

THE MORAL CHALLENGE OF GLOBALISATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Aside from the contemplation of globalisation as a modern concept that is conflict-filled, globalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon that all nations have to engage with for expansion and development, both humanly, politically, economically, et cetera. In the discourse on globalisation and its impact on Africa, numerous publications have rolled out. While some applaud the phenomenon, others do not seem to be at home with the idea, as they see it as the cause of the erosion of core African values and brain drain in the contemporary African continent. In this paper, while I do not seek to take sides with any of the positions, I shall argue that in discussing the various aspects of globalisation and how it has impacted the moral life of the African continent, Africans should not allow for the erosion of their value system perceived as inferior to other cultural values following from individual uniqueness.

Keywords: Globalisation, Morality, Challenge, Africa.

Introduction

The term “globalisation” is one whose meaning remains obscure even to those who formulate it. In other words, it is a word that over time has proven to be equivocal in its approach due to the many ideologies and scholarly approaches on the application of the concept. For some scholars, globalisation means the integration of different economies and societies. It involves technological, economic, cultural, and political exchanges that are brought about by communication advancement, infrastructure and transportation.¹ By implication, globalisation implies the coming together of various world economies and cultures, politics and technologies to actualise global togetherness.

In the process of integrating and encountering various cultures of the world, there is the possibility of cultural infiltration, such that the moral values of one culture erode with the welcoming of other cultural values that could be in the form of dressing, respect, and other values. Consequently, this paper gears towards discussing the moral challenges posed to Africans by globalisation as it evidently presents us with complex moral challenges in the continent, requiring nuanced consideration of cultural, economic and social implications.

¹ Philip G.C. (Autumn, 1995). Globalization and the Changing Logic of Collective Action. *International Organization*, 49(4). p. 596.

To clearly discuss the objective of the paper, it shall explore the economic aspect of globalisation and its moral challenges, cultural globalisation, social globalisation and its moral challenges, environmental globalization and the challenges that come with it. The paper will also examine the African moral philosophical frameworks and responses in tackling the challenges posed on the continent by globalisation. Afterwards, the submission of the paper is that despite the challenges posed by globalisation, Africans can still maintain their sense of values irrespective of the encounters with other cultures.

Economic Globalisation and Moral Challenges

Prominent among the challenges of globalisation in Africa is its impact on the economies of the states on the continent, resulting from exploitation and inequality that exist on the continent today. According to Stiglitz, as quoted by Asogwa Felix Chinwe, the term globalisation is technologically dependent and determined.² Deduced from this view is the notion that globalisation is technologically driven. In the African context, Africa is one of the most technologically dependent continents in the world as its economy remains a gross consumer of finished products from other continents like Europe, America and Asia.

In the process of engaging in economic activities with other continents, there is a high chance of exploitation, display of inequality and absorption of other people's culture that is typically different from the African way of doing things. Following this view, globalisation may bring about cultural infiltration and erosion of the indigenous African way of life. Aside from the cultural challenge of globalisation in Africa, another notable challenge of the phenomenon in Africa is technology, which aids in the dissemination of information around the world. Over time, it has been recorded that Africa and Africans have been consumers of information that is foreign to them at the expense of their own. In this way, we can see that globalisation brings foreign doctrine to the African system. Therefore, to be technologically liberated, Africa and Africans have to wake up to the challenge of developing their talents in the field of ICT.

Economically speaking, globalisation is understood as the integration of global markets, finance, technology and money resulting from increasing macroeconomic liberalisation. Globalisation in this sense entails a technological change that informs the establishment of transnational networks in production, trade and finance.³ In essence, globalisation exposes the interdependent nature of the world's economy on individual countries and

² Asogwa, F.C. Africa and the Challenges of Globalization: A Critical Appraisal of the Relevance of Pan-Africanism. Available at: <https://www.aegis-eu.org/archive/ecas4/ecas-4/panels/21-40/panel-30/Asogwa-Felix-Chinwe-Full-paper.pdf> (Accessed 03/05/2025).

