

**GLOBALIZATION AND THE RISING WAVE OF SOCIAL CONFLICT IN WEST AFRICA: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Globalization is a major trend that has become irresistibly dominant in contemporary world system. It is a universal force that propels the world towards a unification and integration of production, finance, culture among others. This development has become possible due to the advancement in transportation, information and communication technologies. The emergence of international super high ways have rubbished the barriers hitherto placed on movements of goods and people by distance and time. Today people have become closer than ever before. Unarguably, globalization has brought societies and their economies closer to each. Unfortunately it has impacted on different countries and peoples in an unbalanced manner, marginalizing some and rewarding some, with unequal distribution of benefits and curses. This development has its negative implications on the security and stability of some regions. Against this backdrop, this study examines the nexus between globalization and the rising wave of social conflicts in West Africa. The data for the study were drawn from secondary sources while narrative and trend analytical techniques were employed for data analysis. Rooting its theoretical analysis on the propositions of the clash of civilizations theory, the study avers that globalization has disarticulated the economies, politics, cultures and environment of West African States and exposed the region to socio-economic woes, political tension and social conflict. The study recommends for inter-regional collaborations by West African States through trade and investment, collective security, improved social security and youth employment to ward off the negative effects of globalization.

**KEYWORDS:** Globalization, Social, Conflict, West Africa, Interdependence and collaborations

**INTRODUCTION**

Historically, has over the years West Africa has remained a victim of all economic and political reform agenda masterminded by European powers. These agenda are incompatible with the socio-cultural system in West Africa and have combined to throw up a lot of conflicts in the sub-region. The struggle for economic resources has led to endemic conflicts, electoral violence and thuggery among the people and parties for political position used as a vantage instrument for primitive accumulation in Africa in general and West Africa in particular. The African people's first sad experience with Europeans forces started in the era of industrial revolution in Europe which brought about European trade and political colonialism in West Africa. The second sad experience with a devastating political effect on the continent was the European political balkanization of Africa near

the end of the 19th century. The resulting long European colonial rule sowed seeds of ethnic and religious discord in all occupied territories (Okpalaobi, 2014).

From the foregoing, neo-liberal globalization builds the growth and development of one part of the world on the back of other parts. This according to Filho and Johnston (2005) is done through the idea of a global free market, yet we know that the most basic feature of neoliberalism is the systematic use of state power to impose market imperatives through a domestic process that is replicated internationally. Globalization has triggered local resistance and social crises that have graduated to full-fledged conflict in parts of West Africa. Resistance to resource dispossession which globalization generates is strongest among indigenous peoples. These struggles have often focused around land and mineral wealth deposits, for instance against concessions in the Nigeria Niger Delta, mining in Western Ghana, Zambia, Chad amongst others and early signs are that the social and the political implications of the ongoing China's resource thirst are certainly as bad (Bond, 2006; Bush, 2016). Accumulation by dispossession is what is prevalent in Africa epitomized by commodification and privatization of land, forceful expulsion of peasant populations, the conversion of widely varying property rights into exclusive private property rights; the suppression of the rights of the commons; the commodification of the labour power; and the suppression of alternative – indigenous forms of production and consumption (Harvey, 2003). People in Africa are everywhere seeking to safe guard their assets, and to preserve local wealth and family relationship in a struggle against the dispossession that globalization generates. To this end, (Bush, 2016) asserts that it is not surprising therefore that the Niger Delta is a major sources of opposition. And it is not surprising either that US is worried about losing Nigeria's oil. Resistance to dispossession of oil wealth from within the oil producing areas has involved militias, youth organization, criminal elements and infant struggles. The economic and social crisis, in West Africa has become so intractable because of continued poor gross domestic savings and investment, despite the rhetoric to the contrary around globalization. The reality is that the whole of sub-Saharan Africa has income of not more than Belgium's with an average GDP of not much more than \$3billion (Bush, 2016). There has been little effort to explain and expose why Africa is in crisis, other than to heap blame on poor capacity, war, poor education and the need for more trade. This has been a smoke screen for persistent western intervention. Globalization in Africa has been tied on having a civil society but exerting authoritative control over it and having improved transparency on mineral and oil wealth but not allowing indigenous people control over resources access. This is the crux of the matter and the study aims at x-raying the real pros and cons of the sweeping wave of globalization and its attendant social conflicts in this West Coast of Africa.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Part of the burgeoning difficulties facing West Africa is how to counter the intellectual deceit peddled by international financial institutions driven by the notion that globalization brings universal economic growth and development. Our understanding of basic challenge of globalization is perceived from the relationship status between and among the participating actors in the global

