

# A GLOBALISING WORLD AND SOCIAL VALUE DISORIENTATION IN NIGERIA

By

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## Abstract

*Sociological literature is replete with discussions on social values, more so, its dialectical relationship with individual and group behaviour. However, contemporary discourse on social values has failed to interrogate the interface between globalisation and social values in Nigeria. This paper seeks to demonstrate that much of the social values of developing countries like Nigeria have been undermined or corroded by the force of globalisation. The paper argues that Nigerian social values have become disoriented and incapable of providing the bulwark for the much needed reforms, primarily because of the force of "externalities," as driven by the hydra-headed phenomenon of globalisation. The paper suggests a reinvention or resuscitation of Nigerian social values as the roadmap to building a new Nigerian nation.*

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## Introduction

The relationship between globalisation and social values is seen as a contemporary paradox. (Afoaku, 2005, Erinoshio, 2004). The advent of colonial rule meant the wholesale transportation of Western cultural values into Nigeria. Since that encounter, in the early part of the twentieth century, between the colonised and the colonisers, the former's values had witnessed a systematic adulteration, if not complete negation. Nigerian traditional values following that encounter with the British lifestyles appeared to have caved in. The transformation evident in the changing social values, itself a byproduct of acculturation, has however been given fresh impetus by the renewed forces of globalisation. Globalisation, although enjoys currency in contemporary literature, its effect on social values, and even socio-political life for most developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa has been anything but salutary (Kura 2005, Nwauwa, 2006, Asobie, 2001).

Indeed, the process of globalisation brings along with it numerous and varied effects on the society affecting economy, politics, education, religion, and not the least of all, social values. Societal values are values that are generally accepted by a society, and that form the basis of its cultural traditions, structures, practices and laws. Values are qualities that an individual or a society considers important as

principles for conduct and that are intrinsically worthwhile, that is, worth striving for. These values are acquired and internalised by an individual and it influences his or her thinking and behaviour. These values have come under intense pressure following globalisation engendering a crisis of identity. Nigerians are now at the cross-roads. Like the proverbial bat, Nigerians are no longer sure of their true identity.

The aforesaid scenario is fraught with a number of difficulties and challenges. First, is it possible for Nigerians to re-evolve their traditional norms, values, culture amidst the onslaught by globalisation? Second, are Nigerians still distinct groups with unique identifiable cultures and identity? Third, have Nigerians lost their cultural identity? Fourth, can Nigeria and other developing societies overcome the obstacles posed by this march of globalisation and go ahead to have a true national identity?

The paper shall seek to provide answers to these questions. But first, let us x-ray the phenomenon of globalisation.

#### **Globalisation: Meaning and Characteristics**

Globalisation, a multifaceted phenomenon has not enjoyed definitional consensus in the literature (see Aina, 1996, Abubakar, 2001, Asobie, 2001). It is, as Kura (2005) contends, a highly contested concept: something that has been discussed by almost everyone, yet unsure of what it is. A major problem when discussing globalisation, as Whaley (2005:8) pointed out, is that the term means different things to different disciplines and even to individual researchers within the same discipline. Therefore, Whaley (2005) outlines the different persuasion of the globalisation discourse thus, to Economists, the major concern is market-based integration during which process national barriers to flows of goods, capital, and labour are removed and the global economy inches ever closer towards a single global economy and away from nationally demarcated markets.

While to political scientists, globalisation is conceptualised as global political processes in which there are challenges to national authority structures as movement across national borders intensifies and the functions of nation's states are taken over by supra-national authorities. However, to sociologists (Beck 1997, cited in Whalley 2005), globalisation is viewed as a process of social interaction seen as elevating global risk and providing implications for social structures at all levels of interaction.

The question arises as to what happens to these local communities and their values in the face of this market based integration? Will globalisation lead to the emergence of global values with global collective identity as a global fusion of national values, or is globalisation to be seen as a process where value systems of powerful nations displace those of the weak? Some other writers (see Asobie, 2001,

Moussa, 2000, Yusuf, 2000) have highlighted the ideological connotation of globalisation by reviewing the contributions of the North/South international divide. Asobie (2001) argues that universalisation of capitalism is globalisation. It is in this context, seen as a euphemism for imperialism (Erinosho, 2004).