³ Kassie, T. and Jorgie, Y. 2020. The Challenges of Globalization to Africa: Theoretical Reflections and Practical Assessments. *World Journal of Research and Review (WJRR)*, 11(3). pp. 21-38. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.31871/WJRR.11.3.7>

continents, thus expressing that there is no one continent that is economically self-sufficient. While this understanding of globalisation is plausible, there are moral challenges that come along with it, especially in the African context, which tend to relegate core African values to the background of existence and bring in value systems that are alien to typical Africans.

Through the instrumentality of globalisation and the welcoming of foreign cultures, it is evident that Africa and Africans suffer greatly in terms of a huge fall in the standard of living, demonstrated in weak productivity and the tragic increase in the wage gap that exists in the formal and informal sectors.⁴ The foregoing view is further and well captured in the thoughts of Richard Sandbrook, as he argues that the implementation of economic reforms by African countries was not without downturns.⁵ In light of the foregoing, Le Goff, Maelan and Raju Jan Singh opine that with about 50 per cent of the African population living below US\$1.25 daily, sub-Saharan African countries remain the poorest.⁶ The idea from the viewpoint of Le Goff and colleagues does not imply that Africans and African countries are lazy or not able to rationalise and come up with reasonable ideas. But with the transatlantic slave trade, it is recorded that able-bodied men of Africa were taken away via the slave trade. With this act, Africans fell in terms of capacity, thus leading to an inability to maintain and then a virtual drop in the standard of living.

One may want to think that the slave trade era is over and go into history, and so, it should not affect contemporary African society. However, it is noteworthy that, just as it was in history, slave trading still exists, but in a refined manner, playing out in the form of teaching foreign ideas to Africans that mentally take them away from their homelands, teaching them values and replacing them with foreign teachings. With this, existence becomes challenging for a typical African. This singular act has influenced the flight of human capital from the continent, thus depriving Africans of better brains to aid in the building, maintenance and upliftment of the continent and its standards.

The above viewpoints are not to be construed as teaching against multinational corporations and foreign investment, but a pointer to an understanding that since it is plausible to seek international and foreign investments to better the economy of a given state, it is necessary not to do away with the necessary and basic cultural values of the people as this will aid the sustainability and maintenance of the culture and standard of living of the people in the state.

⁴ Kassie and Jorgie, *The Challenges of Globalization to Africa: Theoretical Reflections and Practical Assessments*. pp. 21-38.

⁵ Sandbrook, R. 1996. Democratization of economic Reform in Africa. *Journal of International Development*, 8(1). pp. 2-20

⁶ Le Goff, *et al*, 2013. Can Trade Reduce Poverty in Africa? *World Bank's Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) Network Economic Promise*. p. 2. Available at: www.worldbank.org/economicpremise (Accessed 03/05/2025).

Cultural Globalisation and Moral Challenges

Following the understanding of globalisation as the general integration of political, cultural and economic dimensions of different people, there is a high tendency of individual cultural influences on one another. Therefore, in the face of globalisation, underdeveloped countries encounter challenges of feeling inferior when brought together with 'developed countries'. With this encounter, there is the tendency to do away with their cultural heritage and absorb that of the 'superior culture', which for them is a way of perfection worth emulating and seeing as a high and esteemed standard of life.

Sequel to the above, Afshari Abdolrahman argues that in the face of globalisation, individuals experience the challenge of cultural identity⁷ as a result of such individuals having to face a contrasting worldview that consistently battles with what they have always been fed. If this becomes the case, there is a high tendency for the loss of traditional values and cultures.

Before Western cultural imperialism and the rise of globalisation, Africans were known for their communalism and communitarianism in whatever area of life they occupied. However, with the advent and encounter with the Western individualistic thought system via the means of globalisation shown through colonial activities, capitalism and individualism seem to now be the order of the day, as evident both in individual and community way of life. This representation brings about a cultural identity crisis, and when this happens, as is often the case with younger generations, there is a high chance of value and cultural misplacement.

