
GLOBALIZATION AND THE PROLIFERATION OF CONFLICTS IN POST-COLD WAR ERA

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the issue of globalization of conflicts in post-cold war era. It reflects on the correlation between the phenomenon of globalization and the proliferation of conflicts in the underdeveloped countries following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It is argued that globalization entails the tightening of the grip of Western forces on the economies of peripheral states, as well as the universalization of Western interests and values. Moreover, it is clearly pointed out that globalization is designed primarily to promote the interests of Western imperialism, and this implies that the interests of weak, underdeveloped countries are neglected.

Introduction

There are two problems with the concept of globalization, first the 'global', and second the '-ization'. The implication of the first is that a single system of connection – notably through capital and commodities markets, information flows, and imagined landscapes – has penetrated the entire globe; and the implication of the second is that it is doing so now, that this is the global age...

- Frederick Cooper (2001: 189).

Forces of Western imperialism and hegemony tend to celebrate the process or phenomenon of globalization as being beneficial to everyone. It is said that globalization has the capacity to integrate the world economically, socially, culturally, technologically, politically, etc, and that "it stresses the aggregation and reduction of the universality into a micro-level of a village community through high-tech information system" (Ajayi, 2000: 153). There is no doubt that globalization is an integral part of human history and it has been a part of the movement of history given the fact that all through the history of man, we have noticed forces which seem to push for greater integration of human activities (Kwanashie, 1999: 17). However, contrary to the claims by the apostles of globalization, the benefits ascribed to this phenomenon do not accrue to all the member-states of the global community. In fact, what forces of Western domination praise as gains of imperialism are mainly technical matters or developments such as computer, internet and electronic mail services and related developments in production, transportation and other forms of transactions (Ekanem, 2003: 144).

In this essay, attention is drawn to the fact that in the post-cold war period, imperialist forces – on the pretext of globalizing the world – have precipitated crises and conflicts in many countries of the South. It is argued that in spite of the kerfuffle about the gains of globalization, this phenomenon has produced

many adverse outcomes in the global community, one of which is the proliferation of conflicts – socio-economic, political, military, etc. And the victims have been mainly third world states. This paper is composed of four broad sections; following this introduction is section two in which the concepts of globalization and conflict are briefly examined. In section three, an attempt is made to x-ray the tendency of globalizing powers to engender conflicts in many peripheral countries. The conclusion is contained in section four.

B Globalization And Conflict: A Conceptual Discourse

In order to avoid any form of “definitional dilemma” (Heywood, 1997 cited in Obo and Williams, 2007: 2), it is important for us to clarify the two major concepts employed in this essay: “globalization” and “conflict”. This is to indicate how they are to be understood. We do agree with the view that “if concepts are to serve the functions of communication, sensitivity to and organisation of experience, generalization, and theory construction, they have to be clear, precise, and agreed-upon” (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996: 28). And as Chafe (cited in Obo and Williams, 2014: 11) has observed, “the primary requirement for debating anything is to understand first and foremost the critical thing being talked about.”

Understanding Globalization

Globalization is a slippery and elusive concept, and its definition is still being contested; only few terms in modern history have ever been used as frequently as the term yet there is no single definition of it (Heywood, 2007: 143; Peet, 2003: 1; Farazmand, 2007: 4). Roland Robertson (1992) regards globalization as “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as whole” (cited in Brown, 1995: 54). The point has been made that although this definition is abstract, it raises three issues: the first is that globalization is a process rather than an end state; the second issue implied in the definition is the divergence between what the structures of integration look like from a global perspective and from a local perspective; and the third aspect is that what is being compressed is space which implies that individuals and communities which have been separate or only loosely connected are pulled together (Brown, 1995: 54-55).

According to Kwanashie (1999: 17), globalization is a process of increased integration of national economies with the rest of the world to create a more coherent global economy. It is, in his view, a process of integrating economic decision making such as the consumption, investment, and saving process all across the world. It is also a process of creating a global market place in which free markets, investment flows, trade and information are integrated. That is, it is a process of heightening the level of interconnections between nation-states. Kwanashie (1999: 17-18) also points out that globalization can also be defined as the process of shifting autonomous economies into the global market – the systematic integration of autonomous economies into a global system of production and distribution. In his words,

In a broad sense, globalization is a process that promotes the integration of a whole system of interrelationships across sovereign states. At the core of this process is technological advancement in communication the immediate and concrete impact of which has been the creation of a global society with the global market place at its core. Countries operating in separate, sovereign, autonomous environments take decisions which have bearing on others and are themselves influenced by decisions taken by others.

