

Economic Globalization and its Effect on Community in Africa

Aborisade Olasunkanmi

*Philosophy Unit, Department of General Studies, Ladoké Akintola University of Technology,
Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria*

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ABSTRACT Economic globalization has had a great impact on African community. Many policies have been made most of which have a negative effect on the people. In addition to this is the lack of economic alternatives that have all combined to create various terrible living conditions across Africa. This has aggravated many crises in the traditional systems of family and communalism. Today, individualism has replaced the sense of community; mutual antagonism and suspicion have replaced unity of purpose. It affects the economy because the structure of global economy makes most people poor and this is unfair. However, whatever may be the effect of economic globalization on communalism, the fact still remains that changes are inevitable. Whatever happens in one country cannot be isolated from the global, socio-economic and political concerns of others.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is the process of transformation of local or regional phenomenon into a global one. It can be described as a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces (Shell 2004). Globalization is also a process of placing human progress and the opportunities of human ingenuity at the doorsteps of all people. That is, it evokes a worldwide cooperation, solidarity, interdependence, global prosperity and world peace. It is an intensification and acceleration of cross-border interaction which actually or potentially links all individuals, institutions and states into complex structures of mutual but frequently imbalanced dependencies. The primary point of reference for this development is no longer the nation-state, whose scope of action is becoming limited, but "the world as a whole, or at least larger regions with, in some cases, all-embracing institution" (Bhaagwati 2004). It is often used to refer to economic globalization, that is the integration of national economy into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology.

On the other hand, communalism in Africa is a system that is both supersensible and material in its terms of reference. Both are found in a society that is believed by the Africans to be originally 'god-made' because it transcends the people who live in it now and it is 'man-made' because it cannot be culturally understood indepen-

dent of those who live in it (Naomi 1992). The Africans emphasize community life and communalism as a living principle of which the basic ideology is community-identity. Their aims are to produce and present an individual as a community and a culture bearer. Communalism is a strong identity with and devotion to the interests of one's own minority or ethnic group. It is a form of nationalism at the sub-national level. It is based on the assumption of common identity and belief that people belong to specific groups, sharing history, language, culture and historic space. The membership of this group is strictly determined by the criteria that define the community and afford members rights and loyalty. Communalism often extends from mere affirmation of the dignity of one's own people to the proclamation of their superiority and the denial of the claims and needs of others. It is only a member that has right to those things that belong to the community.

This essay examines Economic Globalization and its negative effect on African communalism. In this discourse, globalization is seen as a suspect, which acts as a vehicle of western cultural and economic imperialism in a nuanced fashion. The essay attempts to expose the impacts of economic globalization on African communalism and further highlights the possibility of finding lasting solution to the problem.

ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION AND AFRICAN COMMUNALISM

Globalization has manifested itself in Africa through economic, ecological, political and so-

cio-cultural features. From the economic side, the liberalization of world trade and the increasing roles of the trans-national corporation become more prominent. Politically, democracy and human right are becoming worldwide catchphrases. Socio-culturally, the mass media and advanced means of communication have aided the increasing dissemination of western values and models of life as a standard for all people and culture.

Economic globalization has had a great impact on African communalism. Many policies have been made most of which have negative effect on the people. For example, we have the Structural Adjustment Programmes encouraged by the World Bank, and its attendant the pressure on government to remove subsidies on some usable and essential goods which are meant to protect the poor and the weak. Today, individualism has replaced unity of purpose. Individualism is a destructive divisive element in African society and it promotes many of our problems. It affects the economy because the structure of global economy makes most people poor and this is unfair. This is why individualism as an ideology and principle of life is not encouraged in Africa.

The philosophy behind the African communalism, therefore guarantees individual responsibility within the communal ownership and relationship. And that is the exact point that western individualism is now destroying. Individualism is creating a situation of 'all to himself' where the only governing principle is to 'survive by all means'. Survival in this case, is not seen as a community phenomenon but within the context of the 'I' in exclusion of others. The scenario today in Africa is an indication that "the ground has been pulled under one's feet and with this emergent situation, survival has replaced rationality and desperation replaces reason.

One of Karl Marx's critiques of capitalism shares a relationship with the negative effects of globalization on Africa communalism. Marx referred to alienation as a defect (Karl 1959) which "displays the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings, on their physical and mental states and on the social process of which they are part" (Allman 1988). The economic difficulty and the alienations of people from one another are shaking African communalism, because the situation today is that people are now reexamining the size and essence of extended

families. For some people, the large size of the extended families appears as a huge burden that ought to be shed off in order to manage the meager available resources (Buyo1998). Hence, one notices the attempts of some families to gradually close in on themselves. The well-to-do families tend to see the poorer families as parasites and disturbances.

Economic globalization also negates all the ideals of cultural relativity and cultural pluralism such that today, Africa suffers from crisis of identity because of the importation of foreign values. Economic globalization has also been accused of creating globalized people and in the process, destroying the unique national cultures and identities. Some even regard economic globalization as the spread of America culture and influence, traditional social relationships and commercial values, which have dominated many family's values in Africa. Thus, economic globalization has really done a lot of havoc to communalism in Africa. It is well known that the spread of globalization will undoubtedly bring changes to the countries it reaches, but change is an essential part of life. It does not make sense to talk of a world of six billion people becoming monoculture.