With the knowledge of globalisation following from the discussions above, one may want to view the concept from the standpoint of negativity. While that is a welcome development, it is worthy to note that a misuse and misrepresentation of globalization yield a negative outcome. On the other hand, a proper application and examination of the concept through the lens of balance and positivity give rise to a seemingly perfect community. Thus, one may want to question what the positive impact of globalisation is. In an attempt to resolve the dilemma that may arise while contemplating the concept of globalisation, it is plausible to look at the positive impact of this practice in the world from the standpoint of technology that has aided the simplification of the world to a global village. Hence, in shaping and correcting cultural narratives, the media, which is a product of technology, plays an essential role. Going forward, globalisation brings about cultural exchanges and openness to various opportunities.

⁷ Afshari A. 2013. The Cultural Globalization and the Challenges facing the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, (Nigerian Chapter), 1(3). pp. 12-21.

Social Globalisation and Moral Challenges

Every society is a conglomeration of different people living together and adhering to the standards set by the society. Some of these standards are reflected in the manner of speaking by the people, their way of dressing (decent), expression of love and affection, cooperation, patriotism, hard work, etc.⁸ Expanding on the importance of the above values, Oladiti opines that the development of any society largely depends on the smooth running and healthy relationship that exists between the members of a society, holding their societal values in high esteem.⁹ The people living in a particular social environment find a common ground in their dealings and activities, which is an expression of their sense of value placed on unity and the importance of communalism. However, with growth and expansion (necessary for humanity), there is a high possibility of encountering and partnering with other cultures accessed via the use of the internet. On this ground, Mofoluwawo and Ajibade have argued that the internet allows anyone access to various cultures, different from theirs, with no one to control, stop or direct the user. For them, this has exerted greater influence on the reasonability and actions of individuals in relation to how they hold their value system, as most internet-based activities aim at promoting materialism, violence and immorality.¹⁰ A simple deduction from the foregoing view is the representation that through the instrumentality of the World Wide Web, the world has become so close in a way that it becomes easy for one to gain access to the way of life of other people and learn what is probably not acceptable in their culture and not meet their true worth and actualisation.

A typical example of the above stance is the Yoruba concept of *omoluabi*, a term used in relation to a responsible, hardworking, disciplined individual capable of contributing positively towards their community and self-development.¹¹ The foregoing values, as expressed in the Yoruba concept of *omoluabi*, explain African placement of esteem on self-development and individual responsibility for the purpose of actualising community growth and development.

While seeking global oneness via the use of the internet, one has to be very careful not to do away with the core values of his/her culture, thus leading to the absorption of inappropriate values learnt from the use of the internet and

⁸ Mofoluwawo, E.O. and Ajibade, I.O. July-2019. Impact of Cultural Globalization on African Moral Values: The Case of Nigeria. *East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature*, 2(7). pp. 382-388. Doi: 10.36349/easjehl.2019.v02i07.005

⁹ Oladiti, A.A. 2015. Swot Analysis of Cultural Globalization of Moral Values in Nigerian Society. Proceeding of the 31st Annual National Conference of Social Studies Association of Nigeria. Oyo: Gbolagade Printing Press.

¹⁰ Mofoluwawo, E.O. and Ajibade, I.O. July-2019. Impact of Cultural Globalization on African Moral Values: The Case of Nigeria. *East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature*, 2(7). pp. 382-388. Doi: 10.36349/easjehl.2019.v02i07.005

¹¹ Fafunwa, A.B. 1974. History of Education in Nigeria. Revised edition. Ibadan: Samadex Nigeria Commercial Enterprise Ltd.

meeting with other persons of different pedigrees. With the rise in the use of ICT, there seems to be a drastic drop in the practicalization of the African cultural heritage as individuals pay more attention to what they see on the internet rather than relating with one another. On this, you may want to take a sample of two or more people in a group who ordinarily ought to interact with one another. You perhaps will notice that they are more engrossed with the use of their mobiles connected to the internet and interacting with those not physically present with them, rather than communicating with those around them. This practice is a social loophole caused by the use of the internet, thus expressing a negative implication of Western culture on what we once knew as the communal nature of Africans.

