

IMPACTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON AFRICAN CULTURE: THE NIGERIAN EXAMPLE

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Abstract

Globalization refers to the process of interface of cultural values, systems and practices across the world. It involves interaction and integration among people of different backgrounds, businesses and companies to move beyond domestic and national markets into international trade and investment. Globalization is fostered by information technology, and has both positive and negative impacts. The hitherto rich and dynamic culture and traditions of the African people, which has erstwhile been protected, preserved and sustained in the African indigenous society are been lost due to the advent of globalization. This paper examines some Nigerian values (such as sense of communal living, respect for elders and constituted authorities; respect for marriage institution; willingness of citizens to showcase their language, culture and tradition; good dress sense, rich local cuisines, and so on.) and how they are being encroached upon by the global trends. It further suggests ways by which Africans can use the platform of globalization to revive, sustain and promote its cultural heritage.

Key words: Globalization, African Culture, Cultural Preservation

Introduction

Globalization may be described as the interaction and integration of various countries of the world to come together under one umbrella (global village) for the purpose of trades and investments, economic transactions, bilateral relationships, interface of cultures among others. It is facilitated by information technology and communication. Globalization is not new, but has been in operation since the period of the Trans- Atlantic Trade (15th–19th century) and Colonialism (1870s and 1900) till this present time. Thus, Africa has been exposed to the practice of globalization for a reasonable number of years. However, globalisation has its positive and negative impacts on Africa, as one of the continents which globalization has spread to.

The term ‘globalization’ has been defined by various scholars base on individual’s perspective about the concept. While some are positive in their definition of globalization, others see the concept from a negative point of view. However, globalization may be explained as:

“a process of advancement and increase in interaction among the world’s 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”. (Nsibambi 2001:1)

Therefore, globalization refers to increase integration and interaction among the countries of the world, fuelled by sophisticated and advanced communication technology, for the purpose of trade, political, economic, social and cultural networking. It affords the countries of the world to operate under a common umbrella. However, globalization is not a new thing in Africa, it is:

“a continuation of a long tradition of over five hundred years, the tradition of imperialism.

Globalization is only the latest phase and expression of this uninterrupted history of domination and subjugation of peoples, nations and conquistadors and colonizers. It is a tradition of political, economic and cultural domination of some nations over others” (Wilfred 1997: 42-43).

Globalization creates a platform where the developing countries of the world showcase their local products, expertise, culture and tradition, among other things to the world, while the technology, culture and tradition of the Western society are also transmitted to all the nooks and crannies of the world. It is a two-way thing, but tends to favour the Western world over the developing countries. The situation could be likened to the events that unfolded in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, in which the slogan “all animals are equal, but some are more equal than the others” rules the animal kingdom. It has been argued that globalisation creates equal platforms for all countries of the world. Therefore, as different countries interact, their culture and tradition also come into contact, and this brings about interface of various cultures across the globe. In the process, the countries that have the control of highly developed information technology tend to exert influence on other countries that are not as advanced as them in this respect. As a result of this, since the former has wider coverage and audience, there is the tendency to project their culture over others. There is also the possibility by other developing countries to see the culture of the developed countries as the acceptable and standard way of life. This is the situation of African culture to that of the Western world. Babatunde and Ifedayo (2015) capture this clearly:

America continues to export her culture to all parts of the world with great impunity in attempt to dominate world society. This is evident in the alarming rate at which American culture is being exported to African countries with unrelenting force. The pretext of

technological importation continues to be conduit for this cultural importation. The irony of the entire scenario of this cultural imperialism is that there is nothing in place to filter or differentiate the good from the bad, the moral from the immoral, and the fair from the unfair (P. 36)

Therefore, at the detriment of African culture and tradition, the Western society continues to use the platform of globalisation to erode and subjugate African culture through

cultural imperialism has bombarded Africa with Western films, Western music, Western television programs bringing along with it a change in culture that has contributed to increased armed robberies, violence at every level, unprecedented corruption because people are now interest in life styles they see on television.

(Babatunde & Ifedayo, 2015, p. 32)

The effect of this is that Africans are gradually losing touch with their culture. Since the youths who are supposed to ensure the continuity of culture from one generation to another have fallen for, cherished and adopted the Western ways of life in all ramifications (dressing, music, movies, language, and so on) as the status quo. In the words of Oni (2005:2) “Nigerian youths are rapidly losing touch with cultural values and this could be seen in the alien culture which they portray; their bizarre dressing, dancing, language and so on which invariably affect other aspects of social life”. It is in this light that this study examines some Nigerian values and explains how they are being invaded upon by the trend of globalization. The study further gives recommendations as to how Nigerians and African continent as a whole can use the platform of the world as a global village to project her cultural values.