The dominant strand emanating from the North sees globalisation as the process of both vertical and horizontal interaction involving increasing volume and variety of transnational transactions, in goods, services, international capital flows, human migration and also through rapid and widespread diffusion of technology. Consequently, globalisation apologists talk of liberalisation of trade, removal of obstacles to international capital flow or international market, and free flow of information and ideas (Asobie, 2001). The way the south perceives globalisation has also been neatly summarised by Asobie (2001).

Globalisation, especially its contemporary character, involves a conscious effort by the governments of the developed societies or industrialised countries to govern the world using such multi-lateral agencies as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Group of eight (G8) and the United Nations Security Council. This anti-globalisation perspective has received some attention in the literature. This is prominent in the several contributions of writers like, Greider (1997) and Strange (1995) who discussed the manic behaviour of modern capitalism; Ritzer (2000) who dwelt on McDonaldisation; or the negative elements of global standardisation; Glassner (1999) who deplored the influence of media misrepresentation and portrayal. Similarly, Arnett (2002) sees globalisation as a process by which cultures influence one another and become almost identical through trade, immigration, and the exchange of ideas and information. This may be so, but it is necessary to investigate, whose cultures are being assimilated, and by whom; and also, whose national social values are becoming extinct or disoriented. Globalisation is the hand maiden of contemporary international capitalism in a unipolar world (see Alubo, 1999). Following the much trumpeted end of the East/West cold war, globalisation signified an increase in cross-border or transnational interactions involving cultural, technological, and capital exchanges on a unilateral direction, basically, from the west to the rest of the world. It seeks to impose Western life-styles and values, their preferences, choices as the ultimate standards on humanity. Globalisation is an attempt by the Western societies, as led by the US, Japan and Western European countries to control and dominate the world. This is done in a most deceptive manner by eulogising what is commonly called, *the global village*. The impact of globalisation has been so overwhelming that Worsley (1984) wrote, "Until our day, human society has never existed" implying that it is only until very recently can we make allusions to types of social associations covering the entire globe (Giddens, 1993). To Giddens,

The world has become, in important respects, a single social system, as a result of growing ties of interdependence which now affect virtually everyone. The social, political and economic conditions which crisscross borders between countries decisively condition the fate of those living within each of them. The general term for the increasing interdependence of world society is globalisation (1993:528)

This interdependence need not be misconstrued as an equal relation, rather as Giddens (1993) observed it would be fallacious to think of globalisation singly as a process of the growth of world unity. Simply put, the globalising of social relations should be interpreted basically as the reordering of time and distance in social life where our everyday activities, even our lives are continuously shaped by events happening quite a distance away from our local contexts. However, it seems pertinent to state, beyond the position of Giddens, that, activities, social organisation and value orientations in the developing world have borne more the impact of globalisation inequitably. It is still scanty, if not totally absent where it is documented, that social values in Europe and America have been sub merged following globalisation. This is the crux of the problem. As much as the process of globalisation seems irreversible for now, it is germane that its various impacts on different societies (see Kura, 2005) be contextually examined. However, to put this in proper perspective, the origin of globalisation needs to be properly understood. What is the epistemology of globalisation, how did it develop and what factors ensured its dominant features currently?

### **Origin of Globalisation**

Historically, globalisation is not new, as against the widely held notion in some academic circles that globalisation is a new phenomenon. This is in line with the view held by Kura (2005), Aaron (2001), Howe (2000), and Watkins (1997). While the new globalising processes may have been different, the essential ingredient has been the integration of the world's economy. Giddens (1993) concurs that, although rapidly developing today, globalisation is by no means completely new dating from the time when Western influence started to expand across the world some two or three centuries ago. Kaufman (2004) argued that the establishment of the great trading companies formed in the seventeenth century such as the Royal African Company, East Indian Company, and colonialism were all significant landmarks in the creation of a global economy. The colonisation of Africa has been properly documented by historians that it does not require further elucidation here. Suffice it to submit however, that, colonialism created a witch's brew by putting together into one state a mixture of different ethnic groups that did not get along but coexisted on the basis of mutual fear or respect. This forced cohabitation has led to conflicts among different ethnic groups. The basic problem regarding these conflicts

has to do with the nature of values that the state should adopt as the fundamental normative basis for its political structures, laws and public policies.

This problem has been highlighted in various forms, some of which are, lack of national integration, massive corruption, incessant coups, civil wars and the efforts by some ethnic groups to gain power and dominate the others by imposing their values on others.

