

**GLOBALIZATION, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL COHESION: A  
NIGERIAN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

*Globalization is a fast-paced process that filters through territories to influence cultures around the world. This paper explores the relationship between globalization and cultural identity and the impact this makes on Nigeria's social cohesion. Globalization, defined as a bundle of cultural components sweeping across the world, became was birthed at the inception of colonialism. Culture, it was shown, is the identity marker of a group of people living in a given territory. Consequent to the contact between globalization and cultural identity is the impact left on the nation's social cohesion. It has been argued that globalization has impacted mostly the material and superfluous way of life of Nigerians' culture while the nonmaterial culture which is significant on the people's core beliefs and decision-making, remained impervious to the globalists' ideologies. Two ways of life -sports and the family unit- have been spotlighted to assess the impact of globalization and cultural identity on Nigeria's social cohesion. It was shown that while such ideologies as LGBTQ have been normalized in the west, they remain unpopular in the Nigerian setting. As for sports, it was argued that to use sports to galvanize social cohesion, Nigerians have so much to do to systematize their indigenous sports. Finally, the article recommends that, while globalization is not entirely negative, Nigerians have a lot more to do to preserve their cultural identity.*

**Keywords:** globalization, culture, cultural identity, social cohesion

**Introduction**

Human societies are now more interconnected and at a faster pace now than previously (Razak 2011). Thanks to science and technology, transportation and communication has become easier, cheaper and more accessible across the world (Matos 2012). The globe has been turned to a village. However, this contact is not without clashes. Nigeria's cultural identity, like other societies' around the world, has been in the eye of the storm of globalization. While the flood of globalization is unrelenting and showing no signs of receding, Nigeria's cultural identity must be properly anchored and accentuated or it will drown and go extinct. The

interface between and among globalization, cultural identity and social cohesion is complex. This paper considers the impact of globalization on Nigeria's cultural identity and social cohesion, highlighting the need for a philosophical framework to navigate the tension between global influences and local values. It argues for the retention of cultural plurality. To underscore its belief in cultural diversity, the paper asks these three questions: first, 'are Nigeria's cultural identities converging?' secondly, to what extent is globalization helping or hurting Nigeria?'. Finally, does globalization homogenize, polarize, hybridize or universalize Nigeria's cultural identity?'

### **Clarification of Concepts**

#### *Globalization*

First coined by Roland Robertson, the term 'globalization' appeared in the Webster's English Dictionary in the 1960s but the idea has roots in the fifteenth century colonial policy of the Europeans to expand their economies and influence which they did through the scramble and partition for Africa (Razak 2011:61). 'Globalization' has multiple definitions always spinning around a mix of internationalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization/modernization and deterritorialization (Kaul, 2014; Razak 2011; Yankuzo, 2013). For the purpose of the present study, the definition put forward by Clark (cited in Walle, 2022: 9) is apt: "globalization describes the process of creating networks of connections among actors at multicontinental distances, mediated through a variety of flows including people, information and ideas, capital, and goods". This definition makes room for the related concepts this study covers. The rapid spread of globalization triggered interest in social interest. Some argue that globalization will undermine cultural identity and social cohesion. However, Walle's finding in the study that includes Nigeria and 90 other countries, shows that globalization, a macro-level determinant of social cohesion, has a generally positive impact on various dimensions of social cohesion.

Following other authors, Walle (2022) identified four main ways that globalization impacts social cohesion. First, it interconnects countries, making it possible and easier the flow of goods, services, labour and capital across nations and continents. The downside of this is that, with the increased diversity, it could erode social cohesion. Some scholars, including Touraine (ibid) worry that globalization could water down cultural or national identities -a major glue that binds a people or nation together to give them their uniqueness. In protest to this, people may shift

their loyalty to promote their ethnicity. This, Walle argues, could water down social cohesion. A third way globalization significantly affects social cohesion is its potency to stimulate economic growth which will produce a happy who will trust their government. Finally, globalization afford people the platform to engage with other cultures, making them to appreciate 'others', hence, promoting inclusivity.

The global dominance of the English language makes it easier for the culture (e.g. music, lifestyle, movies, clothing) of the native speakers of the language to be exported to all parts of the world. These cultural components are sold out to the world as a sort of unifier of all 'conquered' cultures. Globalization is irreversible. It has flooded cultures and much needs to be done to keep our Nigerian cultural identity afloat.