In his analysis, Heywood (2007: 143) points out that despite intensifying interest in the phenomenon of globalization the term is still used to refer, variously, to a process, a policy, a marketing strategy, a

predicament or even an ideology. According to him, the problem with globalization is that it is not so much an “it” as a “them”: it is not a single process but a complex of processes, sometimes overlapping and interlocking processes but also, at times, contradictory and oppositional ones. In his view, globalization is the emergence of a complex web of interconnectedness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decisions that are made, at a great distance from us; and the central feature of this phenomenon is therefore that geographical distance is of declining relevance, and that territorial boundaries, such as those between nation-states are becoming less significant.

On his part, Farazmand (2007: 13) observed that globalization has meant many things to many people, and that the ideas are diverse, interchangeable, and broad, so much so that it is easy to fall into a definition trap. For example, in his view, while economists consider globalization as an advance step toward a fully integrated world market, political scientists regard it as a march away from the conventionally defined concept of state with territorial sovereignty and the emergence of supranational and global governing bodies under a new world order.

The point has also been made that globalization is the international system that replaced the Cold War system, and with it came the integration of capital, technology, and information across national borders in an attempt to create a global market. Furthermore, it is stated, we have all seen evidence of the tension and conflicts that exist between this interconnected system and the ancient forces of culture, geography, tradition, and community that feel brutalized by it and resist its intrusion (Vliet, 2007: 69-70).

In his contribution, Nnoli (2000: 173 and 174) contends that globalization is not only imperialism but also a very complex social phenomenon, and that like imperialism, globalization is a dynamic phenomenon which changes in accordance with the laws of capitalist expansion. According to him, globalization is associated with:

- (a) the increasing concentration of power and influence over the world economy by a group of corporations and countries;
- (b) the domination of production by multinational or transnational corporations, which are multi-branch and multidivisional enterprises that operate in different parts of the world, and by international financial institutions and exchanges;
- (c) the supervision of production on a world scale by an increasingly narrow managerial-technocratic elite composed of the captains of industry, banks and finance houses located in countries of the North;
- (d) an international division of labour which favours the export of technology;
- (e) the emergence of a time-space compressed world economy and society, which expresses the emerging “global village”;
- (f) the emergence and transnationalization of a new dominant technology associated with the information revolution; and
- (g) the increasing importance of the knowledge structure for production, culture and economy in general.

In one of his essays, Eskor Toyo (2004: 43-44) reinforces the view that globalization is imperialism, arguing that today, globalization is the hegemony of the industrialism of the Group of Seven led by the prior hegemony of the United States of America. As he puts it,

Globalization today means that all countries must become capitalist or bow to capitalism, misnamed ‘market economy’ or ‘private enterprise’. It means free trade, open capital markets and privatization. It means that only governments that are lackeys of the USA must exist. It means that all governments must come to power through money-powered

elections whose results can be influenced with money from the Central Intelligence Agency of the USA. It means that all countries must abide by the foreign affairs dictation of the USA with or without the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In the alternative, a country must face the Rapid Deployment Force of the USA with or without any of her military allies.

According to Heywood (2007: 143), it is difficult to reduce globalization to a single theme; but a good attempt to do this was in Kenichi Ohmae's (1989) idea of a "borderless world". This, in Heywood's view, not only refers to the tendency of traditional political borders, based on national and state boundaries, to become permeable; it also implies that divisions between people previously separated by time and space have become less significant and are sometimes entirely irrelevant. In view of this, Heywood (2007: 143) cites Scholte (2005) as contending that globalization is linked to the growth of "supra-territorial" relations between people, a reconfiguration of social space in which territory matters less because an increasing range of connections have a "transworld" or "transborder" character. For instance huge flows of electronic money now surge around the world at the flick of a computer switch, ensuring that currency and other financial markets react almost immediately to economic events anywhere in the world. Similarly, cable and satellite technology allow telephone messages and television programmes to be transmitted around the world almost instantaneously (Heywood, 2007: 143-144).

From the foregoing conceptualizations, it is clear that the interconnectedness that globalization has spawned is multidimensional; the popular image of globalization is that it is a top-down process, the establishment of a single global system that imprints itself on all parts of the world, and in this view, globalisation is linked to homogenization as cultural, social, economic and political diversity are destroyed in a world in which we all watch the same television programmers, buy the same commodities, eat the same food, support the same sports stars and follow the antics of the same celebrities (Heywood, 2007: 144).

A Word On Conflict

In the words of Yaqub (2010: 66), a conflict is a derivative or outcome of the very contacts that occur between two or more people as well as between two or more communities; but the contacts are not merely contacts in the sense that there are established relationships, and such relationships are special, focused and directed to the achievement of an objective that is also desired by someone else or another community involved in the above-mentioned relationships. Citing Murray (1972), Yaqub points out that in political terms, a conflict can be defined as a phenomenon that emerges whenever two or more persons (or groups) seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space or the same exclusive portion, play incompatible roles, maintain incompatible goals or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes.

