



Globalization and the Clash of Cultures

Socrates Ebo

Centre for Continuing Education, Federal University Otuoke,

Abstract

Culture is generally seen as a people's way of life. It was much easier to be distinguished when people were mostly confined to their territory. The way of life was always apparent, and the people were easily defined in their physical environment. But the internet and its social networking websites have changed all that. The world has become globalized to the point of becoming a global village. In today's world, territorial identities continue to lose relevance under the universalizing influence of globalization. Keeping a people interactively homogenous is an outright impossibility in today's world of virtually interconnected humanity. Values flow without borders in the globalized everyday world of human interactions. Clashes of cultural values ensue; acculturation and obliteration of cultural values occur. No culture anywhere in the world is completely immune to the dialectics of the clashes and syntheses of cultures under the levelling forces of globalization. This work philosophically investigates this unfolding global, existential cultural conditions, using the analytic method of philosophy.

Received 04 Sep., 2022; Revised 17 Sep., 2022; Accepted 19 Sep., 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

Culture is the acclaimed people's way of life. It is the behavioural identity that set aside a people as unique and distinct from the rest of humanity. It is the blueprint according to which a people interact with the world. Without culture, there is no social identity. Culture does not happen in a vacuum. It happens to a people within an exclusive territory. Exclusivity is vital for the survival of culture for culture is highly dynamic and highly vulnerable. Culture itself has functional values for man. Culture must give a people the roadmap for successful survival in their environment. Therefore, culture must continue to evolve as long as the people continue to experience new challenges in their environment. Culture is equally susceptible to external contacts [1]. Once culture comes into contact with another culture, it will never remain the same. Contact with a different culture has always been a turning point for culture.

Globalization has presented new existential situations to cultures all over the world. The principles that drive globalization are diametrically antithetical to the principles that preserve culture. While culture requires territory, exclusivity and minimal external interventions to thrive, globalization does not just override territories, it aims at obliterating the barriers of territory. Globalization is ultimately about turning the world into a contiguous territory with minimal barriers or demarcations. It thrives on inclusiveness and interconnectedness. Globalization tends to shrink the private and national domain. It compresses the entire world into a single global interactive village [2]. The forces of globalization are certainly antithetical to the exclusive social identity culture tends to give a people. Globalization aims at getting the entire world to do same things or to do things in similar ways. Globalization does not pay much attention to local peculiarities. It rather drives a sameness of experiences and sameness of patterns of interactions for the entire world.

As the forces of globalization are diametrically antithetical to the forces that traditionally drive culture, clashes of culture become inevitable. The values that drive globalization do not materialize from nowhere. They are definitely local values made global. Human beings are decision making intelligent beings. Although the forces that drive globalization are powerful, they are not omnipotent. Many a time people see through the forces of globalization to recognize cultural imperialism being championed by a people who want to impose their peculiar way of life on the world as the universal normal. The result is varied degrees of resistance. People sometimes, consciously and actively protect aspects of their culture from the pervading influences of the forces of globalization. They could even use the instruments of globalization to advance their peculiar culture and push it on to the global scene.

Globalization is predominantly championed by the West. The values that are globalized are predominantly Western values [3]. In recent years, there have been aggressive pushback by some Asian nations. China has been a leading power in using the instruments of globalization to counter the West-driven forces of globalization. China did not just aim at preserving her indigenous culture but has actually reasonably globalized same to the point that Chinese restaurants now have ubiquitous presence around the world and even in the US. As globalization becomes more citizens directed, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for organized forces to control the trends of globalization. While economic globalization is heavily controlled by organized institutions, the social media are making it difficult for organized institutions to fully control cultural trends in globalization. It is not yet *uhuru* though because many social media companies use censorships to drive their own cultural narratives [4].

II. Globalization

Globalization is the movement that seeks to interconnect the world into a single universal mesh where everything is related to everything and no one is successfully free to opt out the mesh. Like all contentious phenomena, the definition of globalization, of course is mired in controversies. What is key in globalization is global interconnectedness. That is what the idea is all about. How this idea has been executed in different facets of human endeavour are what account for the controversies in the definition of globalization. When defined in terms of the economic shenanigans of Breton Wood institutions, globalization would mean little more than the universalization of crass capitalism. While globalization openly advocates free trade, in practice, it is the free movement of finished goods from the Northern Hemisphere to the rest of the world. It is also the guaranteed and uninterrupted movement of raw materials from the Southern Hemisphere to Northern Hemisphere at prices determined by institutions in the Northern Hemisphere.