African Values

The value of a thing can be explained as the essence or worth of that thing. In other words, it is the essence or worth that one places on something that makes that thing to have value. However, what individuals or societies place value on differ from place to place. Notwithstanding, it is the value that put on something that makes that thing worthwhile. In African culture, the society place value on her culture and tradition, such that there are penalties for anyone who does contrary to lay-down societal values. These values can be religious, moral, political, economic, and so on. The values are so much infused into the culture of the African society that virtually, every members of the society are aware of it and the consequences of doing otherwise. In fact, it is the values that are place on the culture and tradition of the African society that give the culture relevance and ensure its continuity from generation to generation. Igboin (2011:99) explains thus:

African values therefore are goal-oriented because they point to a desired goal, which actions are geared towards and upon which the expectation of every individual and community is hinged. Individual actions are mirrored through the approved society's values upon which the test for justification is based. This makes an action a moral one.

For instance, if one considers the moral values, among the Yoruba socio-cultural group of South-Western Nigeria, 'honesty' and 'contentment' are virtues expected to be upheld in all ones dealings. As such, there are series of proverbs to buttress this fact. 'iwon eku ni iwon ite', that is, cut your clothes according to your material (and not your size). This talks about contentment. The state of being satisfied with what you have. Also, 'san l'aa rin, aje ni mu ni pekoro'. This simply means honesty is the best policy. Therefore, theft, adultery, armed robbery, and other social ills are frowned at.

Furthermore, social values like hard work, respect for delegated authority, respect for marriage institution, sense of communal life, sacredness of life, hospitality, peaceful co-existence, among others are highly celebrated. Diligence is so much celebrated in Yoruba land to the extent that there is greeting for all forms of handwork, skill or occupation that one engages in. In fact, a Yoruba proverb emphasises the virtue of diligence 'ise l'ogun ise', that is hardwork is the antidote for poverty. Respect for delegated authority starts from the family in Yoruba land. Utmost respect is accorded the eldest male in the family known as 'olori ebi'. The 'olori ebi' has the final say in all decision making in the family, and members of the family are obliged to respect and comply with whatever he says. The value placed on the marriage institution is such that a lady must not give birth outside wedlock, but must be properly married before living with her husband and giving birth to children. The issue of the wife moving back to her father's house as a result of misunderstanding with her husband is totally frowned at. It is known as the 'ile mosun' concept. In fact, no woman wishes to move back to her father's house after marriage. The society clearly frowned at this act. Indeed, African indigenous society is that in which there is decorum, decency and respect for societal values. Unlike what ensues now that:

...evils such as sexual harassment of students by lecturers and vice-versa, sale of marks, lack of sense of duty, indifference to social responsibility and public property, indecent dressing and the general decay of the moral sense, all culminating in abysmally low performance of students are now common features of most secondary and tertiary educational institutions (Odimegwu, 2007, p. 357)

Positive Impacts of Globalization in Nigeria

One cannot deny the fact that the advent of globalization has brought about some positive developments in the affairs of Nigeria. For instance, it has helped to eradicate or minimise

some cultural practices which are absurd and inhuman in Nigeria. These include the killing of twins, burying of people with a dead king ('abobaku' tradition among the Yorubas), condemnation of people whose medical condition could not be diagnosed (sickle-cellers, leprosy, e.t.c.) to the evil forest to die, female genital mutilation, and so on.

Base on the observations of the researcher while growing up, globalization has helped to replace some crude and ancient ways of carrying out some activities with modern technology. For instance, in the indigenous African society, whenever the king wants to communicate or pass information across to the people in the community, the service of the town crier was always engaged to use his voice and gong to attract people's attention in order to communicate the information to them. This usually takes him a lot of time to get to all the nooks and crannies of the community. However, with the emergence of globalization which ushered in mass media (radio, television, newspaper, magazines and so on), one only needs to disseminate the message or information through any of the mass media, and the target audience are reached instantly and simultaneously.

Furthermore, globalization has gradually replaced the intensive method of farming with the mechanized form. This has enabled farmers to cultivate more farmlands and bring about increase in productivity or output. Also, the tedious ways involved in palmoil production are being replaced by easier, faster and reliable methods. Thus, the primitive process of using feet to extract oil from the palm kernel seed is now being replaced with machines. However, despite some positive impacts of globalization in Africa, the fact remains that globalization is gradually making Africans, particularly Nigerians to lose touch with their culture and tradition. This is because virtues that people use to cherish and place values on are now being look upon with contempt and nonchalant attitudes.

