RETHINKING THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY AND THE GLOBALISATION DEBATE: THE NEED FOR CAUTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the question of African identity as it relates to the idea and practice of globalization. Globalization as an existential concept appears to be contradictory. Even though it pushes for equality and interconnectedness among nations around the world, it also creates inequalities. As a carrier of values, globalization creates cultural-value conflicts across borders. The push for globalization, laced with capitalism and individualism, has greatly affected African culture, thereby creating conflicting ideologies and identities for Africans. The problem that this work sets out to address is the crisis in African identity within a globalized world. This research is a contribution to the growing intellectual discourse on African identity and an attempt to systematically interrogate the aforementioned problem. Hence, the questions that this research sets out to interrogate are: Is globalization a threat to African identity? How should Africa respond to the challenge of globalization? What is the role of African leaders in creating a new path for African development? In order to provide answers to the aforementioned questions, the research made use of the method of analysis. At the end, it was discovered that globalization has negatively affected African identity, and it was argued that Africa must discard the victimhood narrative by looking for a way out of the woods. We recommended a systematic emphasis and integration of indigenous African languages in the educational systems across Africa. Also, African political and traditional leaders must wake up to the call of nation-building and put on the garment of patriotism in order to develop the continent.

Keywords: Africa; Globalization; African Identity; Society; Capitalism; Communalism.

Introduction

Globalization is a concept that depicts the interconnectedness, interdependency, and free flow of information across borders and among nations in the world. As a concept, it has different aspects: economic globalization, religious globalization, political globalization, cultural globalization, technological globalization, etc. Globalization has contributed greatly to the development and progress of the human race. However, in recent years, scholars and nations, especially nations from the global south, have started to be worried about the true nature and aim of globalization. As a continent, Africans are highly suspicious of globalization, and this can be attributed to their experiences with slavery and colonialism. Globalization is seen as a form of neo-colonialism targeted at alienating the African personality from its true identity. Hence, globalization presents a conflict of ideologies and identities for Africans. This paper examines the place of Africa in the context of the globalization debate and the African identity question therein. Some of the questions that triggered this study are: What is globalization? What is African identity? Is globalization a threat to African identity? How should Africa respond to the globalization challenge? We now begin with a conceptualization of globalization.

The concept of globalization has attracted great scholarly, theoretical, and practical attention since the latter part of the twentieth century. Such theoretical and practical references have shown the degree to which globalization depicts the collapse of traditional territorial boundaries, the interconnectedness of man in the universe, and the integration of nations. The concept of globalization is a plausible development: we live

in a world that is always yearning for justice, fairness, social order, equality, and integration. The push for globalization was triggered by the increase in global capital, technological developments, changes in information and communication technology (ICT), interdependence in world economic relations, changes in international transportation, and migration. Thus, there is a bridge to the gap between peoples and nations around the world, thereby bringing people and countries closer together.

Globalization is a phenomenon that has security, socio-political, and cultural dimensions. It also has positive and negative appeals. Hence, different scholars have given several definitions of globalization. In Dukor's view, "globalization is a practical and philosophical concept of economic integration, information and communication highways, justice and fairness for mankind under the aegis of the United Nations and the concept of man as an end in himself."[1] Princova also defines globalization as "an irreversible process presented by the huge international market, the information revolution, and the universal advocacy of human rights, global cultural industry, and polycentric international politics with the impact on the everyday life of people."[2] Furthermore, Civelek distinguishes between three meanings of globalization, namely: It is a historical phenomenon, meaning a new era where the political and economic system of the cold war era vanished. According to those who support this definition, globalization means the change of the balance of power among the superpowers in favour of the United States. The second meaning of globalization comprises a number of related developments like liberalism of the market, privatization, government non-intervention in the economy, increasing international investment, and integration of the world commercial market.

According to a third definition, globalization is the technological and social revolution that symbolizes the transformation from industrial to post-industrial capitalism. Globalization is a new phenomenon that shows itself in social as well as economic areas. Thus, "the integration of production and technology across national borders, the move to expertise in the labour market, interdependence – the world taking the steps to become one market – all define the globalization phenomenon."[3] For this research, we shall adopt that "globalization is a process by which the parts, countries, peoples, etc. of the world become more connected and more dependent on each other."[4] It is the above meaning of globalization that this research aligns itself with and therefore serves as its operational definition.