system. Adedeji (2005) opines that globalization is not only a force of marginalization but inequity and also a factor of fragmentation. The real problem is that there is little to celebrate about the phenomenon of globalization as it affects Africa. As Egbaju (2007) puts it ‘the current situation in developing countries, whereby they export largely primary commodities such as crude oil and cocoa, make it impossible to gain from the trade driven by American globalization’. From the foregoing, the situation of dependency, social-political, economic and environmental crises engendered by Western globalization actors notably the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Trade Organization and activities of Multinational Corporations have come to pose a huge problem for government and people of Africa. In the 1980s for instance Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in various countries in West Africa and beyond ushered in a spate of riots and conflicts across the continent. This was further exacerbated by the growing militarization that assumed a more dangerous dimension in the proliferation of small arms, light weapons, the involvement of child soldiers and the struggle for the control of mineral resources (UNDP, 2002; Oche, 2003; Okpalaobi, 2014). Structural adjustment and the logic of the market, debt crises and Marginalization have all been intensified by this globalization process and are also indicators of the process. This has actually reduced the role of the state in the present time in the provision of social welfare and employment and hence jobs were cut, currency devalued and inflation promoted. As a consequence, ethnic conflicts, electoral violence, militant activities and terrorism have taken tolls in Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Somalia, Ethiopia, Rwanda Burundi, Kenya, Sudan among others (Alli, 2005). As this economic woes deepens, the Economic Commission for Africa’s 2008 flagship report noted that ‘recovery’- whatever that means and for whomever it reaches is not being translated into meaningful development and has not benefited vulnerable groups. At the heart of globalization is the debt burden of more than \$254 billion, that means that debt obligations remain high (Economic Commission for Africa, 2008).

It is against this backdrop that this study sets to unmask the pros and cons associated with globalization vis-à-vis West African experiences of conflict and we therefore posit these questions, thus: Is there a relationship between globalization and wave of social conflict in West Africa? Has globalization contributed to any form of improvement in the standard of living of West African States and people? What strategies are open to the governments of West Africa to be able to harness the possible benefits of globalization? It is the researchers’ poise to find sustainable answers to these puzzles that triggered this study.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Clarifications**

### Globalization

Globalization is today probably the most singular factor exerting the greatest influences not only on nation-states but also on all human existence and interaction (Saliu and Omotola, 2006). Though the beginning of globalization can be traced to around 1870, its pace and scope in the last twenty years

has been unprecedented (Onimode, 2000). In point of fact, no universal conceptualization of globalization has emerged as there are as many perspectives as there are many scholars. For the purpose of clarity, the following conceptualization will suffice. In the economic sense of it, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) explains that globalization denotes greater integration of goods, services and capital between countries in the international system (IMF). In the same line of thought, Mkor (2012) succinctly put that:

“Globalization is a process of vertical and horizontal integration involving increasing volume of trade and variety of transnational transactions in goods and services, in international capital flows, in human migration, and through a rapid and widespread diffusion of technology.”