Negative Effects of Globalisation

African indigenous society has a lot of values which the people cherish and have high regard for before the advent of globalisation. With the

introduction of globalisation through the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Colonialism, most of these values have been polluted and being eroded by Western culture. Some of these values alongside how globalisation has negatively affected them are examined below.

Loss of Sense of Communal Living: In the African indigenous setting, Africans live together as one. One does not need to be related by blood before one sees one's neighbours as family members. Then, people have a sense of communal living. They are free with one another, as they share food, clothing materials and personal effects together. It is a society where one could correct or scold another person's child/children for wrong doing, without the parent of the recipient raising any eyebrow. Discipline and enforcement of moral values then was a collective responsibility. The foregoing circumstances were vividly captured by Mbiti (1969) when he expressed that "I am because we are. And since we are therefore, I am." (p. 5). The situation is different now. Individualism has replaced Africans sense of collective coexistence. Everyone does his/her own thing in each one's desired way. Everything boils down to 'me', 'self', 'mine' and 'myself': individualistic tendencies now permeate the society, because so is the norm in the Western society. Sense of family, relationship and brotherhood are gradually waning down. Since there is no longer trust, everyone is suspicion of his/her neighbours, friends, family members, co-workers, among others. One dare not scold, admonish or discipline another person's child/children without the consent of the parents. The ward/wards in question could insult anyone who dares, let alone the parents. Everyone now look out to protect individual interest. Hence, the common slang among the youth nowadays: "you are on your own (OYO)."

• **Language**

African languages are embedded with various virtues. Inside the languages are proverbs, which are used to embellish one's utterances. Africans use their languages to project their cultures. Thus, their use of language entails decorum in addressing issues, showing respect

for elderly ones, expressing thoughts, settling disputes/issues and so on. As a result of these, the languages are full of euphemistic expressions, as such, vulgar words and expressions do not hold water in their language use. What operates now that English language is trending is a fowl cry from what used to be the situation. The researcher observes that youths of today, musicians, artistes, film makers, celebrities among others, use profane and offensive choices of words indiscriminately like their foreign counterparts among themselves and to project their works. They mention sexual organs and sensitive parts of the body anyhow, describe and show the very act of sex making in their music and movies, thereby encouraging and promoting illicit deeds in the society.

- **Dressing**

Africans have a good dress sense. They dress to cover their body and suit the occasions. The way someone dresses in African society easily gives the person away as to where the person comes from (i.e. the tribe). Thus, dressing is a form of recognition and identity. Because of the foregoing, there is the tendency of members of a society or community not to engage in illicit deeds, because people could easily know the household (in few cases) locality or tribe that the person comes from. What the norm is now is different from what used to be the situation. The researcher observes that most of the youths: ladies and guys dress lustfully, exposing parts of their bodies that are supposed to be covered. Some of them “sag” their shorts and trousers, because that is how celebrities in the Western society dress. While some people inscribe tattoos on their bodies and wear revealing clothes with a view to exposing the tattoos. In fact, the dressing of students, especially in the various higher institutions of learning in Nigeria is appalling. These explain the high rates of rape cases and defilements in this present time. In fact, Bello and Adesemoye (2012) capture this vividly when they affirm that:

...teenagers and youths generally are vital segments of the society who could be instrumental in promoting

African cultures. But unfortunately, the mentality and lifestyle of the teenagers in African societies have been grossly affected by exposure to western films to some extent that rather than promoting African cultures, they have become hardened acolytes and promoters of western culture. (p. 66)

- **Marital Values**

In African tradition, it is the norm that a man marries a lady legally (in the traditional sense) by going to the lady’s family to ask for her hand in marriage, pay the bride price and other marriage rites before the lady is formally handed over to the groom’s family. Unlike what ensues now that people who do not know each other’s family members or place of abode would find somewhere to have canal knowledge of themselves, there after start living together as husband and wife. Some even engage in what is called ‘trial marriage’. African tradition does not support giving birth outside wedlock. Nowadays, words like ‘baby mama’. now exist in our lexicon, referring to women that give birth to children for men they are not legally married to. Some refer to themselves as ‘single father’ and ‘single mother’ while some women prefer to seek the services of women who would serve as surrogate mothers for them. They claim they do not want their body to wear out because of pregnancy and do not want their breast to sag as a result of breastfeeding. It is so pathetic, that all the aforementioned conditions are not part of African culture. They are the way of life of the Western people. Even, the rate of divorce is gradually on the increase, since what is being celebrated before has now become the detested and disdained.