Environmental Globalisation and Moral Challenges

Africans have a sense of viewing the environment from the standpoint of communitarianism, following from the argument that the physical is intertwined with the metaphysical. This understanding has had a great influence on how Africans approach and relate to the environment. Before the African encounter with the colonial masters, they had a different worldview and attitude towards the environment and nature that is peculiar to Africans and based on African belief in “live and let live, be and let be”, a thought that flows from the notion of communitarianism and communalism that seems to favour sustainable management of natural resources.¹² In agreement with the foregoing perspective, Ikuenobe asserts that activities that have raised certain concerns for the environment in Africa did not exist before the era of colonialism, as Africans were conservative about their beliefs, values, practices, *et cetera*.¹³ The assertion, as seen above, points to the fact that Africa, before colonisation, had a conservative value system and practices that were eco-communitarian in nature, as it considered the natural environment in its doctrine from the point of view that both the physical and metaphysical realms are interwoven. However, with the advent of colonialism and globalisation, a different view of the environment was sold to Africans. In the view brought to Africa by the Westerners, whose philosophical doctrines are rooted in individualism and anthropocentrism, the communitarian nature of doing things the African way began to experience decline.

To ensure a proper understanding and representation of globalisation, both international and national bodies have their various roles to play in bringing about the actualisation of the aim of globalisation by reaching agreements and cooperation to help in addressing various environmental challenges that tend to pose difficulty in actualising the purpose globalization.

¹² Tosam, M.J. 2019. African Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 9. pp. 172-192.

¹³ Ikuenobe, P. 2014. Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 2. pp. 1-21.

Moral Frameworks and Responses

Despite the domineering nature of colonial activities and doctrines in Africa, it is necessary to understand that some indigenous African doctrines still endured. African environmental consciousness is observed in some traditional African religious and metaphysical doctrines and beliefs, customs and practices that follow from Africans' daily life experience and reflection on the place of nature in human existence.¹⁴ In this fashion, it is notable to understand that in spite of the individualistic spirit brought into the continent by the colonial masters, some African values and beliefs still stand strong and are not influenced by the Western way of life.

Various African moral philosophical perspectives aid in the driving of globalisation. One of these doctrines is the understanding derived from the concept of *ubuntu* that is used to signify oneness and togetherness. Bringing this notion into our globalisation discourse, we cannot but hold that Africans before the era of scientism already had and practised the value of welcoming one another irrespective of the individual background or culture. This embrace of one another in the contemporary world can be understood as globalisation.

African religious and metaphysical traditions and beliefs have also shaped the mode of thinking of the typical African, as h/she is taught that the physical and the metaphysical realms are interconnected and that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. In the African sense, if this is the case, it follows that the human person, irrespective of cultural background, is to be respected and given priority in the order of doing things. Therefore, the African religious thought system is heavily laden with religious and spiritual beliefs in the value placed on the human person.

Since the ideology behind the concept of globalisation is a plausible one, it is necessary to tackle the problems that also come along with it by putting both the national and international initiatives in place to curb any moral challenge(s) that may arise from the application and practice of globalisation.

Conclusion

Globalisation is an essential tool in the life of any nation that seeks development. However, while there are positive effects of globalisation, there are also negative effects of globalization. This paper has thus far been able to discuss to an extent, though not holistically, due to certain human knowledge constraints. This has placed the discourse on an open floor to further criticisms and debates. Globalisation has proven to have greatly impacted the African continent, just as it is with other places and areas of life, both positively and negatively. On the positive hand, it has contributed to the development of the

¹⁴ Kelbessa, W. 2006. Can African Environmental Ethics Contribute to Environmental Policy in African? *Environmental Ethics*, 36. pp. 31-61. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics20143614>

continent through collaboration with persons and other countries and continents of great substance that have had the cause to contribute to the economic and political growth of the continent. On the other hand, it has had some negative impacts on the continent in terms of erosion of core African values and cultural practices. The point, however, is the need for a mental decolonisation of Africans if we are to get it right and begin the process of doing our African thing.

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