From the foregoing, globalization is therefore the increasing breakdown of barriers and obstacles to the world wide diffusion of economic ideas, doctrines, products, services and practices originating from the Western industrialized nations, especially the United State of America (Abutundu, 2000). In a more concrete economic term, it refers to the increasing economic interdependence among countries of the world through the increasing volumes of cross-border transactions in recent times. We could take globalization to mean the establishment of a global market for goods and capital. The universal character of competing technologies, the progression towards a global system of production (Amin, 1998; Egbaju, 2007). Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union by 1990; the subsequent adoption of economic liberalization programmes by erstwhile communist states, the effort of China to join the main stream of market-led economies of the capitalist west, all of these combined as factors that propended economic globalization process (Babawale, 2007). The Phenomenon is now so propound that today, distance is no longer a barrier simply on account of technological revolution. Thus, territoriality has come to be eclipsed telemetrically. To this end, globalization could be taken to mean the changing ways of production organized as required by general dismantling of trade barriers and the free mobility of financial and productive capital. It is the internationalization of production, finance and exchange (Garea, 1998; Pearson and Rochester, 1998). Whereas Aluko (2003) views globalization as the growing interactions in world trade, national and foreign investments, capital market and the ascribed role of governments in national economies; Ihonvbere (1996) lamented that the constraining legacies of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation, foreign domination, conditions of poverty make participation in the global order impossible for sub-Saharan Africa. To further illuminate the impact of globalization vis-à-vis Africa experiences, Obuoforibo (2010) avers that:

“The world order that the North is fashioning through the process of globalization would certainly not be in the interest of Africa. This is predicated on the fact that through the mechanism of their policies and the multinational corporations, they have already succeeded in pocketing the leaders of Africa. This has given rise to African leaders pursuing anti people policies mostly designed by WTO, IBRD and IMF.”

Our understanding of the new reality posed by globalization in West Africa is perceived from the relationship status between and the participating actors in the global system. In truth, globalization has succeeded in breaking barriers, collapsing space and time. In sum, it has turned the world to a global village. Yet it has aggravated the gulf between poor and rich countries.

The effect of globalization on the state in West Africa is not only of an economic nature. The process and outcome of globalization involve a lot more than economics. Globalization includes permeation of political ideas and practices across borders. It includes the permeation of cultural and religious beliefs and practices resulting in dilution of some cultures. Globalization includes the domination by some super-powers through military coercive means and impositions that go with it. Globalization is not a value-free, innocent, self-determination process. It essentially seeks to enhance and deploy a country's (society's or organization's) economic, political, technological, ideological and military power and influence for competitive domination in the world. While globalization has positive, innovative, dynamic aspects, it also has negative, disruptive, marginalizing aspects (Nsibambi, 2001; UNDP Human Development Report 1999). From the Arab to the Europeans through the experiences of slavery and colonization, to contemporary globalization conditions, West Africa has never been given any window of opportunity to develop on its own terms. Rather than being a key player in the global system and taking proactive measures, West African states have always been taking reactive measures.

## **CONFLICT**

Conflict is a term that has been given several interpretations over the years by scholars of diverse background based on their experiences and perspective. No surprise thus, Okolie (2009) opines that any definitional enterprise must take into cognisance the fact that conflict is part of several movements in history. While some scholars view conflict as negative and destructive, others have conceived the phenomenon as a positive and necessary part to progress, change and advancement. However Akpuru-Aja (2009) aptly noted that consensus is achieved by scholars that conflict is an inevitable part or process of social life. It is a continuing reality of social existence. Conflict exists even in the 'best' of human societies (Sani, 2007). From the foregoing, the conceptualization of conflict as a negative and destructive phenomenon was posited by Louis Coser. Hence, according to Coser (1956) conflict occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. In the same line of thought McEnny (1985) sees conflict as the overt coercive interaction of contending all activities. Onu (2009) also concurred that conflict is a manifestation of hostile attitude in face of conflicting interest between individuals, groups of states. These conflicting interests can be over resources, identity, power, status or values. Francis (2006) refers to conflict as the pursuits of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Furthermore, he conceives armed conflict as the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals. More so, in the sphere psychoanalysis, conflict can be taken to refer to intra-psychic conflict in which antagonistic forces are pitched against each other. In contrast, conflict

has also been viewed from positive and progressive terms. In this end, Igwe (2002) conceives conflict as:

“A universal and permanent attribute of nature, life and sociality, necessary and unavoidable when in terms of dialectics they serve to advance the positive evolution of phenomena, and unnecessary and avoidable when irresolvable and their consequences are negative for society and man.”