An Exposition of the Notion of African Identity
The issue of identity and how it became a central issue in contemporary discourse in African philosophy and African scholarship in general is itself very historical. The scope of this research might not permit us to engage much in the historicity of the identity question in African philosophy. Just to erase some presuppositions and assumptions, according to Wiredu, the issue of African identity has nothing to do with the application of the Laws of Thought; the laws of identity, excluded middle and non-contradiction. Rather, the question of identity is a normative question. Simply put, are Africans what they should be? This invokes a negative feeling because of the reawakening that it

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[1] Dukor Maduabuchi, "Globalization and Social Change", *Essence: Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 5(1), 2008: 17.
[2] Princova Kveta, *Globalization, Vulnerability, Poverty and Human Limits, Beyond Globalization: Exploring the Limits of Globalization in Regional Context*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava, Czech Republic, 2010: 131
[3] Civelek Mehmet Ali, *Globalization and Terror*. Ankara: Utopya Yayinlari, 2001: 162.
[4] Grinin Leonid, "Toward a New World Order?", *Journal of Globalization Studies*, 3(7), 2012: 7.

triggers in Africans. The origin of this negative feeling is traceable to the experiences of the African with the West through slavery, colonialism, racism, and now globalization. The starting point of this negative view of Africans, according to scholarly research, is the slave trade. Slavery by the West dehumanized, degraded, and exploited Africans and left a crisis of identity and ideologies in the African conscience. The coming of the colonialists and the eventual colonization of Africa reinforced the degrading and dehumanizing of Africans. This negative view rests on "a central assumption that the Africans were different from other races, that the African ways of life were different from other ways of life, in a way that implied that the Africans were subhuman or inferior."[5]

Capturing further the issue of African identity, Mazrui identified what he distilled as the "six paradoxes," of the postcolonial African condition. The first paradox is the "paradox of habitation," which identifies Africa as the least hospitable today. The second paradox is the "paradox of humiliation" which typifies Africa as a continent that has passed through the humiliation of slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination. The third is the "paradox of acculturation," which is a result of the influence and imposition of foreign values, cultures, and ideologies on Africa. The fourth is the "paradox of fragmentation," that is based on the exploitative nature of Western influence over Africa and the ensuing effect of underdevelopment. The fifth paradox is the "paradox of retardation," which is seen in the disunity and divisions among different ethnic and religious groups in Africa. The last paradox is the "paradox of location," which explains how Africa, as a centrally positioned continent, is the most insignificant in world politics.[6]

The significance and implications of the x-rayed history of dehumanization and degrading of Africans by the West and the current identity crisis are worthy of emphasis because of the negative influence it has on Africans. It has left Africans with a feeling of inferiority, and by and large, some foreigners see Africans that way too. In the same way, some Africans see themselves as inferior to others. Affirming this point, Joseph Nyasanyi opines that "the long years of exploitation, humiliation, subjugation, vilification, and utter contempt for human equality and dignity have gradually and progressively brought about a sad process of mental, spiritual, and social degeneration of the colonized African."[7] For Mazrui, postcolonial predicaments and instabilities hunting postcolonial Africa are a "symbol of cultures at war" with Africans fighting 'to avert the demise of Africanity."[8] It is within this context and other issues not covered because of space that the question of African identity arose and remains relevant till date.

That said, it is proper and significant to state that the African is easily identifiable ontologically. By that, we mean that the African is conceived fundamentally as a "being with others." That is, a "being with." The African self is defined in relation to others as a "we." Life for the African is interrelated and interconnected. The aforementioned view gives a brief description of the metaphysics of the African personality. The quest for

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[5] Philip Ogo Ujomu, "Ubuntu Ethics", *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics,* Henk ten Have (ed). Switzerland: Springer International, 2015: 7.
[6] Ali AI'amin Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. London: BBC Publications, United Kingdom, 1986: 126.
[7] Nyasanyi Joseph, "The Antithetical Sequel of African Personality", *Philosophy, humanity and ecology: Philosophy of nature and environmental ethics*, Odera Oruka (ed). Nairobi: African Academy of Sciences, 1994, 18.
[8] Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, 21.