- **Honorifics**

Africans have a lot of respect for elders, aged, community leaders, authorities and public office holders. They see these categories of people as those who are custodians of culture and tradition, and those who are vested with the power to lead and guide them. They have high regard for them. In short, they show respect to

whoever it is due. Therefore, younger ones do not only go on errands for their parents, but for people who might not be related to them by blood, but are older than them. People accord themselves respect even in greeting. Aged age mates bow to their peers while greeting, while the female younger ones genuflect and the males prostrate among the Yoruba socio-cultural group of South-West Nigeria. Also common among this socio-cultural group is the tendency of the younger ones to ease someone older of the latter's luggage, when the former comes in contact with them. The reverse is the case today. Most youth watch adult carrying luggage and would just walk pass the elderly one(s). Majority of the youths find it difficult to greet now a days. African society is now following what is the norm in the Western world, where according respect to parents, elders and authorities might not be compulsory. This explains the way they hurl insults on parents, authorities and institutions. Hence, the various hate speeches in the electronic and social media, which cumulates in the reason why the society is losing decorum gradually.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of globalization on African culture. Even though the effect is both positive and negative, the negative influences are more pronounced. We suggest some recommendations which could be used to revive and sustain the hitherto African culture that are being eroded by that of their Western counterpart. Since culture gives identity and there can be no culture without a society. It boils down to the fact that if Africa allows her culture to continually be eroded by the Western culture, she might lose her voice, place and identity in the world. We end on this note, 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." Nsibambi (200, p.10). Thus, African should harness the benefits that globalization proffers while being watchful that it does not rob Africa of her cultural heritage.

Recommendations

Having examined some African cultures and how they have been eroded by Western ones. We make the following suggestions for the revival, promotion and sustenance of African culture and tradition.

First, there should be national re-orientation by the government to the people on the task of rebuilding the country through the restoration of our culture and traditions. Government needs to sensitize the populace to do away with inferiority complex on anything that has to do with African/Nigerian culture and tradition. The people should know that they must celebrate and be proud of their own national values and cultural heritage. Refusal to do this would amount to non-existence of such cultures, since no one would showcase their values for them. Therefore, government should engage in rigorous sensitization programmes in the print, electronic and social media, in order to create awareness among the people. Therefore, Africans should celebrate and project their values. The fact that those who do not own the culture castigate and look down on it do not make it bad. In fact 'black is beautiful' and not 'bad' or 'demonic' as the Western world have portrayed everything that has to do with the complexion of Africans.

Second, the federal government should revive the indigenous languages that are fast going into extinction. This can be done by enforcing the language components of the National Policy on Education (NPE), which spelt out how the languages would be put to use in the schools: as a language of instruction and as a subject. Also, the lexicon of the major Nigerian languages should be well developed and codified. Furthermore, incentives should be given to students who study the major indigenous languages in various higher institutions of learning as a course, instead of the embarrassment and sense of inferiority complex that they face among their colleagues. In addition, school competitions and debates should be organized for primary and secondary school students on the major languages, and prizes should be given to best students, as is the norm for English language. In all, the federal government must have the right political will to revive the languages, enforce and implement all

we have suggested here, since language is very crucial for the sustenance of culture and humanity.

Third, Africans, particularly Nigeria government should use the platforms of the widely attended annual festivals to project her cultural heritage. Festivals such as 'Osun' Osogbo Festival in Osogbo, 'Ojude Oba' Festival in Ijebu-Ode, Calabar Festival in Cross-River State, Abuja Festival among others usually witness a large turn-out of tourists from within and outside the country. These festivals are viable platforms where the culture and tradition of the Nigerian people can be displayed to the outside world. Our local clothes such as 'adire' and 'aso-oke' (among the Yorubas) should be worn by people as costumes at the festivals. Also, our indigenous languages should constitute the modes of communication in the various venues where the festivals do take place. Furthermore, our music and dance should be used to entertain people at the various venues of the festivals. When this is done, tourists from outside the country would see the beauty of Africa's culture and tradition, and the former would be advocates of Nigerian culture and tradition when they return to their countries.

Furthermore, Africans should look at those avenues where globalization has impacted positively in the Western society and use the same innovation to promote the Continent. In this light, we can use the platform of social media, electronic and print media to project our dressing, moral values, sense of communal living, language, music, dance, medicine (Africa has highly medicinal leaves and trees) and food (Africa has a rich cuisine: vegetables, soups and so on). This is because if Africans do not promote and project what they have, the Western worlds would continue to unleash their own culture on the former and portray it in bad light. Africans can also borrow a leaf from some positive things that globalization has to offer. For instance, the concept of 'African time' should be dealt away with. Westerners are known to be punctual to wherever they have appointments. Africans can emulate this and be better off in terms of time management.

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