GLOBALISATION AS A THREAT TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN AFRICA: THE CAMEROON EXPERIENCE.

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Abstract

The effect of globalization on various aspects of the life of third world countries has always been controversial in nature. The imminent phenomenon of globalization has been mainly explored in academia through the lens of economics and politics. Little attention has been given to the relationship between this phenomenon and culture in Cameroon in particular and Africa in general, and yet the yield of this relationship could be tremendous in Cameroon where people, especially young people no longer take an interest to own culture. This paper thus examines how or the extent to which globalization poses as a threat to cultural diversity in Cameroon.

Keywords: Globalization, Culture, Diversity, Threat, Cameroon

Introduction

''I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen a beggar, who is a thief such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation''(Lord Macsaulay, 1835)

Although the word globalization was not coined until the second half of the twentieth century, the origin of globalization has been traced back to the period between 1450-1500 AD, a period referred to as the mercantilist period and characterized by the development of trade in the quest for commercial empires to broaden their markets (Amiuwu, 2004:18; Scholte, 2002:4). Since then, propelled by incredible advancements in transportation and information technology, globalization has practically shrunk the world to one global village. Initially, globalization was seen as an economic phenomenon and in fact, some economists still define it from a purely economic perspective. However, it is now obvious that although it was triggered by economic motives, it has far reaching effects in all aspects of life especially in the areas of politics, culture, technology and the environment (Ogechukwu et al., 2014).

Africa and Cameroon in particular is a society with abundant rich cultural heritage that are scattered within the diverse ethnic nationalities. These cultural heritages include language, marriage rites, burial rites, birth rites, dressing, greeting, music, folklore, religion, and other tangible cultural monuments, natural sites and cultural landscapes. Some of these cultures have died due to western cultural influence

engine by globalization. The advent of ICT has brought the culture, folklore and heritage of western countries into our doorsteps; reading tablets, desktop or laptop with just a press of the computer keyboard or a click of mouse.

The multicultural nature of our society has been ignored. Most countries have been failing to recognize the enriching value of diverse cultures. Cameroon, for example, is culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse. It is tempting to deny this diversity consciously or unconsciously. Cultural diversity is now a fact of life in today's **"global village"**. Many people have been experiencing the negative effects of the globalization process. Towards the end of the last closed century, there have been some protest movements against globalization on new world economic, political, cultural, technological, religious order, and the way the pros and cons of a new global world have been assessed.

Most studies of globalization tend to focus on changes occurring in the economic and political spheres. The details of those issues, such as tariff rates and international agreements, have fallen within the traditional province of government bureaucrats and political leaders. However, the dramatic changes wrought by globalization have forced policymakers to respond to public pressures in many new areas. Observers of globalization are increasingly recognizing that globalization is having a significant impact on matters such as local cultures, matters which are less tangible and hard to quantify, but often fraught with intense emotion and controversy (Globalization 101.org).

Jeremy Rifkin, a prominent critic of globalization, writes that:

"The powers that be have long believed that the world is divided into two spheres of influence: commerce and government. Now organizations representing the cultural sphere, the environment, species preservation, rural life, health, food and

cuisine, religion, human rights, the family, women's issues, ethnic heritage, the arts and other quality-of-life issues are pounding on the doors at world economic and political forums and demanding a place at the table. They represent the birth of a new "civil-society politics" and an antidote to the forces pushing for globalization" (Rifkin, 2001).

Generally speaking, issues surrounding culture and globalization have received less attention than the debates, which have arisen over globalization and the environment or labor standards. In part this is because cultural issues are more subtle and sensitive, and often more confusing (Globalization 101.org).

The concept of globalization

Borrowing from Held et al. (1999:16), Seldon (2008) argues that globalization involves a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power. He went further to analysis this by emphasizing some key points in the definition.