African identity and the re-affirmation of African humanity is a project that many African scholars have embarked on, with Tempels being the first to employ philosophy as a means of asserting African identity and humanity. According to Ujomu, the search for an African identity "is an intellectual and social project that implies the pursuit of the human values of freedom, human dignity, justice, and responsibility that will ensure the escape from regressive manipulation and exploitation." The aim of such a project "is to lead the Africans toward exhibiting an identity or personality that can command respect worldwide and promote the key elements of our African cultural systems or ways of life.[9]

Problematising the Concept of African Identity in an Era of Globalisation
In philosophy, logic in particular, "the principle of identity states that if a statement is true, then it is true."[10] This is a necessary truth because it speaks for itself. In the same way, if a person is an African, then he is an African. Also, the same person cannot be an African and a Westerner, for that would be in opposition to the 'principle of contradiction.' To go the other way would mean to contravene the logical 'principle of excluded middle.' Hence, it is either that an African is an African or he swims in the ocean of contradiction of his being and 'beingness.' The African of this age appears to be in this ontological and existential identity crisis within the global context. Globalization has brought confusion to the African, leaving him unsure of his original identity. For July, modern/contemporary African is a result of the "uneasy union of two alien civilizations."[11]

Globalization, though with its positives, has placed Africa in a tight situation. This is traceable to the fact that almost all countries in Africa are underdeveloped, and it becomes difficult for them to cope in a highly divided world. The world is now a class-based global community, with the underdeveloped African countries struggling for survival. In fact, the dichotomy of "Global North and Global South" clearly shows the issue at hand. Most of the countries in the global south are found in Africa. The question is, why the classification of the world into such categories? This shows that even though globalization in a way is a push for sameness, it also thrives in widening the various existential poles, and this places African countries in a disadvantaged position. The reality of the whole idea of today's globalized world is that it is built on capitalism, and as such, it is about the survival of the fittest. Capitalism creates inequality in society, and when extended to the realm of international relations, it leads to inequality among nations around the world, thereby establishing a master-slave relationship between nations. Because of the economic and technological power of the West, African countries find it hard to measure up in the international arena.

The master-slave mentality occasioned by globalization has made scholars suspect the actual reason behind the concept and practice of globalization. Hence, some of these scholars have tagged globalization as the expansionist philosophy of the West. This expansionism of globalization can be seen in the unending push by the West to establish liberal democracy in many parts of the world, especially in Africa, as against the indigenous communitarian political system Africans are known for. Why the rigorous push to extend and expand liberal democracy to other countries? Is it that the indigenous

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[9] Ujomu, "Ubuntu Ethics," 7.
[10] Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen C., *Introduction to Logic*. 9th edition. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, India, 2000: 372.
[11] July Robert, *A History of the African People*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, United States of America, 1974: 126.

communitarian system or any other system(s) is inferior to democracy? Clearly, even though the pro-globalists would want us to believe that globalization is just another phase in the history of mankind, the various expressions and manifestations of globalization betray that position. Globalization is a planned program, a strategic ideological tool instituted to keep African countries and poor countries of the world perpetually in the slave-divide. It is colonialism in another form. Simply put, it is neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism "is a practice under which an advanced nation does not maintain its political domination in a foreign territory but, taking advantage of its superior position in the organization of trade and industry, uses the resources of a developing nation as a source of cheap labour and raw materials, as well as a large market for its own products. It is a subtle method of economic exploitation of developing nations by the developed nations."[12] Dwelling on this, Asobie argues that "for anyone to think that globalization is not an imperialist policy simply because there is no evidence that imperialists 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 interests primarily do they serve?"[13] The African predicament is badly degrading because, though African countries claim to be independent and sovereign, in reality, they are not. African countries and their leaders therein still dance to the beats of foreign powers. Interestingly, and sadly, as sacrosanct as elections are in the life of a nation, African nations still wait for their foreign "lords" to hint at whom to elect as their presidents. In most cases, the preference of the foreign powers eventually wins. Further, most economic policies in Africa are influenced by the West in their own favour, through the mechanisms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The neo-colonialist tendencies of globalization can be seen in several aspects of African existence, and, in a way, this is aimed at crumbling the African identity. Globalization has done damaging harm to African culture and the African way of life.