(Ikuenobe, 2006 <http://upress.kent.edu/nieman/ethnicity.colonialism.htm> ).

Aaron (2001) observed that the first wave of globalisation lasted for over three and a half centuries. It was marked by an unprecedented pillage of Africa's natural resources, enslavement of Africans and general disarticulation (Ake, 1981) and disorganisation of social life (Howe, 2000). This adventurism and expansionism which were indeed logical corollaries to the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production resulted in establishment of colonies. The second stage of globalisation, therefore, culminated in the colonisation of Africa and some parts of Asia, Latin America by European powers.

These different stages of globalisation are often clothed with moral tonality. In the same manner that colonialism was depicted as a Whiteman's burden, globalisation has been decorated in such a manner that Africans are now being told to embrace it because, failure to do so would imperil African societies irredeemably. African values have been portrayed as "lacking of any respect," "uncivilised," and in urgent need of redemption. This paved the ground for the exploitation of Africa. As Aaron puts it,

Indeed, the asymmetries associated with colonialism ushered in an era of unequal economic relationship between Africa and Europe with the unfavourable terms and balance of payment problems for Africa. Till date, the structural imbalances created by years of colonial conquest are still held culpable for most of Africa's woes (2001: 21).

Currently, globalisation is in its third wave where nation-states are urged to surrender the sovereignty of their peoples to the dictates of international capital led by transnational corporations. African economies are being goaded by a new proclamation that the fate of their national economies is tied to the expansion of the global economy which is misconstrued as synonymous with universal prosperity.

African governments are urged to open up their economies so as to attract foreign investment. The form and content of these investments are not considered, even now that a country like Nigeria has become a dumping ground for all manner of unimaginable low quality, disused commodities, even toxic wastes. Nigeria is now a rendezvous of second-hand materials, even second-hand human beings, with very poor quality of life. This phase of globalisation is consistent in its attempts to subvert our values and undermine our national heritage. It is therefore necessary at this stage to examine how the emerging global order has affected, in a rather profound manner, the social values of Nigeria. That shall be the next focus.

### **The Impact of Globalisation on Nigerian Social Values**

The relationship between globalisation and social values has elicited diverse comments from different scholars. This debate among academic circles has been sharply polarised into two different camps, namely: the *optimists*, and, the *pessimists*. The pro-global viewpoint showcases the perspective of the optimists who eulogise the benefits of globalisation, and argues that globalisation integrates national cultures, culminating in a cordial union of pluralistic cultures.

The optimists contend that the spread of democratic values, respect for human rights, tolerance, and density in the information highway, increased and open trade among nations, are suggestive of the gains of globalisation. But then, as Abu-AI-Ola (2003) observes, the globalisation value system includes great negativity. Its positive values aforesated cannot be considered as absolute. These values are not reflected in all societies; the concepts behind them serve rather only to enhance the current policies of globalisation and the interests of the developed capitalist countries. This viewpoint is supported by Falk (cited in Runde, 2000) when he posited that the phenomenon of globalisation represents mainly material developments that reflect the expansion of technological capabilities on a global scale as well as the de-territorialisation of these capabilities due to informatics and the internet. Falk deplors the net effect of globalisation to include social and economic injustice, environmental degradation and heightening materialism leading to cultural and spiritual decay.

Following from this, the pessimists (see Rodrick (1997) cited in Chan (2006) point to the increasing number of agitation and sustained protests against globalising institutions like World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO) even in developed capitals as demonstrating the popular resentment against globalisation. The pessimists contend that globalisation destroys cultural values, weakens social cohesion, disrupts social order and solidarity and exacerbates tension among groups. Even the late catholic Pontiff Pope John Paul noted the predicament of the developing world that is continually being cut or denied the opportunities of market based integration. The latest push for globalisation revolves around market based integration where profit motive is given primacy more than life.