Globalization could be viewed in economic, political, cultural and demographic terms. All the mentioned variables are witnessing more international integrations. In economic terms, globalization also meant providing free international movement of capital. One could send funds from anywhere to anywhere using PayPal, Western Union, MoneyGram or any other international payment platform. One could purchase an item from anywhere in the world on the internet. No nation can survive in the contemporary world outside the global market.

Globalization also meant increased migration. European Union has disappeared restrictions on international movement among member nations [5]. Europe operates more or less like a contiguous nation among member countries: same currency, movement without restrictions similar laws and same regulations from the EU parliament. Other regions and subcontinents are copying the European Union model, applying varying degrees of integration. The West African subregion has formed the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) which guarantees free movement of persons among the member states.

Politically, globalization would mean bringing the world under one government. It is doubtful whether this ideal would ever be achieved but so many world bodies have been formed to enhance international government. The United Nations and its numerous organs and agencies have enacted a reasonable degree of global government in the world. The United Nations maintains a secretariat in New York from where it seeks to coordinate the affairs of the world in admittedly limited degree of control. It has its General Assembly which is the parliament of the leaders of its member nations. There is no gainsaying that the UN has made advances in globalizing government in the world but it is certainly not *uhuru* yet. The UN has very limited capacity to enforce its decisions and execute its sanctions on erring member nations, especially the powerful nations [6]. The limitations of the UN notwithstanding, it has all the accoutrements of world government; at least in principle.

Culturally, globalization would literally mean getting the entire world to adopt a similar way of life. Whether this is proper in principle or feasible will be the core discussion of this work. People definitely diffuse their values as well as assimilate others' values consciously and unconsciously as they come in contact with other people. Increased regional integrations would in principle, engender increased cultural integrations.

III. Culture

Culture is popularly defined as a people's way of life. It is the sum total of their acquired experiences: social and otherwise, in their continuous adaptations to their environment. Culture encompasses the wholistic endeavours of a people: material and immaterial expressions. It is the way a people behaviourally manifest in the world. This manifestation encompasses, their language, norms, technology, architecture, social institutions, political establishments, arts, fashion, food, music and religion. Indeed, culture is the identity of a people codified in norms, thoughts and practices.

Culture is susceptible to change, varies from age to age, and from place to place. Even within the same society, culture varies from one social class to another [7]. Culture is fundamentally functional. It is a programmatic way of getting along in the world in a particular environment. Challenges presented by the

environment change from time to time. So does culture. Moreover, culture is vulnerable to contacts with other cultures. It often modifies when it comes in contact with other cultures. Culture is relative. Although there are cultural universals - cultural practices that are found across the globe, most times, what is upheld by a certain culture could be meaningless in another culture [8,9]. Thus, no culture can be objectively measured against another culture. Every culture is unique in its right. Hence, culture is adjudged to be relative.

People have varied degrees of access to cultural capital. Thus, even in the same society, culture is stratified. The upper class generally have more cultural capital than the lower class. They are able to acquire more cultural goods like higher education, posh homes, political power and exclusive social circles. These cultural goods set them on a higher social stratum in the society. On a global scale, societies have varied degrees of access to cultural capital. Citizens of wealthy nations generally have better access to cultural goods. The wealthy nations also have bigger capacity to diffuse their culture. Even on the global scene, cultural strata exist due to unequal access to cultural capital.

IV. Globalization and Clashes of Cultures

Culture by nature is easily diffused. Inculturation, acculturation and culture borrowing are all veritable manifestations of the diffusion of culture. Culture has not been immune to the processes of globalization. The forces of globalization have a visceral effect on culture. They enable cultural diffusions on such grand scales as were hardly traditionally possible. Globalization has led to the universalization of peculiar cultural variables of particular regions. Those who control the instruments of globalization tend to have their culture globalized [10]. They have powerful cultural capital. They control the instruments of cultural globalization. So, they often tend to project their peculiar cultural practices as the universal ideal. Globalization has impacted on culture in several ways. Some of the ways in which globalization has impacted on culture and the attendant conflicts are discussed in detail below.