Foltz (1991) remarked that conflict stems from the basic fact of human interdependence: for individuals to meet even their basic needs, they depend on the active participation of other individuals. Similarly Okolie (2009) opined that although the ground desire of virtually all existing human societies is to enhance productive and harmonious living conditions, a situation of conflict remains an inalienable companion of group attitudinal and behavioural aggregates. German sociologist, Georg Simmel asserts that social conflict and consensus (peace and unity) are naturally complementary. According to him, genuine peace or consensus without conflict is hardly possible (Coser and Rosenbery, 1979). It is deducible from the above that conflict is critical in resolving the tension between contrasts. Without doubt, one striking view on the inevitability of social conflict was posited by Karl Marx. Marx applied the idea of dialecticism to a materialistic analysis of history or societal development and submitted that “the history of all hitherto known or existing societies in the history of class struggle.” For Marx, social conflicts revolves around the emergence of two opposing classes (the bourgeoisie and in the proletariat) in the capital regime (Okolie, 2009). Generally speaking, the source of conflict depend on the strain in any aspect of human relationship whether ethnic relations, state relations or supra-state relations. The Africa experiences particularly in the West Coast have been attributed to disarticulated state institutions that allowed exploitation and maximization of resources rather than investing in nation building. The imperial nature of the extractive industries and their internal state collaborators have combined to exacerbated the recurrence of social conflicts in the West African sub-region.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study is anchored on the Clash of Civilizations (COC) theory as espoused by Samuel P. Huntington. The theory is premised on the thesis that people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the Post-Cold War World. This was vividly espoused in his work: ‘The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order’ published in 1996. Essentially, Huntington began his thinking by surveying the diverse theories about the nature of global politics in the Post-Cold War period. Some theorists and writers agreed that human rights, liberal democracy and the capitalist free market economy have become the only remaining ideological alternative for nations in the post-cold War World. Specifically, Francis Fukuyama argued that the world has reached the “end of history” in a Hegelian sense (Fukuyama, 1992). Huntington (1996) believes and argues that while the age of ideology has ended, the world had only reverted to a normal state of affairs characterized by cultural conflict. In his thesis, he argued that the primary axis of conflict in the future will be along cultural lines. In addition, the clash of civilizations, for Huntington,

represents a development of history. In the past, world history was mainly about the struggles between monarchs, nations and ideologies such as seen within western civilizations. But after the end of the Cold War, World politics moved into a new phase, in which non-western civilization are no longer the exploited recipients of western civilization but have become additional important actors joining the West to shape and move world history.

According to Huntington (1996) civilizational conflicts are particularly prevalent between Muslim and non-Muslims. More recent factors contributing to a Western-Islamic clash, Huntington wrote, are the Islamic Resurgence and demographic explosion of Islam, coupled with the values of Western universalism, that is, the view that all civilizations should adopt Western values that infuriates Islamic fundamentalists. Huntington offers six explanations for why civilization will clash which forms the central propositions of the theory.

1. Differences among civilizations are basic, in that civilization are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and most important, religion. These fundamental differences are the product of countries and the foundations of different civilizations, meaning they will not be gone soon.
2. The world is becoming a smaller place. As a result, interactions across the world are increasing, which intensify civilization consciousness and the awareness of differences between civilizations and commonalities within civilizations.
3. Due to economic modernization and social change, people are separated from longstanding local identities. Instead, religion has replaced this gap, which provides a basis for identifying and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilizations.
4. The growth of civilization consciousness is enhanced by the dual role of the West. On the one hand, the West is at the peak of power. At the same time, a return-to-the-roots phenomenon is occurring among non-Western civilizations. The West at the peak of its power confronts non-Western countries that increasingly have the desire, the will and the resources to shape the world in non-Western ways.
5. Cultural characteristics and differences are less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones.
6. Economic regionalism is increasing. Successful economic regionalism will reinforce civilization consciousness. Economic regionalism may succeed only when it is rooted in a common civilization.