In Nigeria, globalisation has affected the existing set of social relations and social organisation. In a specific sense, globalisation currently, appears to be an attempt to commercialise the cultures and economies of the world (Jeffrey, 2002). Globalisation has indeed brought social disintegration, which refers to the uprooting of social values of a nation without a suitable replacement (see Rodrick, 1997). This has led to a crisis of national identity as Nigerians now try to out do one another in their futile bid to sheepishly ape the nuances, mannerisms and life-styles of the Western world. To speak, walk, dress, eat, laugh, build houses, and indeed, do

anything resembling Western standards is a significant index of one's social status. Many center elites continue to believe that mimicking western values, habits and culture is the way forward (Kwesi Kwah Prah, 2004). Thus, while the extended family maybe useful in productive and other activities, in fact, may be a better and culturally basic social unit for accumulation, the elites favour the nuclear family structure which bears no continuity in African history or cultural practices (Kwesi Kwah Prah, 2004: 14).

Nigerians have indeed become apprehensive owing first, to the imminent failure of the post-colonial Nigerian state (predicted by American Intelligence) even under the current so-called democratic dispensation, and second, because of the overbearing influence of corporatism that imposes itself on cultural life. In spite of globalisation, and all its gospel of free trade, the West has not relented in its resolve to continue its protectionist policies. In practice, the developed countries maintain high tariffs, protect huge subsidies in favour of their economies and trade. Indeed subsidy spent on cows alone show in reality that globalisation was not meant for and cannot redeem Africa, or Nigeria for that matter from the mess it found itself. World Bank (2002) report shows that one European cow receives \$2,50 a day while the average Japanese cow receives \$7.50 a day in subsidies. It is to be noted that 75 percent of people in Africa live on less than \$2 a day. This is not to talk about the surreptitious payment of over 20 billion dollars by the Obasanjo administration in the name of debt cancellation. Whatever the supposed benefits are, no country gives out 20 billion dollars in one fell swoop and still hopes to be stable. The benefits are still far flung. The supposed gains of globalisation are not only dubious, but devious.

Jeffery (2002) provides a useful insight on the impact of globalisation when he observed that the processes of globalisation appeared to have created two major types of human beings. One is the Americanised brand name consumer who is educated by the media and achieves self identity by consuming standardised brand name images/products, deconstructing his tastes and appetites to conform to American culinary patterns. Two, is the anti-modernist led by fundamentalist identity politics which seeks to achieve a sense of cultural identity as cultural warrior. Owing to strong beliefs and sentiments that are deep-rooted, the warrior confronts headlong, the insults and deprivation inherent in the so called modernity propelled by the new 'global order. This group has been prominent in prosecuting Jihads and other forms of ethnic cleansing to preserve their purity and retain their identity. The rise of militancy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria may be instructive in this regard. However, with the increasing force and tempo of globalisation, there is little doubt that the world will continue to witness such hotspots of resistance around the globe.

The worry in Nigeria is that the Nigerian state appears ignorant or insensitive to the travails occasioned by globalisation. The Nigerian economy is being surrendered to the dictates of international monopoly capital facilitated by a camp of

the internal collaborators. To mention the latest sale of national enterprises like refineries in the guise of privatisation and commercialisation is to say the least done in deference to the globalisation music. The truth has been documented by several scholars (see Kura, 2005; Ukaga, 2004) that without a fundamental restructuring of economic relations of production, distribution and exchange, there is little chance of full economic recovery and development in Nigeria, nay Africa.

The issues raised by "globalisation and the Americanisation of cultures threaten value systems and intensify the change in structures such as the once traditional institution as the community, the family, sustained employment and the particular type of support they each provided" (Jeffrey 2002: 95)

Globalisation is Americanism under a mask. In fact, Americanised culture has been exported aggressively abroad through the media, getting across the globe and sitting atop the cultures of the world. Images presented have been variously described by commentators as Macworld (Barber, 1996), or Mcdonaldisation (Ritzer, 1996) or what, we may translate here to mean, at least in Nigerian sense, Mr Biggisation of social life, where the dietary habits, and even other life styles of the urban folks are being shaped by the Mr Bigg's corporate interest.

The process of Americanising the world has been facilitated by the immense power of the media. In fact, CNN has colonised many native cultures through its world wide reach. People are deluded to think through constant viewing of CNN and allied media channels that they have vast individual choices and opportunities to consume products (Euro-American products) as they are presented by the western media. Unfortunately, the addiction to such borrowed life-styles even with its purported freedom granted the individual, leaves the person alienated from the society. Critics of a globalised media or media imperialism point to the growing dominance of consumer oriented, western, largely North American media and entertainment products and how they contribute to a one way transmission of ideas and values that result in the displacement of indigenous cultures (see Adesoji, 2006). But for the arrival of home movies, despite their shortcomings, the gamut of our culture would have been forgotten. The world press has continued to show social life in Africa as akin to the jungle with only famine, disease, malnutrition, crime and death being our collective lot. To these apologists, nothing good comes from Africa.

