

Africa and the West: Contextualising the Globalisation of Inequality

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Abstract

Globalisation and globalism – its philosophy – seem attractive on the surface, especially when one considers that Man, by nature, is a gregarious animal. The increasing connectivity, interdependence, universal cooperation and expansion of world trade that globalisation theoretically preaches can hardly be ignored. However, connectivity, cooperation and interdependence of the states and peoples of the world cannot be successful where there is a glaring inequality of status. In a world divided into “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries, we wonder what is being globalised. In view of the above, this paper argues the position that African countries need to pay attention to developmental issues before any attempt at globalisation. Globalisation is a world of competition and no one goes into a competition without having the requisite skills or products. Globalising at this stage of underdevelopment puts African States at a disadvantage, except the developed world decides to trade its development for underdevelopment.

Introduction

Monism, dualism and pluralism are attempts in philosophy to explain the uniformity or otherwise of the sources of reality. While monism subscribes to the notion that the whole of reality, despite its numerous manifestations, comes from one source; dualism submits that reality could be from a combination of two sources. Pluralism, on its part, does not foreclose the possibility of reality being a product of more than two sources. Whichever of these positions one subscribes to, the fact of the interconnectedness of reality is

affirmed. This interconnectedness, which is most pronounced in *monism*, is explicit in the philosophies of Parmenides, Hegel, Marx, among others. The interconnectedness of reality provides the link between globalism as the philosophy behind globalisation and philosophy.

In African Philosophy, this position is exemplified in Placide Tempels' theory of force in which he places all manifestations of existence in a hierarchical order of interacting forces. If no manifestation of reality exists in isolation of others, then the interaction among and interconnectedness of humans become valid inferences. Furthermore, man's gregariousness is not a matter for debate. Man's gregariousness and the interconnectedness of reality as a whole form the foundation for globalism, the philosophy of globalisation.

In this paper, we examine globalisation and its philosophy of globalism. We are of the view that the distortion of the philosophy of globalisation, i.e. globalism, and the reduction of globalisation to mere economics, are responsible for the dysfunctional state of globalisation and the attendant discontent and criticisms. More importantly, the inability of third world countries, especially African states, to effectively partake in, and reap the benefits of globalisation renders globalisation almost meaningless for it is as one-sided as the nationalism and regionalism that have emerged as alternatives to it.

No doubt, globalism in its true philosophical sense, and globalisation in its all-encompassing sense, are desirable for human communion and interdependence. However, economic globalisation, which has been variously termed "neoliberalism", "imperialism", etc., has been more of a monologue on the part of the Northern world. Globalisation is a world of competition. No one goes into a competition without the requisite skills and products as the underdeveloped countries of the world currently do. Head or tail, they cannot win.

We begin the paper with a look at globalism as philosophy of globalisation. Then, an attempt is made to have a glimpse at globalisation. This is followed by "Economic Globalisation and the

African continent. We conclude the paper with the recommendation that a recourse to philosophical globalism and empowerment of citizens of Third World Countries would re-focus globalisation.

Globalism as Philosophy of Globalisation

Globalism has been viewed variously by various scholars. It has been viewed as a philosophy¹ (Falaiye: 2009), as an ideology² (James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer 2004); as imperialism (ibid. 8-25). For the purposes of this paper we see globalism as the principle of interconnectedness and the underlying philosophy of globalisation. This is in agreement with our position elsewhere³. Seen in this light, globalism becomes the theoretical foundation of globalisation. Joseph Nye attempts to answer the question, “what is globalism?” in the following words: “globalism, at its core, seeks to describe and explain nothing more than a world which is characterised by networks of connections that span multi-continental distance”⁴. Nye distinguishes between globalism and globalisation. While he sees globalism as the underlying basic network, he considers globalisation as the dynamic shrinking of distance on a large scale. He sees globalism as a phenomenon with ancient roots. He identifies four dimensions of globalism thus: economic, military, environmental and social.

Globalism recognises diversity in nature and emphasises the need to understand such differences with a view to benefitting all. Its basic assumptions include⁵:

- The idea of a central world government
- The idea that global governance is better than national advantage
- The idea of ‘harmonizing’ national laws into, and under, a global body of law
- The idea that autonomy of nations is related to inferior or antisocial urges.
- The notion that international trade agreements should be signed for a higher purpose despite disadvantages to either party

From the above, globalism goes beyond the particular and penetrates into the universal essence of man and our world. It entails a common

understanding and penetration of problems in all areas of human existence.

As a principle, ideology or philosophy of human interconnectedness, globalism calls attention to the necessity of placing the interests of the entire world over and above those of individual nations. It is on this philosophy that globalisation is built.