#### *Social cohesion*

The idea of social cohesion began to attract attention of scholars and politicians in the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017:1). Social cohesion is a concept with two dimensions. Regina Berger-Schmitt's 2002 decomposition of the term (as cited in Jenson 2010:3) captures first, the inequality dimension wherein it concerns itself with promoting equal opportunities and reducing disparities and divisions within a society. It includes the area of social exclusion. Secondly, the social capital dimension with a focus on strengthening social relations, interactions and ties and embraces all aspects generally considered as the social capital of a society. Social cohesion is geared towards development. Olasunkanmi (2011: 97) argues that for development in Africa to be sustainable, it has to be culture-sensitive, this will attract popular participation. Social cohesion and its potency to bring about societal development, can foster social cohesion in Africa's most populous nation (Ibagere, 2014) especially when leaders who have a great role in fostering it use language accordingly (Ikeke 2021). In their comprehensive review of the concept, Schiefer & van der Noll distilled six core dimensions of social cohesion: identification, social relations, orientation towards the common good, shared values, equality/inequality, and subjective/objective quality of life.

#### *Cultural Identity*

It is mankind's most prized possession. It is an identity marker. It is the paraphernalia holding a people's essence of existence. Though commonly used, it is one of the most nebulous terms to define. Kroeber and Kluckhorn (cited in Tubi,

2020: 77) list over 160 definitions of the concept. It refers to habits, knowledge, beliefs and customs shared among people living in a society. Andah (ibid) with focus on Africa, characterizes culture as human activities acquired from generations past. Culture, it is clear, defines and identifies a people. 'Culture', Jegede 2015: 1) argues, is necessary in order to give purpose and credibility to one's existence'. It has been compellingly argued that culture is an instrument for social cohesion (Jeremiah 2021).

A social group is distinguished by the three manifestations of its culture. First its production, transaction and consumption of goods and services; secondly, by the symbols and rituals which helps them to codify social relationships and give meaning to their lives; thirdly, by their quest and aspirations which issues from their ideologies and belief system. The cultural identity of a people settles the question of being, doing and having. It answers the question of 'who am I?'; 'where am I going?' and 'what do I have?' (Wang 2007: 85). Culture has two components: material and non-material (Akanle 17-18).

### **The Implication of Globalization on Nigeria's Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion**

We need to beware of the negative impact of globalization on Nigeria's cultural identity. Cultural identity is impacted by forces including globalization and religious rituals (Santiago 2023). This paper argued for the retention of cultural plurality. Globalization has been blamed for distorting African indigenous cultures (Yankuzo, 2013). Yankuzo argues it is cultural imperialism. He blamed globalization for taking away our traditional diagnostic and therapeutic system, our precolonial economies replacing them with the capitalist one. While there is truth in this claim, the hole in the argument is that the author views Africans and their culture as passive objects upon whom foreign cultures can be imposed on them. The author ignores the subjective role of Africans can play in deciding their way of life. He seems to imply their powerlessness in choosing or rejecting their culture. However, as moral agents, Africans are squarely to blame for abandoning their indigenous culture for foreign ones.

Another area that we should be interested in is sports. Indigenous sports are largely undeveloped and this is not attributable to globalization but to Africans themselves for abandoning their sports. Rather than abandon these, it is better they be standardized and promoted. Sports has been a tool for social cohesion for Nigerians. Football has enormous power to pull fans across the globe. When it

comes to our national football team's victory, Nigerians are always united. Take the football that we watch today. The world watches European premier leagues. Football has evolved over the years. There have been significant changes that can best be appreciated by sports historians. Nigerians -and Africans in general- have a responsibility to systematize, to document the way we do our sports. Wrestling, for instance, in northern Nigeria, called *dambe* is a very fashionable sport loved by a huge audience- unless the practices are documented, it will be hard to systematize it for international recognition. This table tennis was never a part of the Olympics but the Chinese and the eastern world who are good at it, they insisted that it must come into the Olympics. We can also do this in relation to the traditional sports in Africa, and even in Nigeria.

But this cannot be done until the sport has been systematized. The rules of the game must be systematized and must be documented and the tools you use for the game must be systematized. For instance, we have *ayo*. The *ayo* can be systematized and standardized. It is surprising that although we now have things like different sports that have found their way into the Olympic calendar, no single sports from Africa has been able to get Olympic recognition. The problem is that those sports are not systematized and they're not documented. So, if you want to sell it, you don't have anything to sell because you are not going to use oral tradition to sell a product for international consumption. We don't have competitions on them because they just remain as local pastimes. Even the rules vary from one community to the other. Whereas, if we systematize it, we will all agree on the rules. Same with draughts/drafts. How come it has never really been included in the Olympic events? It means that is because they are not systematized but we enjoyed them.