The above theory becomes germane for the study especially in light of the fact that globalization is a complex phenomenon which interfaces with various areas of social life and is suffused with ambiguities, variations, uncertainty and incompatibilities; its core is the inevitable expansion of capitalism world-wide including the spread of its values (Nnoli, 2000). The phenomenon of globalization is subtly rooted in the universal permeation of Western economic, political and socio-cultural values. As cultures interact, some cultures are being diluted or destroyed at the expense of others and negative values are spread all over the world with relative ease.

With emphasis on Africa, Nsibambi (2001) maintains that the effect of globalization in Africa is not only of an economic nature. The state decision-making and policy-making process and therefore the influence and power of the state has been globalized and shared among world decision bodies. According to Nnoli (2000), the major source of conflict in Africa, in the past two decades or so, has been the globalization process which disarticulated the fragile governmental systems in Africa and significantly undermined the development of the sovereign states. The political arm of the globalization package was the adoption of liberal democracy, while liberalization of market and social reform which seek to cut down public utilities, the withdrawal of subsidy and cut in employment resulted to labour unrest and violent conflicts. Okpalaobi (2014) aptly notes that while the democratic ideals may be attractive, there is no doubt that it has been a source of some conflicts on the continent in places where minority groups exist like in Sudan, Nigeria and Burundi. Similarly, Jega (2004) observed that the democratic space may have been opened and far widened but in many cases, the usage of this space has also hindered and deepened the pre-existing ethnic and religion divides and is now accompanied by a proliferation of violent eruptions. Today, there are associations formed mainly to promote the interests of ethnic or religious groups in West Africa such movements as the Patriotic Movement of Ivory coast (MPCI), Movement for Peace and Justice (MPJ) also in Ivory Coast; Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP); the Ijaw National Congress (INC); Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra, (MASSOB); The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) all in Nigeria. These associations have their claims or demands for more equitable distribution of resources such as political power, economic resources or even sovereignty as in the case of IPOB and MASSOB in Nigeria and the MPJ in Ivory Coast (Okpalaobi, 2014). Ethnic conflicts though are wide spread all over the world, but the African situation is alarming because the Economic Reform Programme of the IMF and World Bank have diminished the capacity of the state to provide welfare and ethnic groups have sought a new strategy for survival.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted qualitative method in carrying out its investigation. The data employed for the study were gathered from secondary sources. As such, data used for this study were collected from public libraries as well as private libraries of a number of colleagues and associates within and outside the country. Besides, the study also made use of internet materials wherein relevant articles were carefully gathered. The study utilized content analytical techniques for the analysis of data. As such the information employed for analysis in the study were carefully extracted from logical chains of evidence presented in journal papers, conference papers, periodic papers, edited books, documentary materials among others.

## **Globalization and Conflict in West Africa**

The manner with which globalization has defined the conflictual social relations between the possessors and the dispossessed people of West Africa have gained currency in scholarly discourse. This is viewed particularly against the backdrop up of a situation in which smaller populations in the

highly industrialised world enjoy the benefits of the transformation and transfer of Africa's resources through globalized structures of production and exchange, leaving behind scarcities and the intense struggles for larger chunks of shrinking resources waged at local, national and global levels (Obi, 1997). The situation in sub-Saharan Africa has become desperate in view of the failure of structural adjustment and deepening of environmental conflict in the continent. If anything, adjustment has devalued Africa's resources in the global market place and in the process exposed most Africans to greater exploitation, poverty and alienation from the state (Obi, 1999). A major area of conflict that is closely knitted with globalization in West Africa is the wave of conflict associated with global network of resource exploitation and dispossession. Needless to state that there exists a relationship between the processes of globalization mineral resource extraction in Africa and the deepening of environmental conflict, on the continent since the 1970s, and especially with the onset of structural adjustment which imposed the hegemony on the African economy and ecology (Obi, 1999). Globalization itself has to be understood not just within the context of the restricting of global capitalism and the shrinking of time and space through the use of technology, but within the context of deepening economic crisis in Africa and its pervasive adverse political and social ramifications. Categorically, Obi (1999) and Midgeley (1997) agreed that environmental conflict in the Nigeria oil industry, particularly in the oil-rich region of the Niger Delta, is globalized in the sense of the presence of global actors in the local communities, the integration of the communities via oil production into the global economic system and the connection being forged by local social movements to the global human right agenda, and international human environmental rights groups in the fight against the state-global oil alliance.