Globalisation

Globalisation has been defined in so many ways such that the meanings ascribed to it often times portray ideological partisanship. Many supposedly harmless definitions are viewed to be either from above or from below. Definitions are viewed to come from above when they are from the perspective of the globalists and from below when they are from the view point of antiglobalists or alterglobalists. In many cases, globalism especially those who consider the two as euphemisms for one and the same thing. This is wrong because globalism and globalisation are not the same. As we said earlier in this paper, globalism is the principle of human interconnectedness. It establishes the universality and interconnectedness of humanity. Globalisation, on its part is the process, the degree of interconnectedness among humans. The administration of the process and the management of the degree of interconnectedness among humans and nations have greatly affected the perceptions of globalisation. As Petras and Veltmeyer put it⁶:

There are essentially three “classes” or “actors” in the world political economy: the advocates and beneficiaries of globalisation; the adversaries and exploited classes and states; and those who experience both exploitation and benefits and waver in their response.

We now consider some of the definitions of globalisation.

According to Joseph Nye, globalisation is the speed at which human connections take place. In his words, “globalism describes the reality of being interconnected, while globalisation captures the speed at which these connections increase or decrease”⁷. For Ogundowole,

globalisation is not different from the subjugationism which preceded it. According to him:

Globalisation, like subjugationism that brought it, forth, is the aggressive imposition of a particular eccentric culture, eccentric value system, element or elements there from, on human civilization and world development process⁸.

Ogundowole's definition is one of those which see globalisation as another form of colonization and neoliberalism. Martin Khor views globalisation strictly from the economic perspective as pure liberalization of finance, trade and investment⁹. In their book, globalisation unmasked, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer write that globalisation refers to cross national flows of goods, investment, production and technology¹⁰.

From the above, certain things become identifiable: the interconnectedness of men and states, liberalization of finance, trade and investment; opportunities for democratization of governance. Today, the distance between the farthest areas of the world has shrunk due to the availability of technology. If the above represent what globalisation stands for, then it stands to reason that no state can do without globalisation. But, can we say that globalisation stands for these and is beneficent to all states involved. This is what engages our attention in what follows.

Globalisation and the African Situation

Historians of world politics, economics anthropology, etc would not subscribe to any suggestion that globalisation is a recent phenomenon. The universality of mankind and the interconnectedness of men irrespective of creed, colour or epoch attest to the fact the world is a global village. Episodes in human history such as slavery, colonization etc were parts of efforts at globalising. Slavery was a device by the world powers to use global labour to develop their lands. The evangelization and islamisation that followed were used to globalise belief systems and modes of worship. The Arab invasion of Africa in the 7th century AD and western colonization were political forms of globalisation. The

1884/85 Berlin conference was a global event where the world powers at the time, ceded to themselves foreign territories without inviting representatives from such territories. It defined the economic relations between the rich countries of the world and the developing ones. States are dictated by the former while the latter tags along as if they have no choice.

The above scenario has called to question both the philosophy of globalisation, that is, globalism, and globalisation itself. It would seem that globalisation has always been in favour of the advanced countries of the world. No wonder, therefore, that globalisation has been viewed in so many negative ways of recent. It has been variously christened as imperialism, neo-liberalism, subjugationism, recolonisation, etc. A look at the characterisation of globalisation by Petras and Veltmeyer reveals that there are essentially three classes: the advocates and beneficiaries of globalisation; the adversaries and exploited; and those who both reap the benefits and suffer the disadvantages of globalisation. African states fall in the second category. Even though criticisms of, and protests against, globalism come, more often than not, from disillusioned citizens of the advanced countries of the world, the exploited classes and states are more in the developing countries.

Globalisation as practised currently, thrives on inequality which bothers on injustice. From whichever perspective we look at it the essence of globalisation is lost in its practice. Wherever one turns-culture, politics, economy, environment, health etc one is faced with a one-sided world of the advanced countries. Before looking at these elements of globalisation and how they constitute inequalities, let us make the point clear that no two entities, individuals or states are equal in all respects. And, we are not advocating that they should be. Our point is that globalisation, rather than widen the inequality among states ought to offer equal opportunities for all to be empowered to globalise. Rather than refer to globalising states as the same or uniform “the demand for equality is to mitigate larger number of existing social and economic inequalities to bring about definite social improvement without obliterating natural differences¹¹. Where states are concerned, there are scholars who insist that the situation in many developing countries today, is traceable to

their relations with the advanced countries of the world, in the past and now.

Turning to the cultural aspect of globalisation, many are of the view that a situation whereby the identities of citizens of the south are eroded cannot adequately represent the aims and objectives of globalisation. In the case of Africa, there has been a steady erosion of her identity since the contact with the west. Maduabuchi Dukor observes that:

Globalisation is a process by which a network of cultural, political and economic advantages and interests of the different peoples of the world work naturalistically for their mutual benefits ¹².

However, he laments that globalism has joined the league of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism in eth historic erosion of African identity and authenticity. Today, what is in place is domination of African cultures by the Western cultures. It is now common place to see African girls, ladies and women scantily dressed all in the attempt to mimic those brought to their living rooms by Western television stations and films. This aspect of the erosion of African cultures is mild when we consider the linguistic aspect of culture. In Nigeria, for example, it was only of recent that the learning of at least one indigenous language was made compulsory for primary school and lower secondary School Students. This was as a result of the realization that most Nigerian children who school in the urban areas had become English children of Nigerian parentage. The situation is not different in other urban areas of Africa. Loss of identify cannot be considered a positive thing for globalisation. Equality demands that the fears of these different peoples over their cultures must be allayed. They must have the choice to maintain their identities. The recognition of diversity must be encouraged by the powerful West hence, “for globalisation to become a cosmopolitan world ‘philosophy’, it must be predicated on interrelation of cultures or what some have called intercultural philosophy”¹³. This much is expressed in multiculturalism.