First, globalization is a set of processes rather than a description of the (fixed) state of a system. Second, central to the concept is the idea of spatial transformations in patterns of interconnectedness. He further argues that conceptually and analytically, globalizing processes can be seen to operate in a number of different realms, four of which bear on the argument here: trade, finance, migration and culture.

Globalization is a conceptualization of the international political economy which suggests and believes essentially that all economic activity, whether local, regional or national, must be conducted within a perspective and attitude that constantly is

global and worldwide in its scope. Discussing the history of globalization and economic development, Piasecki and Wolnicki (2004) argue that by the mid-1990s, the advances in international trade and investment looked like undisputable proof of the validity of neo-liberal model.

Globalization can be defined in several ways (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2007; Peters and Pierre, 2006; Curry, 2000). In this study, Curry's (2000) definition of globalization is adopted. For Curry (2000), globalization refers to the worldwide phenomenon of technological, economic, political, and cultural exchanges among nations, organizations, and private individuals. These exchanges have led to interdependencies at all levels (national, firm, and private individual levels). Globalization has been recognized as the main force dominating the economic universe. It upholds to light-up the world with economic prosperity and seeks a victory of market over government and self-interest over altruism (Simplice, 2013).

According to Awuah and Amal (2009), globalization also comes with enormous difficulties which may include "liberalization of markets, intense competition, decline of domestic job opportunities and revenues", and others according to them include economic volatility of the integrated markets, cyclical crises, and non-tariff barriers to trade, spread of pandemics, and new security issues. Many actors, especially in the least developed countries (LDCs) may not have the capabilities to handle challenges (Spiegel, 2007; Human Development Report, 2002) which globalization brings with it. And above all, one major challenge will be the ability of poorer countries and the firms in them, for example, to deal with the fact that there is no leveled playing field (Speigel, 2007; Beamish and Lu, 2004; Human Development Report, 2004, 2002) for exchanges between economic actors. Subsidies and trade restrictions of various kinds are still common rather than the

exception in many developed countries, even emerging markets, and some LDCs (Peng et al., 2008; Spiegel, 2007; Beamish and Lu, 2004).

The Recognition of Cultural Differences

According to Coertze (1973: 61), there are as many cultures as there are people in the world. Cultures are deployed differently, and it takes different meanings in other histories and places. For example, Cameroon is multicultural. Virtually everywhere, from all sides, in law, politics, in the press and from the public channels of communication, we know that Cameroon is composed of many cultures, and that these cultures are the product and properties of different people.

According to Thornton (1988:22), there are a number of things which culture includes, such as knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, etc. The definition of culture that is acquired by humans is a significant intellectual achievement. According to this view, however, civilization is as a result of a rational thought that leads to the general improvement of life. It is not something that people are born with, but something they gain through normal social interaction. Today, culture is best thought of as a resource. Like other resources, such as energy, food, air, etc. it cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals. All groups and individuals must have an access to, at least, some of these resources for survival purposes. Similarly, culture is some kind of the information that human beings are not born with but they need in order to interact with each other in social life. It must be learned during the long process of education, socialization, maturing and growing old.

Culture refers to the ways, means, and results of the human interaction with and material transformation of the nature towards an environment suitable to human

existence, and to the total strategy of human orientation within that environment (Degenaar, 1994: 3-5; Van Peursen, 1970: 7-22; Lemaire, 1976: 374-378). This definition could be extended to further include a broader international form of life, or even societal and political arrangement in terms of which various national and ethnic cultures are accommodated. In this sense one can speak of Western culture (or nowadays with the unification of Europe of European culture). In a nutshell, may simply be defined as a complex, integrated system of beliefs and behaviour that may be both rational and irrational (Tiedt & Tiedt, 1989:3).