According to Katz and Kahn (cited in Abada, 2004: 235), two systems (persons, groups, organisations, nations) are in conflict when they interact directly in such a way that the actions of one tend to prevent or compel some outcome against the resistance of the other. In the view of Ross Stagner (cited in Abubakar, 2010: 78), conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not both, and there must be at least two parties – each party mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation; and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal.

On his part, Isaac Albert (2007: 7) observes that there are several definitions of conflicts, and that all these point to the fact that a conflict is an incompatible interaction between two entities. According to him, there are two major types of conflict: positive and negative conflict. And a conflict is said to be positive if it leads to positive change and development, in which case the differences between the

disputants enable them to discover new ways of doing things and relating with each other. On the other hand, a conflict is said to be negative if it promotes or produces negative results: physical harm, deaths, destruction of property, etc.

The point has also been made that conflict refers to situations of disagreement between groups or individuals over some collective goals, means of achieving such goals, or the distribution and allocation of collectively owned resources (Abada, 2004: 234). Park and Burgess (cited in Yaqub, 2010: 67) have reasoned that a conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism (and achieve) some kind of unity even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflict parties. In this regard, conflict may no longer be seen as something that is negative, dysfunctional and disjunctive; rather, it provides a solution to a problem that may have been short-lived or may be lingering (Yaqub, 2010: 67).

It is also important to stress that as Abubakar (2010: 79) has shown, conflict is inevitable because it can originate in individual and group reactions to situations of scarce resources; to division of functions within society; and to differentiation of power and resultant competition for limited supplies of goods, status, valued roles and power-as-an-end-in-itself.

C.Exporting Conflicts In A Globalized World: Underdeveloped Countries As Recipients

In the course of celebrating the emergence of a “global village”, evangelists of globalization and agents of imperialism tend to gloss over some fundamental issues and questions. As Cooper (2001: 189) puts it, crucial questions do not get asked: about the limits of interconnection, about the areas where capital cannot go, and about the specificity of the structures necessary to make connections work. Globalization is a very uneven process, with unequal distribution of benefits and losses; it is thus a game of winners and losers. This imbalance leads to polarization between the few countries and groups that gain, and the many countries and groups in the society that lose out or are marginalized. The winners are invariably identified as multinational corporations and industrially advanced states generally, but particularly the United States; the losers, in contrast, are in the developing world, where wages are low, regulation is weak or non-existent, and where production is increasingly orientated around global markets rather than domestic needs. Whereas the US and other western economies have grown strongly since the 1980s on the basis of globalization and technological advance, absolute living standards have fallen in the poorest parts of the world, notably in sub-Saharan Africa (Khor, 2000:9; Heywood, 2007: 146-147). In the words of Khor (2000: 9-10),

...globalization, polarization, wealth concentration and marginalization are therefore linked through the same process. In this process, investment resources, growth and modern technology are focused in a few countries (mainly in North America, Europe, Japan and East Asian newly industrializing countries...). A majority of developing countries are excluded from the process, or are participating in it in marginal ways that are often detrimental to their interests; for example, import liberalization may harm their domestic producers and financial liberalization may cause instability.

Globalization is thus affecting different categories of countries differently, and this can broadly be categorized as follows: growth and expansion in the few leading or fully participating countries; moderate and fluctuating growth in some countries attempting to fit into the globalization framework; and marginalization or deterioration experienced by many countries unable to get out of acute problems such as low commodity prices and debt, unable to cope with problems of liberalization and unable to benefit from export opportunities (Khor, 2000: 10). Kwanashie (1999: 21) has drawn attention to the fact that albeit it is generally agreed that globalization would advance global production and increase global welfare, but the structure of production and the ownership pattern of the source of

growth would determine how the returns are distributed. In his opinion, the dominance of international capital – which is supported by international finance institutions – in the emerging global structure has serious implications for the distribution of the gains of globalization, and this is more so because in many of the weaker countries international capital has taken significant control of the domestic economy.

Indeed, the uneven and unequal nature of the present globalization process is manifested in the fast-growing gap between the world's rich and poor people and between developed and developing countries, and in the large differences among nations in the distribution of gains and losses. In sum, globalization has created a vast chasm between the North and the South (Khor, 2000: 10; Kwanashie, 1999: 22).

The countries of the South and their people neither have a major say in, nor any control over, globalization as sermonized and practiced by the West. The West dominates and controls the world market; it owns and controls the major technologies that drive the process of globalization; and it also owns the multinational corporations which dominate and pillage the major sectors of third world economies. Thus, in this Western-dominated globalized world, the underdeveloped states and their people are not only voiceless and unrepresented; they are also the main recipients of the adverse effects of globalization. Their collective sense of humanhood is grossly devalued. As Ndabanigi Sithole (cited in Okolo, 2001: 326) rightly affirmed, “man is less than man unless he belongs to something in which he has a say and over which he has a certain measure of control”.