Suffice it to state here that the injury to African identity orchestrated through globalization and the crisis thereof is heavily manifest in the way of life of the people. Language is an aspect that has been badly affected in Africa. The place of language in the life and lived experiences of a people can never be overemphasized. It is often said that if you want to know a man's philosophy, you start with its language. It therefore means that a nation's philosophy is tied to her language and her history too. Unfortunately, indigenous African languages appear to have been relegated to the background in preference for foreign languages. The English language, in furtherance of the global agenda of the West, is now the preferred language for global, and to a large extent, local exchanges. In fact, in most African countries, the English language is a compulsory subject for secondary school students, while local languages are rarely made compulsory. Even teaching in schools is done in English, while teaching in indigenous languages is greatly frowned at. There is barely any African country where the African language is the official language of education. Such is the damage that has been done to African identity. How then can there be proper theorizing and teaching of African philosophy and history when the foundational leg of such a philosophy is missing? This is a major challenge to the growth of African philosophy and a threat to African identity. According to a disheartening research estimate by Skutnabb-Kangas, "over 90% of the

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[12] Om Prakash Gauba, *An Introduction to Political theory*. New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd, India, 2007: 130.
[13] Monday Leonard Igbafen, "Africa in a Globalized World", *Philosophy and Praxis in Africa,* Asiegbu and Agbakoba (ed). Ibadan: Hope, 2006, 293.

world's spoken languages may be extinct by the year 2100."[14] This is the result of the quest by the globalists to establish a monolingual and mono-cultural economic system for the rest of the world.

Beyond the above-mentioned aspects of the identity crisis, the globalization agenda also affects the African mode of dressing, food, music, etc. There is a deliberate globalization and externalization of the Western mode of dressing, their genre of music, and their food. Sadly, Africans have almost fully embraced these foreign categories. No wonder some scholars have labeled this age as the age of the Westernization of the world. The embrace of the western lifestyle, which is built on individualism, hits negatively on the traditional identity of the Africans, thereby creating a huge crisis of identity that might be very difficult to solve. Globalization creates a dependency culture for Africans. It makes Africans look at their own culture as inferior to foreign ones. As earlier said, globalization also breeds a culture of inequality among peoples and nations around the world. Accordingly, Nwokeji asserts that, "by neo-colonial period, the colonialist had done the battle, either accomplished or ensured the accomplishment of cultural destruction and physical and intellectual enslavement of the neo-colonial peoples so that they have no other image of civilization and culture but that which colonialism defined."[15] For Willard, "The interpenetration of so many different foreign cultures with so many varying indigenous ones makes culture clash a problem for every…African state."[16] The effect of this is that the African finds himself in crisis of identity where he is unsure of his true identity and as such lacks the self-confidence that he needs to survive in the world. As a people, Africans have internalized a mentality of low self-worth and an unnecessary reverence of the "foreign." It is a sad existential tale that affects the African consciousness, its existential makeup, and everydayness. Hence, some African values are gradually going into extinction.

Beyond the 'Negatives' of Globalization: Chatting a New Path for the Discourse of Identity in Africa
Before moving to theorize a way out of this current crisis of identity, it is important to clarify some unsaid but significant issues. The first issue relates to whether Africa, as a continent, is envious of the West. The second, which is related to the first issue, is whether the quest by African scholars to ride Africa out of her current identity crisis situation is an indirect way of Africans seeking to take over the mantle of globalization. Suffice it to state here that the answer to the two issues is the same: no. Africans are not envious of the West, and they are not desirous of being part of the globalizing divide. Instead, what African scholars are after is a humane world order built on a system of fairness, justice, and respect for other people's cultures and traditions. The response to the crisis of African identity is a bold attempt aimed at re-affirming and re-asserting the humanity, dignity, and identity of Africans. Consequently, it is a call for true independence and national pride for Africans. This call is important because, according to Sen, "a sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy but also of strength and confidence."[17]

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[14] Rehnuma Sazzad, "The Effects of Globalization on Languages and Cultural Diversity", 2020. https://impakter.com/effects-of-globalization-on-languages-and-cultural-diversity/
[15] Martin Onwubiko Nwokeji, "Cultural Decolonization and Cultural Revival: Problems and Prospects", *The Humanities and All of Us*, Oguegbu, E. (ed). Onitsha: Watchword Publications, 1990, 156.
[16] Willard R. Johnson, *Cameroon Federation: Political Integration in a Fragmentary Society.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, United States of America, 1970: vii
[17] Sen Amartya, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny.* London: Allen Lane, United Kingdom, 2006, 1.