In the area of politics, the inequality between the West and African states is obvious. Before the Europeans came, African societies had their modes of governance. Today, globalisation has exported democracy to most parts of the world. However, while democracy seems to work in the advanced countries of the world, it seems that the same cannot be said of African countries save for very few. Issues of periodic elections, universal adult suffrage, recall of elected representatives, power transfer, etc., still constitute problems in most African states. Africa, despite her participation in globalisation, is a continent where leaders run terms determined by them. In 2011 alone, four of such leaders were forced out of office. First it was Gbagbo of Ivory Coast, Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and finally Muammar Ghaddafi of Libya. In Africa, today, democracy seems to be synonymous with everything evil, including corruption as African leaders use the free flow of capital and technology to swindle their people. What is more? Capitalist democracy has forced African communities to deviate substantially from their indigenous systems of government ¹⁴. Advocates of globalism ought to see the need to give African states the necessary opportunities to deepen democracy.

In the economic arena, inequality between the advanced countries of the world and African states is wide. Agricultural produce are procured from African states at ridiculously low prices only for the same products to be imported at prohibitive prices. Same for petroleum products. This accounts for the low GDP of many Africa states despite their involvement in exports. Lack of requisite technology and appropriate facilities puts African states at a disadvantage in the international market. Economic globalisation encourages (1) breaking down of economic barriers (2) international spread of trade, financial and production activities (3) the growing power of transnational corporations and international financial institutions ¹⁵. Of these, African states are nowhere near their overseas trading partners. The globalisation of policy-making leaves room for the control of international trade by transnational corporations and financial institutions which are firmly in the grips of those Martin Khor refers to as “Big players and speculators”¹⁶. Besides, the globalisation of economic policy-making has weakened

further the capacity of exploited states to deliver the basic needs to their people. Accordingly,

The hesitant, indecisive, passive, feeble nation with its incapacity to make decision and to liberate itself from the complicatedly- woven but exploitative realities of contemporary world, the lopsided international capitalist economic order, to be specific, in the end develops a complete blockage of action¹⁷.

The subjugation of national economic policy- making to transnational corporations and international financial institutions does not help the efforts of developing states, including African states in economic globalisation.

The environmental and health dimensions of globalisation are not different from those earlier discussed. While no same person would oppose universal congregation to fight environmental and health hazards. European countries and America do not operate at the same wavelength as African countries. Rather, African countries are sometimes at the receiving end of the industrial activities of the developed and industrialized countries of the world. In 1988 for example, a ship- load of toxic waste was dumped at Koko fort in the present day Delta state of Nigeria. The ship travelled all the way from Italy. The dumping of the waste had its environmental and health implications on the people of Koko. This seems to be globalisation from above.

Globalisation, practised as above, has elicited reactions from opponents. Most, of these opponents are not opposed to the interconnectedness of humans and states but to what has been variously referred to as economic globalisation, imperialism, neo-colonization neo-liberalism, elite globalism, among others. What they are opposed to are the various abuses and unethical practices in the course of globalisation . These abuses are aided by the unequal power distribution between developed and developing states. No wonder, therefore, that Alter-globalists

See their movement as an alternative to what they term neo-liberal globalisation in which international institutions (World Trade Organisation, World Bank, International Monetary Fund etc.) and major corporations devote themselves to enriching the developed world while giving little or no attention to the detrimental effects of their actions on the people and environments of less developed countries, countries whose governments are often too weak or too corrupt to resist or regulate them.¹⁸

The feeling of inequality among members of the globalised world and the abuses in the course of globalisation have led to a series of protests and disruption of meetings of the international Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Strange enough, little action has been recorded in Africa and the other exploited parts of the world. The reason for this is not far-fetched. African states, merely tag along the path of globalisation, they are not active participants. A continent bogged by civil wars, genocide, pestilence, hunger poverty, Illiteracy is hardly an active participant in the globalisation process.

Conclusion

Globalisation has drawn reactions from all over the world. Whether its critics are referred to as anti-globalisation movements or Alter-globalisation, they are opposed to what they see as large, multi-national corporations having unregulated political power, exercised trade agreements and deregulated financial markets¹⁹. These multi-national corporations and their international financial institutions are in the hands of the industrialized countries of the world who dictate happenings in trade, investment and finance. African countries, like other developing countries of the world lack the technology and financial muscle of the West and therefore, merely tag along the path of globalisation. This ought not to be the case

Granted that no country can exist in isolation of others, while African states make efforts to contribute their quota to developing the world, deliberate efforts should be made to empower themselves

and their peoples to prepare them for the international competition inherent in globalisation. This way, rather than being dragged along, African states must make deliberate efforts to globalise. Making deliberate efforts involves determining what to come to the table with, which includes issues of development and empowerment of their people. When this is done, the partnership in the world globalisation would have transcended the world of unequal.

Endnotes

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