There is a demand for the recognition of cultural differences which is central to a number of debates associated with multiculturalism. People belong to many different cultures and the cultural differences are as likely to be within states (i.e. between regions, classes, ethnic groups, the urban and rural) as well as between states (King, 1990: 409). Cultural diversity tends now to be as great within nations (Hannerz, 1992: 231). It is natural that in the contemporary world many local settings are increasingly characterized by cultural diversity. According to Van der Merwe, the prerequisites for the claims towards recognition of cultural differences are further explored by distinguishing between two justifiable claims: the claim that the right to differ should be recognized and the claim that the inherent value of the difference should be recognized (Van der Merwe, 1999: 313). It is argued that the possibilities of granting recognition are, in most cases, restricted to the claim that the right to differ should be recognized.

Holzapfel (1997:13), in a recent definition of the ideology of 'multiculturalism', that all cultures, values and practices are equal. Likewise, Charles Taylor (1994:64-6), argues that the demand that we all recognize the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth. The demand is based on a premise that we owe equal respect to all cultures. The

presumption seems to be of equal worth. According to Gellner (1992: 49-57), Charles Taylor (1994), and Van der Merwe (1999:328), the truth is that all cultures are equal, and no single one of them has the right to judge and interpret the others in its own terms. This view thus concerns the specific claim that the equality of cultures must be recognized. Even when there are conflicts of cultures, there are no right answers in a conflict of cultures because people look at the world in different ways. For example, consider a belief that 'abortion' or 'euthanasia' is wrong. You are taught this as if it is an objective standard, but it is not, it is just what your society holds. When you say they are wrong, this just means that your society disapproves of them. For other societies, based on their belief, abortion might be all right. Abortion might be wrong in one society but right in another, just like with euthanasia. There is no sense in asking which side is correct. Their views are true relative to their culture, and your view is true relative to your culture. There are no objective truths about right or wrong. When a person claims otherwise, he or she is just imposing his or her culturally taught attitude as objective truth. Unless otherwise specified, the society in question is that of the person or a group making the judgment. When I say abortion is wrong, I mean according to the moral or ethical standards of my society. But how can we know what is good or bad absolutely. How can we argue about this without just presupposing moral and ethical standards of our own society? Judging from this question, there is a little doubt that the emergence of cultural studies in the field of philosophy and other disciplines provides a corrective method too much that has previously been written and morally and ethically disapproved.

 The philosopher Gensler (1998:11) argues that cultural relativism is about picking out your moral principles by following what your society approves of. For instance, the norms that you are taught are the norms of your own society, other

societies have different beliefs and backgrounds, so too they create different norms and different codes. Even before we are free to make choices and create norms and codes, according to our own beliefs, customs, conditioned by time, history, places and circumstances within our choices, we already find ourselves participating in the play of recognition of the cultural differences and recognition of equality of cultures.

Since cultures are different but equal, I suggest that we must respect the moral choices made by different people in the light of their different cultural, ethnical and religious backgrounds. In multicultural societies like Cameroon, this entails that the demand that equal respect must be paid to existing cultures or the equality of cultures must be recognized. Culture in all its forms can thus be regarded as the space in which the play of recognition is regulated institutionally and is played out individually and socially. Culture is the sum total of the original solution that a group of human beings invent to adapt to their natural and social environment. And yet, according to Elvin Hatch (1985:178) and Myburg (1981:31), culture is a common way of life of people or a group of humans that they produce, possess, share and maintain.

Globalization as a threat to Cultural Diversity in Cameroon

Loss of individualism and group identity: Globalization encourages a *Western ideal of individualism*. This promotes a homogeneous set of values and beliefs. The adoption of Western Culture and ideologies is seen as many computer-mediated technologies are developed, marketed and processed via western markets. The dominant population and culture of the day determine the next greatest technology along with the next commercialized gadget that will be offered up to the masses and longed for by those who are at arm's reach of financially obtaining