Furthermore, Okpalaobi (2014) reiterates that African States have been regarded as rentier states largely because they depend on rents from natural resources, namely: Petroleum products, Gold, Iron ore, Copper, Tin and other solid minerals resources. Apart from the Niger Delta conflict there exist litany of resources control included conflicts in West Africa notably in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. The global demand for restructuring both in the economic sphere and structural reforms after the Cold War created dramatic changes in the nature of conflicts in Africa and made way for the resurgence of ethnic, political and economic conflicts. As a result, conflict are now analysed in market-oriented terms (Yeoman, 2005). The result of the ensuing austerity measures which have distributional consequences are polarity, deprivation, social and political tensions. The struggle for economic resources has led to conflicts, electoral violence and thuggery amongst the people and parties for political position (Elbadawi and Hegre, 2003). The Economic Reform Programme with its excruciating effects as dictated by the IMF and World Bank have created socio-economic hardship for Africa, leaving the people more impoverished and desperate. It was observed that there is a close relationship between economic crisis and conflict, noting that fifty percent of the twenty-five most indebted third world countries were at war in 1990 or early 1991 (Smith, 1992). This argument has been further buttressed by Brown (1995) who submitted that only Tanzania of Africa's thirty three most indebted and economically distressed countries here so far not been engulfed by conflicts and wars. The many conflicts which have devastated parts of West Africa like Liberia, Chad, Mali, Ivory

Coast and Nigeria are traceable to serious economic dislocation caused by the impact of globalization and made worse by unemployment and widespread poverty, which result from staff rationalization, privatization and massive retrenchment of workers.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that globalization is a phenomenon that cannot be wished away in the contemporary world system and political economy. Globalization benefits those who have the capacity to harness it but can be very detrimental to those whom it find not prepared. West African States are not prepared, especially in terms of having the requisite capacity. The cutting edge for African people to participate and benefit from the gains of globalization lay within the internal and the external forces within the capacity of its people. The direct impact of globalization on the conflict situation in West Africa has become glaring from the foregoing study. Globalization reforms of openness, economic and political liberalization have combined to delineate the states in Africa from direct welfare programme and hence thrown up crises and confusion. African leaders and those that hope to assist them must recognize this fact and commit resources energies to address these realities and foster development that is people oriented.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In a general way and in light of the effects of globalization on the governments and people of West Africa, we therefore posit the following recommendations:

1. West African states' leadership should as a matter of necessity adopts a proactive approach to globalization so that the challenges it poses and the benefit it offers can be foreseen and planned for. Thus, West African states should use globalization to determine the direction of their people rather than letting globalization use their countries to determine the direction of the world.
2. Without further delay and inaction, there is need to quickly address human capacity needs from a comprehensive angle anchored on acquiring skills, knowledge, attitude, network and information technology. Globalization or no globalization, a country cannot be more developed than the capacity of it human resources.
3. While adopting neo-liberal reforms and policies, governments in West Africa should always take into consideration the context of Africans' socio economic and political milieu, especially their needs and capacities. For example, the rolling back of the frontiers of the state, which included privatization, retrenchment and reduction of public expenditure in social sectors such as education and health, was not introduced in appropriate dose in some West African countries. This is one explanation for the current high level of poverty and inequality.
4. African leadership should strive to increase and strengthen the voice of Africa in international bodies where decision that erode the powers of states are taken. Notable among these international bodies with global decision impact are the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund.

5. In all, West African political leadership should spare no effort towards fostering good governance, democratic peace, fight corruption, ensure inclusive policy and provide security for lives and property. This would further attract foreign direct investment and forestall brain drain.

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