Furthermore, the structure of the global economy makes most countries in Africa poor. Infact, "the African continent has suffered a calamitous reversal of her economic conditions" (Manuel 1998) which has rendered her structurally irrelevant in the present global economic order. The European also controls the price of both import and export product because "the region produces what it does not consume but consumes what it does not produce" (Uroh1998). Milton Obote, describes this experience in this way.

Our economy is the economy of a poor country that must

look for market abroad, and the commodities that we produce

we sold mostly abroad in Western Europe. And when we want

to buy raw materials and plants from Europe, they fix the price.

So heads we lose, tail we lose (Milton 1986).

That has been the situation in Africa. The negative effect of this is that Africa has very little resources to expand on developmental project which has resulted in reduction in government subsidies for social services whenever they are available.

Globalization also has its effect on African politics. The quest for personal power at any price is undemocratic, unjust and immoral. The introduction of individualism to Africa has bastardized the spirit of oneness, and the communal spirit that Africa is well known of. This unbending reputation for individualism also makes African states almost impossible to rule because an individual is more concerned about his own success than the communal success. That has been the reason why corruption is very rampant in African states. African leaders are well known for their corrupt practices. They corruptly enrich themselves as well as their loyalists at the detriment of others. African politicians are well known for putting their puppets in power so as to have unfettered access to the wealth of the nation. This has been responsible for social unrest in African societies. The sociological study of rural communities shows that even in Africa that is proclaimed as being communalistic, individualistic orientation is still noticeable in their lifestyles. There were cases where community members who found the restrictions placed on them by the collectivity too oppressive and decided to dissociate from or even revolt. For example, Bodurin remarks that the question of human rights was not totally alien in traditional African societies. Infact, he puts it this way:

The desire for freedom is endemic among human beings. The freedom of the individual is paramount to all types of freedoms. The African psycho is not different from that of the rest of mankind. In traditional African society as reflected in our mythologies and history, there were men who in defense of their individual freedom stood against society. The myth of Sango, IgbonkaEbiraOlofa Ina in Oyo (Nigeria), and Iyalode (a woman) in Ibadan. In history are such examples which abound in our proverbs and in our inheritance laws. Rulers (King) were not allowed to be absolute rulers in traditional Africa. They were deposed if they trampled upon the rights of their subjects (Cobbarh 1981).

What we are saying is that individualism is not totally alien to African society, because, those factors which gave rise to the need for constitutional guarantee that led to the growth of the philosophy of human rights in western societies are also applicable and relevant in traditional African society.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, we discover that the post colonial nationalist leaders as well as the contemporary African philosophers and scholars on African culture do display a tendency toward exaggerating African communal oriented character. The exaggerated positions are a sweeping generalization about the way the Africans conduct and live their lives. Because to claim that the African community is communal, what they are saying is that the pre-colonial Africa is static and unresponsive to change. But this is not possible because in their day to day transactions, they must have come in contact with other communities who had religion, social, political and economic system different from their own.

However, whatever may be the effect of economic globalization on communalism, the fact still remains that changes are inevitable. Whatever happens in one country cannot be isolated from the global, socio-economic and political concerns of others. Today, Africa has been influenced culturally; there have been cultural diffusion; there were importation of ideas and culture from other countries of the world, which have affected the traditional norms that they had adhered to from generation to generation. Since culture is dynamic, those obsolete aspects of culture have been removed and a new one is put in place. With cultural diffusion, several changes have taken place in Africa. A vivid example is the advancement in science and technology that brought with it development that surpasses the imagination of traditional Africa.

With industrialization which had led to the development of new cities and new ways of life, people now move from their communal setting to urban center for new and better ways of life. Though we cannot rule out the congestion and its attendant social problems, but it is a radical departure from the traditional past.

Besides, the flow of economic resources across border, national, regional, state or community has created the concentration of investment that reach a critical mass that led to the economic take-off in Africa. Once an area becomes the focus of attraction for investment, it develops a location advantage over other areas. With economic globalization, there is tendency for domestic integration, such as removal of cultural and social barriers to the movement of resources including capital, labour and idea. Resources will

be free to move to where they will be most efficiently utilized, people must be free to live where they believe they will be able to pursue their self-interest, whether as consumers or producers. Individual freedom is not only good for economic development, more importantly, it is ethically good. Barriers that separate human beings, religion, race, community, nations are invariably harmful.

And on the part of economic globalization, the world trade organization (WTO) should not focus solely on the opening of markets but also allow trade to be restricted to support human rights, labour rights and environmental objective in other countries. The world trade organization should allow non-governmental organization a direct voice in their governance. It is necessary that the global trade and investment rules be subordinated to national and local governments' decisions about conditions of investment within their border. Agriculture should be eliminated from global trade rules, so as to allow countries to pursue food security and sustainable policy and there should be a fund created to alleviate poverty with revenue raised through a tax on currency transaction along with other forms of global taxation. Finally, if Africa is to come to term with herself, she must stop the sheepish acceptance of communal impositions and Africans must discard those traditions that have

been imprisoning them so as to give their children the dividends of democracy and economic globalization.

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