Our cultural values which include principles that reinforce connections with our cultural roots and help us feel connected to a large community of people with similar backgrounds have been disoriented by globalisation. The sense of community, our identification with the group (Igwebuike), our concern for the well being of others have all been replaced by a new cult of individualism. This individualistic orientation may have begun to take its toll on the people as community development projects suffer in most parts of Nigeria. This may lead to



rootlessness, a situation Emile Durkheim calls anomie. Following this, there is an orientation to the outside world, resulting from discrediting one's traditional rituals and norms.

Without doubt, every value has been influenced by globalisation. Our work values have also been affected by globalisation. The traditional values of hard work, diligence, excellent work ethics have all been deconstructed following the new concept of work associated with *olu oyibo* (white man's work). Since the colonial period and after, the public service, the largest employer of labour in Nigeria has been negatively referred to as whiteman's work, engendering absenteeism, lateness to work, inefficiency, lack of enthusiasm etc. amongst workers.

Globalisation has foisted on us a new god, money. One may say that money is a necessity at least in modern economy, but in Nigeria, money, or the love for it, is the root of all evil practices. Our social values have been commercialised, that adoration of money today, is the *raison d'être* of social life. Love for one another, sense of altruism, that hitherto pervaded in traditional communities in Nigeria have all been jettisoned following the onslaught of globalisation. We no longer look inward but are oriented outside. Every thing is being done by Nigerians to desert the country all in the name of responding to globalisation. Nigeria is a country enslaved by a new societal value depicted by excessive craze for materialism and hero-worshipping all dictated by the amount of money one has, not by any other qualification.

The recklessness of bullion van vehicles on Nigerian highways under the guise of escorting money tells a lot about the new Nigerian psyche. In a scale of preference, it does appear that money enjoys premium more than human life. The recourse to materialism has been given spiritual support by the new gospel of prosperity. It is a sin to be poor these days. That, perhaps explains, why paradoxically, churches are on the increase, and crime rate is also increasing.

Nigeria needs to put a stop to the continued subversion of its values. As Prah (2005: 19) pointed out, the isolation or rather, exclusion of culture and customs in governance has been the problem of development in Africa, which has continued to occur in a socio-cultural vacuum. In the African situation, perhaps more than any other area of the world, culture as an inheritance, as an incremental and constructional basis of life and society has tended to be abandoned in favour of indiscriminate mimicry and cheap imitation of western practices. The result of this is a failure to significantly improve the quality of life of majority of people in the continent (Prah 2005: 20). The lesson here, even following from the experience of the developed countries and even post-colonial Asia, is that developing countries should turn to the massive reliance on their cultural base. Our present-day reforms can enjoy acceptability, and also be realistically tied to developing the common good if its conception is not in the abstract. The new reform agenda (whatever it is) in Nigeria must be predicated on the historically sustained social values.

### **Conclusion**

A society's social values are intrinsically tied to its mode of production. In spite of political independence 47 years ago, Nigeria's economy is embedded in dependent capitalism. It is also a trite fact that a people's consciousness derives its essence from the material conditions of life. The global parasitic economy has sustained the imposition of social values in Nigeria that are largely alien in character and orientation to us. As the world globalises, there is, ipso facto, a glorification of European lifestyles and corresponding condemnation of Nigerian values. With globalisation, came the inclination of Nigerian elites to acquire, unreservedly, English etiquette. Nigerians are now more catholic than the Pope, or precisely, more anglicised than the British. This identity crisis has made Nigerians marginal human beings, neither British nor Africans.

Since then, Nigerians have lost a sense of national pride. The development of pan-national values has been systematically put on hold, if not reversed. Identification with the nation state by Nigerians, except only in situation of sharing the national cake, is illusory. Our social values have therefore been shortchanged by the force of globalisation. A country that is without its own values is like a country lost. The duplicitous effects of globalisation have wrought on Nigeria a monumental disaster. The nation is steadily slipping away. It is submitted here that, only a resuscitation of Nigerian social values, a development of new economic relations with the Western world shall provide the roadmap to genuine national redemption.

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