Having carried out a diagnosis that shows that Africa is in a serious identity crisis, what then should be the medication for this ailment? Should Africa keep on lamenting about the unfavorable and exploitative nature of globalization? Should African leaders keep playing the victimhood card? The answer is no. It is highly important and essential that Africa has passed the first major task of knowing that there is a problem with the current African conscience and personality, but having discovered this, there is an urgent need to discontinue the deteriorating flow of negative influences. This can be done through a pragmatic re-evaluation of our global "presencing" and the institutionalization of core traditional African values.

Suffice it to state here that a critique of the position of Africa in the globalization project is not a call for Africa to break away from the global arena or a call for Africa to seize further relations with other nations of the world. The world is already a global village, and this is the reality of the moment. In this global village, countries will continue to interact and relate because no country can live and/or survive in isolation. However, living in a globalized world is not a sentence to blind acceptance and assimilation of everything that comes one's way. Here is the challenge for Africa. At this point, we must state that, though globalization comes with so many negatives that work against African nations, it still has some positive attributes. Hence, "since, whether right or wrong, globalization is already a reality, it appears that the only option for African nations is to seek means of retaining the baby after throwing away the bath water."[18] This could be achieved by 'digesting' or 'absorbing' the good parts of globalization and harnessing the same to the growth and development of the African continent.

Furthermore, at the economic level, it is obvious that capitalism does not align with the traditional African economic system. At the foundation of African society are the principles of egalitarianism, humanism, and communalism. These principles are in conflict with the principles and systems of capitalism and individualism that globalization offers. Thus, as rightly captured by Kwame Nkrumah, capitalism "is a betrayal of the personality and conscience of Africa."[19] But this betrayal or conflict should not be a clog in the wheel of African development and progress. We posit therefore that African political leaders should internalize, domesticate, and put into practice the principles and systems of African communal society as a way of showing the workability and inherent advantages therein. Simply put, African countries must start the project of taking pride in core traditional African values and systems.

Arising from the above, African nations should devise means of reasserting the African personality and identity by re-integrating African cultures into their educational and family systems. One particular area that needs urgent pragmatic attention is language. This is because language is the vehicle through which a people's culture is unveiled and expressed. But beyond that, language is very essential in establishing self-identity. Identity is expressed and affirmed through language. Consequently, "by extension, every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community; they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity

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[18] Odimegwu Ike, "Philosophy and Africa", *World Philosophy Day*, Unizik, 1(1), 2006: 234.
[19] Nkrumah Kwame, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution.* London: Heinemann Education Books Ltd., United Kingdom, 1964, 74.

construction and negotiation."[20] Given the significant role that language plays in the construction and sustenance of self-identity and the damage done already to African languages in this age of globalization, it becomes imperative for African nations to initiate and effectively implement a compulsory use of indigenous languages in their educational system. African indigenous languages should be among the languages used for teaching and learning. It is a tall task, but it is a task that will bring back the self-pride of the African.

Over and above all, the development of Africa as a continent is a project that must have Africans at the forefront. This is a truism because waiting for foreign governments to develop Africa is a mirage, and more importantly, it hurts the African identity. So, African political and traditional leaders must rise to the urgent task of nation-building. African leaders must imbibe the spirit of selflessness, patriotism, and nationalism and eschew selfish gratifications. Each country must look inward and find patriotic leaders who are willing and committed to the serious assignment of nation-building. Also, the inward-looking must further look for ways to correct perceived and concrete socio-political injustices that have led to social disorder in many African countries. There can be no peace without social and political justice, and in the absence of peace, African development will remain at the level of abstraction.

Conclusion

Africa, with its identity and self-pride bartered, is not helpless. Globalization might have done a lot of harm to the African personality, but African countries must look beyond the negative aspects of the phenomenon and capitalize on its advantages. While at it, Africa must look inward for its development while relating to and interacting with the global community. The project to reassert African identity and build Africa in the twenty-first century is one that African leaders and intellectuals must be at the forefront of. It is achievable, and it must be done with a sense of urgency socked in the ocean of] patriotism and nationalism.

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[20] Norton Bonny, .*Identity and Language Learning,* 2nd ed. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, United Kingdom, 2013:33.

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