As stated **ab initio**, this essay attempts to redirect attention to the capacity of globalization and the propensity of its apostles to precipitate and spread different forms of conflicts in the various regions of the underdeveloped world in the post-cold war period following the balkanization of the erstwhile Soviet Union which used to be a formidable check on the excesses of the West. In other words, while Higgott and Ougaaard (cited in Burnell, 2008: 294) talk about what they call the “globalization of political life”, this essay focuses on the globalization of conflicts in the countries of the South.

With the reinforcement of the incorporation of third world countries' economies into the international capitalist system which globalization entails, the key actors in this system (i.e. Westerners) expect others to see them as models. Any third world country that attempts to chart a different course of action faces various forms of sanctions one of which may take the form of Western-induced conflicts/crises. For instance, As Sam Aluko (2005: 46) has observed, the Americans are so convinced of the superiority of the American system that they regard it as their manifest destiny to export it to “civilize” and “democratize” the world, and where this cannot be done by example, precepts and persuasion, they seek to employ bribery, subterfuge, subversion or sheer force of arms particularly in the less-developed countries. Aluko concludes that this breeds resentment and hatred in other parts of the world, hatred and resentment that an empire – or one may add a “global village” – built on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all should not really incur. There is nothing that more graphically illustrates the injustice of the globalized world and the hypocrisy and double standard of the West and other globalizing powers than the innumerable atrocities which the Israeli state has been committing against the Palestinian people for which there has been no comeuppance. For instance, between mid-July and August, 2014, over two thousand Palestinians (including hundreds of innocent children and women) were massacred in a well-organized, Western-supported carnage perpetrated by Israel. It is instructive to note that hospitals, markets, homes for the aged, homes for the disabled, places of worship, and even United Nations' facilities for refugees were bombed by the Israelis. And it was also reported that over sixty-four thousand Palestinians had their homes destroyed by Israel. What were the reactions of the West and other rulers of our “global village”? criminal inaction and conspiratorial silence! It is important to stress that most of the weapons deployed by Israel were said to have been supplied by United States and other Western countries. For the so-called International Criminal Court (ICC), the aforementioned

atrocious acts of the Israeli state and its apartheid-like policy against the Palestinians do not constitute “crimes against humanity”. Indeed, as argued elsewhere (Obo and Ekpe, 2014: 2032 and 2034), “there is no doubt that the greater tragedy that has befallen the world and humanity is that atrocities of unspeakable proportions are being perpetrated by regimes that are friendly with powerful countries of the West and East without the International Criminal Court raising eyebrows”, and it is clear that “the ICC tends to suffer prosecutorial inertia whenever crimes are committed by either the powerful countries of Europe and America or their cronies”.

As preached by the United States and other Western countries, globalization denotes the universalization of western interests. In the pursuit of these interests, regimes have been overthrown; governments have been destabilized; puppet regimes have been foisted on independent countries; sovereign states have been invaded and violated; and leaders and their citizens have been killed. Attention can be drawn to the experiences of Saddam Hussein and Iraq; Muller Omar and Afghanistan; Cote D’Ivoire’s Laurent Gbagbo; Iran and the leaders of its revolution; etc. And in North Africa, “in 2011, the West realized its age-long dream: NATO’s war planes stormed Libya, toppled, and murdered the Libyan leader, Mouamar Gaddafi. And international law looked on helplessly!” (Obo and Williams, 2014:16). Indeed, the validity of the assertion that “where its interests are concerned, imperialism has never hesitated to commit murder” (Wilmot, 1980: 75) is eternal.

D. Conclusion

According to Kwanashie (1999: 19-20),

...behind the force of globalization is a technological revolution which is fundamentally and radically altering all aspects of business, industry and manufacturing. At the core are the new information and communications technologies. Information technology combines progress in electronics, computing, and telecommunications to come up with a highly dynamic process of storing, processing, transmitting and presenting information. This has created capacities for new and efficient responses to age-old problems...

While the above view sounds pleasant, this essay has attempted to highlight the fact that the technologies being referred to and other core pillars of the globalized world are owned and controlled by Northern countries, and this not only gives them an edge over other countries, it also accentuates their dominance of the world system. This essay has also endeavoured to prop up the position that what supporters of globalization outline as its gains mostly serve the interests of imperialism and the development and expansion of capitalism on a global scale. It can also be deduced from the analysis in this essay that in the post-cold war period, third world countries have become more vulnerable, and no component of their sovereignty is regarded as inviolable. Different forms of conflicts or crises have been exported to the countries of the periphery by the globalizing powers. The mantra seems to be: “behave well or be dealt with!”

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