these devices. Kanuka (2008) also cites that e-learning technologies perpetuate colonization by designing curriculum that mimics the cognitive styles of the dominant culture. Not having access to technologies that are present in the classroom, combined with an education system geared toward the dominant society can be a lethal combination for non-dominant cultures. In Cameroon, the present education, legal and power structures reflect western ideas and philosophies. These western ideas are easily assimilated into other cultures and paradigms with far reaching effects. There is an assumption that the values and ideologies of the "Global North" will provide a suitable framework for the new knowledge economies of the developing "Global South" (Youngman, 2000). In Cameroon, due to the impact of globalization on cultural norms, socialization processes and values are affected. For instance some parents are no longer frowning at what the youths put on. The traditional pattern of subordinating when greeting an elder has changed to "Hi". The spread of capitalism has eroded the African or Cameroon ideology of Family ownership of land to private or individual ownership.

Commercialization of Culture: Globalization allows further colonization which impacts intellectual property and cultural rights of Cameroonians. Global access to information has opened the gateway to acquiring cultural property and information. Many view that 'if it is out there it is free for the taking', which includes cultural signs, songs, dance, rituals and other cultural artifacts. These icons of a culture are viewed as a living heritage and are an integral part of identity (Smith, 2000). Using images, reselling them and misrepresenting these rights are considered property theft and a heinous crime against communities in Cameroon. It is difficult to monitor or control what is out on the Internet and therefore difficult to prevent and prosecute appropriately. This undermining of the peoples existing values and cultures has a corrosive impact on the sense of who we are, what we want and what

we respect. **"The cumulative effect"** in Akande's (2002) words *"is a crisis of cultural confidence, combined with economic uncertainty and crime which global integration often brings.''*

Language Extinction: Language is a cultural system; individual languages may classify objects and ideas in completely different fashions because every person belongs to his or her cultural language for communication within the environment (Kawuley and Iskandar, 2017). Globalization has transformed Cameroonians to become Anglophones and Francophones. Today, the use foreign languages, English and French has always been an important aspect of official languages in Cameroon while local languages are facing extinction. Though there is high rate of illiteracy in the rural population, the use of our local languages has its limitations. Many elite families would like their children to learn English or French language better than their local languages. Today, Cameroonians use and read books written in foreign language faster and more fluently than those written in local languages. In Cameroon, cultural globalization has impacted on the number of movies produced by Cameroon Film Industry. Movies produced in English and French are much more than those performed and produced in any of the Cameroonian languages. This appalling dominance of western languages has relegated the domestic indigenous languages (Kawuley & Iskandar, 2017) in Cameroon, whereby some Cameroonians feel shy to speak their mother tongue but are more comfortable with the European languages. This Eurocentric mission against our Cameroonian languages may lead to the extinction of some local languages in Cameroon in the nearest future.

Challenges of information technology: Globalization consolidated due to the acceleration of Information Communication and Technology, has some impact on the cultural system of Cameroon. The globalization of information flow through

technological outlets such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat and Twitter in the worldwide web of the Internet is to create social relationships within the global arena as well as to transfer western culture, films, pornography, prostitution and moral decadence to the developing societies (Kawuley & Iskandar, 2017: 11). This phenomenon has ease of the system of communication and dissemination of knowledge in one way, while in another it has destroyed our moral values via pornography, western films, movies and cinemas. Nye (2004) described the American movies, films and cinemas as part of the US soft-power in the international scene. This episode has affected most of the Cameroon youths to spend most of their time on the Internet, not for academic development but for watching these nasty films that have serious effects on their cultural system, moral upbringing and socialization.

Dances: In Cameroon, dances are signposts of cultural identity and often depict certain traits of the cultural history of the people through poetic songs and drum bits. The most influential mark of dance is the attire of the various actors and actresses (masquerades). Each dance has its cultural insignia which distinguishes it from the other dances (Nkome, 2016). Examples include amongst others the *Malay dance, Ngosso dance, Ahon, Obasinjom dance, Manjong and the Ngondo dance*. Today, with the advent of globalization, most people in Cameroon do not know how to dance their traditional dance but they are more interested in Western dances such as Hip-hop and R n B.