The philosophy of globalization as designed by its proponents has been aptly captured in a conference paper presented by Hassan:

Facing the challenges of globalization with all the negative impacts of Americanization secularization, materialism, neo-imperialism, debt-bondage to World Bank and IMF, unilateralism militant liberal capitalism, global media conglomerates' manipulation and deception, impoverishment and homogenization of culture bullying by the powerful, imposed liberalization, dominance of the global market, international and regional competition, commodification of education, environmental degradation, moral decadence, high tech crime, violence and war-all these and more at a

time when the [developing] world is divided, weak and poor (in Razak, 2011).

The author speaking within the context of the Islamic world cuts through the entire essence of globalization from a non-Western perspective. His conservative views are shared by many Africans, including the present writer. One indigenous institution that has come under heavy attack especially lately, is the family. The phrase 'traditional marriage' uttered in a Nigerian society means a non-church, non-Western marriage where the couple's kindred are present and traditional rites are performed to join the couple in a union. Marriage, in the strict African sense, is between two genders, not one. It is between a man and a woman, not between two males or two females. Going to the American society, 'traditional marriage' will refer to the original marriage existing between a man and a woman. In the Western world, 'traditional' has to qualify 'marriage' in order to accommodate the shift in culture to alter the people's way of life which includes gay, lesbian practices. Among the disadvantages of globalization is the imposition of what Nigerians have agreed to be sexual pervasion. As the West throws about its cultures across the world, we must have a value system to live by. We must know what our culture abhors or permits. With a firm understanding of our cultural ideals, we must be bold enough to choose what we will or will not buy in the marketplace of globalization. The 2014 anti-gay legislation of President Goodluck Jonathan was among the reasons he fell apart with the West. Likewise, Uganda's Museveni who followed Nigeria to sign the same law, same year. The law was a 'culmination of a cultural battle' that began years earlier; it was passed to save the 'traditional heterosexual family' (Ilesanmi 2016: p219, 220). So many African countries are being bullied to adopt alien cultures from the West. Homosexual and gay marriage are taboos to Nigerian cultures.

American culture and values are filtering in to the Nigerian cultural terrain. Okorie (2020) examined the impact of popular American entertainment programmes on African youths. He submits that the American values and cultures portrayed on TV 'will distort African values' and this will cut across other spheres of life. Another red flag of globalization on Nigerian cultures is the creation of identity crises as local cultures accommodate globalist cultures, youths especially are at the crosshairs of this interface. It leaves them confused. For instance, they copy dressing that is considered indecent to African cultures. They do so in a misapplied way. The result, the dressing is neither contextually correct in the Western setting, nor acceptable in African societies.

One of the gains of globalization is its power to awaken or 'provoke' often-taken-for-granted cultural identities, prodding its adherents bolder and prouder to identify with their cultural identities. People have become more aware of their cultures especially with the fear of their cultures being overrun and trampled upon by globalization. A case in point are the minority ethnic cultures in central Nigeria. The people of these cultures have recently become more assertive to change the narrative that they are not Hausas. One way they have been actively protesting this overgeneralization is being adopting and promoting cultural emblems, attires and other material symbols to showcase their cultural identities.

Despite Nigerian cultures' contact with globalization and its visible impact it is the material aspect of Nigeria's culture that has been influenced. The non-material component has not been impacted much. Popular sentiments seen on social media on the vigorous advocacy by multilateral institutions' for gay rights shows that it is being resisted by Africans.

### **How Should Nigerians Respond to Globalization?**

As Nigeria is resource-rich and a strong attraction to the West, it means we have something to offer on the table of global exchanges and transactions. We can take definitive stand on how our visitors are to behave in our own territory. We have our cultural ethics of right and wrong and should not wait for a foreign culture to redefine us and dictate for us. If we allow that, we are passive to cultural imperialism.

But we cannot bargain or negotiate from the position of weakness. So long as we are tied to the apron strings of the globalists through loans and aid from the IMF, World Bank and WTO, they will continue to make outrageous demands from us, including eroding our cultural identities to adopt theirs. The Arab world is never bullied by the globalists about accepting LGBTQ because the Arabs are wealthy and economically self-dependent.

### **Conclusion**

Following the pattern of human civilization, 'globalization is irreversible' (Razak 2011: 59) much needs to be done to keep our Nigerian cultural identity afloat. Bature & Edoeje (2023) believe that globalization has in some ways entrenched the economic subjugation of women in that it has led to an uneven development of the world with women mostly affected. It is unwise to throw away the baby with the bath water. There are many positive aspects of globalization we can leverage

on. But, on the other hand, we should not allow alien culture be shoved down our throat. As Nigerians (or Africans), we must copy the good, adapt it and leave out the bad. We can as well research on our similarities and highlight them. Educate our young on our own cultures.

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