) identifies a continuous process of change but in spite of the change, culture continues to give a community a sense of identity, dignity, and continuity, security and binds society together.

Within the cultural mosaic are various customs and traditions that regulate the lives of the citizens in a particular society. Just as the larger cultural mosaic undergoes constant changes and evolutions

so should the micro customs and traditions. If they remain stagnant, they actually hinder society's development.

Many societies have, within them, different ethnic groups that practice different cultures and traditions. And Africa is no exception. The African continent has various major ethnic groups who have very distinct cultures. These cultures abound with various customs and traditions that are rich, colourful and exciting. These have shaped the lives of its members over the years. As mentioned earlier, some of these cultures have been adapting to the changing times and the evolutions of African society. However there are some of these ethnic groups who cling to certain aspects of their cultures that have no place in modern-day society's development. Many of the chiefs and elders of these ethnic groups who are described as the custodians of their customs and traditions are still steeped in the medieval times, oblivious to the fast-paced changes that are shaping modern society's development.

For instance, in Ghana; within the customs of many ethnic groups are certain taboos that the group members are required to adhere to. But some of these taboos are totally at variance with modern-day development. For example, residents in certain parts of the country are forbidden from performing certain activities on designated days like going to work in the fields and farms.

In growing up in my holy village, I remember that each Tuesday residents were forbidden to go from the farm to the main river (Paamu) that encircled the town. The rationale behind this myth was that the gods and spirits of the main river that feeds the town perform their rituals on Tuesdays to bless the land, its people and their crops. Therefore they needed the peace and quiet on Tuesdays to be able to meditate and perform their rituals. No-one was allowed to cross that river on Tuesdays except those with special exceptions: These were the Palm Wine Tappers who were required to service their palm trees everyday and people coming to the town specifically to market their produce. The myth was that if anyone not holding a special exemption dared to cross the river to go to the bush, some bad omen will befall that person. Everyone in the village adhered strictly to this customary decree and society moved on. I believe many towns, villages and ethnic groups in Ghana and/or Africa have similar or different myths and taboos that regulate their lives.

According to Baffoe (2005), much as these myths and taboos were needed at some point in our society's development to regulate life, many of them have outlived their usefulness due to urbanization and the trend of modern development. Some were necessary when societies were small and life was very simple. But times have changed. The modern world is moving at the speed of sound and all societies need to adapt to catch up to develop or in order to be abreast with time. We can no longer afford to cling firmly unto every custom, tradition, myth and taboo claiming that they were cultural practices bequeathed to us by our ancestors even if they stifle development and civilization.

Localizing African Cultures?

Globalization has its own set of cultural attendants which exercise a profound influence on the life of peoples everywhere. By definition, globalization makes all other cultures local. But to a larger proportion of people all over the world, their culture is not local. It is central to their lives and who they are. Globalization eclipses, or at least subordinates all previous ways of answering need and of dealing with vicissitudes of human life. All other ways of life are diminished and marginalised at a stroke (Jeremy, 2004). According to Jeremy, globalization is a declaration of war upon all other

cultures. And in cultural wars, there is no exemption for civilians; there are no innocent by-standers. It has also been described as a confrontation between global civilization and local cultures.

Localizing African Cultures: The Challenges

It has been observed that the rapid and aggressive spread of market economics and communication technologies under the influence of western multinationals brings new impediments to local cultures and values, particularly in Africa and non-western societies at large. Africans are cultivating the materialistic and individualistic habits and values previously associated with western culture. This has come as a result of the structural change in the world economy: globalization and the alarming increase of goods dumped on African countries that are marketed by mass seductive advertisement which is blatantly superficial but nonetheless successful in creating desires in peoples of traditional societies (Akande, 2002).

As I have mentioned earlier during colonial era, western adventures made frantic efforts to marginalise the cultural heritage of various peoples around the globe; especially Africa. This has been accomplished by imposing western religion and cultural practices on Africans. The assumption was that, development for the colonized people must involve a denial of their history, a rejection of their cultural heritage and the adoption of western cultural practices. The impact of the above policy in the case of Africa, was untold damage to the African psyche, so much so that most Africans have to believe as truth, the myths and lies about them as being primitive, history-less, mindless, cursed, inherently evil and corrupt, third world, and underdeveloped.