Dress/Cloth "*Country Cloth*": While it can be assumed that previous studies on Cameroon's history focused around issues related to politics and colonialism, the same cannot be said of the nexus between globalization and country cloth culture and identity as a subject of historical research within the specialty of cultural history (Nkome, 2016). The impact of globalization and cross-cultural

collaboration within and without the continent has ushered in changes which are discernible in cloth pattern of African societies in recent years. This change is clearly observed in the new hybrids of country clothes that have recently flooded domestic markets in shops and streets in Cameroon today (Nkome, 2016). This has culminated in dumping of excess and old-fashioned European clothes and replaced Cameroonian clothes hence killing the indigenous Cameroonian cloth industries. In this light therefore, many infant and private individual cloth designers in Cameroon are gradually becoming discouraged in spite of the current high demands for *Afritude* dresses from Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa (Nkome, 2016).

Traditional Meals *"Country Chop"*: Being a multicultural country with about 200 ethnic groups, the different people in Cameroon have their various traditional meals known in Cameroon local parlance as "Country Chop". These various traditional meals have being one of the elements used to identify the various people in Cameroon with respect to their tribes, as part of their culture. For example the Bakwerians in Fako Division, the Southwest Region are being identified and attached to *"Timbanambusa or Kwacoco & Mbanga soup"* as their traditional meal, the Bayangians in Manyu Division are attached with *"Eru"* and most tribes in the Northwest Region are attached with *"Achu or Corn Fufu"* as their traditional meals and the Baasa people in the Littoral and Center Regions of Cameroon have *"Mbongo Tchobi"* as their traditional meals respectively. Prior to the epoch of globalization, the various traditional meals were loved and cherished and eaten on a daily basis. With the advent of globalization, most people today dislike their traditional meals and instead prefer Western delicacies such as chicken sauce, rice and beans etc. some Cameroonians even see or describe their traditional meals as none sense meals.

Despite these threats by globalization to cultural diversity, it is not always bad in totality as globalization has an open venue which promotes cultural diversity of the different parts of the world. Omekwu (2003) aptly reminded us that globalization through the internet also allow cultural heritage of different cultures to be uploaded, downloaded, and accessed by other people in another side of the world thereby projecting the cultural identity of the said group.

Information and communication technology accelerates globalization of cultural values. As Omekwu (2006) reiterated, the internet is a key development in the growth of globalization because globalization has changed the nature of national government imposing national and international cultures on local culture. With information technologies, foreign cultures can be preserved in libraries and accessed simultaneously by library users and other Cameroonians irrespective of their ethno-cultural learning.

Globalization has complicated the process of education many times over, but in doing so has created many incredible opportunities for countries to break out of the traditional models of educating and work towards creating knowledge communities. The global citizen is seen as a person who can act locally but think globally, a goal that keeps an eye on maintaining cultural diversity while exposing a country's citizens to the benefits of globalization. Cultural diversity can be strengthened through globalization by providing the means and wherewithal to support cultural groups attempting to make a difference in society while still maintaining their distinctive set of beliefs, practices and values.

Conclusion

Culture which is the whole way of life of people, from birth to the grave without doubt is and will always be different. Every culture is valuable and worthy of noninterference. Modern societies are multicultural in themselves, encompassing a multitude of varying ways of life and lifestyles of people. Today, most people's identities not just Western intellectuals are shaped by more than a single culture. Not only societies, but people are multicultural. Cultural Globalization will be a good and lasting concept if it be promoting and unifying exchanges and interaction of different cultures and not imposing a dominant culture considered to **superior** on another group of people with what they call **inferior culture**. There is no gainsaying that globalization does not have positive effects in Cameroon but the author concludes that in the nearest future in the aspect of culture, our cultures will be eroded completely due to globalization and its forces.

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