Dying Languages: Threats to traditional cultures

It has been established that “a lost language is a lost culture, a lost culture is invaluable knowledge lost”. It is lamentable that most Africans, especially Ghanaians from the elite background cannot communicate in their mother tongue. Even at home most parents of a certain linguistic background do not consider it expedient to communicate with their children in their mother tongues, which should be the first language (L1). It is quite obvious that such children learn English first from their parents and peers. The reasons assigned to this sudden change of events are that English is valuable, and highly necessary hence they are well pleased when the children are fluent in it.

Exploring African culture

With the world becoming a global village through free trade pressures, many are raising questions about what will happen to Africa's rich and diverse culture and people heritage. In essence, globalization is a phenomenon that seems to promote “a new economic order”. It is a concept that has taken root across much of the world. Although its tentacles reach far and wide, globalization has been more visible in terms of trade and information highway. What has not been explored is globalization of culture, especially those aspects of culture that are generally acceptable and beneficial in a global village (Sithele, 2001).

While multinationals and rich nations race to control the world's resources on the basis of their dollar power (economic advancement and technological advancement), Africa can play a huge role in advocating for people-centred development through its culture. Equally important is the use of culture and cultural institutions to address global problems facing societies. For instance, tapping on traditional medicine and knowledge systems to fight diseases like HIV/AIDS. Nutritionists have

called for people to eat more of their traditional diets instead of expensive, genetically-modified foods that are imported. African food has proved to be healthy, nutritious and accessible. An increase on consumption of Africa traditional foods will catalyze and increase international trade in such commodities, and thus helping to economically empower African people.

Similarly with western societies finding spiritual emptiness in materialism, African religion and culture stand a better chance to offer alternatives to address rising corruption, crime and violence. African culture is renowned for its moral awareness which is embedded in different indigenous languages, myths, folklore and heritage.

Now the question is how can a society completely forget its culture and history and then think of the future? It will be like treating a symptom without knowing the cause. This signifies that African culture and history has been vandalised, diluted, and re-imaged. Historic artefacts are a very important part of culture and identity of a particular group. The past is very important that is the major reason why history is being studied as a subject. The past can never be considered as a hindrance towards solving present day issues and as such should not be ignored.

Two sides of globalization in relation to African culture

It is very important to note that whilst it offers great opportunities for growth and development, its benefits are very unevenly shared and its costs are unevenly spread among, across and within countries. This is particularly true with respect to African countries. Both in concept and practice, while globalization has positive, innovative, dynamic aspects, it also has negative, disruptive and marginalizing aspects (UNDP HDR 1999). For this reason, Nsibambi (2001) suggested that globalization must be seen as a change process full of opportunities and challenges that must be carefully and skilfully harnessed and managed to ensure human development.

Fig 1

Positive side	Negative side
Globalization opens people's lives to other cultures and all their creativity and to the flow of ideas and values	As cultures interact, some cultures are being diluted and/or destroyed at the expense of others and negative values are being spread all over the world with relative ease.
Information and communication technologies have eased interaction among countries and peoples.	The world is now divided between the connected, who know and who have a monopoly on almost everything, and the isolated, who do not know and who practically have nothing

Though I have written extensively on the negative aspect of globalization on African culture, globalization is having some positive effects on African culture as well. Some inhuman cultural practices directed especially at women e.g. female genital mutilation (circumcision), widowhood rites, trokosi etc are being addressed and modified. This is a very significant positive impact of globalization on African culture.

I have the greatest respect for our African traditional institutions. I love our culture and its various traditions and customs. But I humbly submit that some of the customs and traditions are outmoded and have no place in modern society. Our traditional rulers must conform to the modern trend of society's development and do away with those customs and traditions that stand in the way of

development. They must embrace modernization and abolish all those outmoded customary practices that actually belong to the middle ages. If this is not done, many of our traditional areas will remain backward and under-developed for so many generations to come. At the same time they also become a hindrance to other people's businesses that contribute to the general development of the continent.

However, I also observe that, with the advent of Christianity or as a result of globalization, some of the obnoxious and outmoded cultural practices are phasing out gradually. This is a clear instance of the proverb, "you take what is good and leave the residue," which might settle and gradually disappear. That is my view of tradition. Tradition and culture no matter our emotional attachments to them should not colonize and enslave us. In fact, tradition should serve as the springboard for comfort, life, and liberty, while lending itself to social dynamism; it must be subject to change brought about by the sociology of its and the larger society.

In conclusion, our task whether we are citizens, researchers or statesmen is to understand and manage globalization, doing our best to encourage its favourable aspects and keep its negative consequences at bay. That is, any cultural practices noted to be totally counter-productive and has no place in the development of Africa ought to be scrapped.

Thank you.

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