4.1 Language

The era of colonialism in the 19th century saw Western Europe acquire territories around the world and impose their languages on those territories. Spain conquered much of South and North America and imposed Spanish as the official language in those territories. The French and the Portuguese also imposed their respective languages on their colonial territories. The British conquered the US, much of Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand. The combined power of the US and the UK made the English Language the de facto lingua franca of the world. It is widely spoken across continents. So many nations are learning it as their second language. It is the language of globalization as the UK and US dominate the forces of globalization. This strategic positioning the English language made it the second language of choice for most people whose nations don't speak the English language. The language is so strategic that even in China and Japan, being able to speak English is a strategic advantage.

There is no gainsaying that the globalization of the English language helped significantly in integrating the world linguistically. It nevertheless led to the decline of so many indigenous languages. In most former British colonies, the English language was imposed by government fiat. It was the language of education. It was the language of administration. It was the language of socioeconomic advancement. It was the elevated language. Indigenous languages were actively suppressed in these territories. The result is that there are so many dying languages today. Many of such societies seem to be aware of the cultural linguistic extinction they face and often make frantic efforts to salvage their dying language.

4.2 Religion

The globalization of Christianity was another fallout of colonialism. The Western powers that championed colonialism in the 19th century were Christian nations. They often literally imposed their religion on the colonized territories [11]. The idea of spiritual superiority of Christianity was always subtly instilled in the psyche of the local population. The advances of Christianity in these areas notwithstanding, the traditional religions persist and echo deeply in the psyche of the local population. The arising conflicts often create identity crisis in the belief system of the locals. Nkrumah aptly captured this identity crisis in his philosophy of consciencism [12].

The Catholic Church could be called the first truly global institution in the world. While it maintains its centralized authority in Rome, its structures sprawl all over the world with gap-tight administrative echelons. The Catholic Church uses one calendar and practices the same liturgy worldwide on a daily basis.

Other cultures are often aware that Christianity defaces the traditions of a people, and sometimes gave stiff resistance to the spread of the religion in their domain. What Christianity does, Islam does also, with its loosely organized authorities centralized in Mecca.

4.3 Fashion

The Western dress code has been popularized all over the world partly due to colonialism and also due to the West's penchant to present its cultural ideals as the universal standards. Western formal dressing has been adopted as the corporate dress code worldwide. The suit seems to have been accepted as a universal formal clothing for corporate and political events. Political leaders all over the world are often pictured in suits at formal gatherings.

Women's fashion is not left out also. The Western female mode of dressing like the male counterpart seems to have been globalized also especially among the middle class across the globe. The successful globalization of Western dressing notwithstanding, other cultural dressings continue to clash with it and to thrive. More often than not, traditional attires and Western dressings thrive side by side within the same culture.

4.4 Food

The globalization of food is another variable that has become prominent in the dialectics of culture and globalization. Some food crops were transported from their continents of origin and introduced to continents where they previously did not exist. Cassava and corn were transported from Brazil to the rest of the world [13]. Every culture has its traditional way of preparing food. However, the rise of fast foods opened new vistas on the globalization of food. American fast food brands soon sprout in other countries. Today, there is hardly any region of the world that McDonalds has not penetrated.

Fast foods have great appeals to children and to the corporate working class across cultures. Even culinary etiquettes are being globalized. People are changing their traditional ways of eating food. Chop sticks and bare hands are giving way to tablespoons, forks and knives. Fast food companies have become ubiquitous features of the global feeding culture. They maintain uniformity of services across the globe irrespective of the extant local foodculture. Globalization has also helped non-Western nations to make their cultural foods present internationally. Chinese restaurants also have ubiquitous presence internationally.

4.5 Architecture

Nations generally have their traditions of architecture which are generally rooted in their history, environment and technology. The type of building materials available in an environment and the climatic condition of an area, traditionally determine the architecture it would embrace. Today, globalization and advances in technology have broken the traditional architectural bars. Designs fashionable in a cultural environment could be exported to another cultural environment and given new meaning. Building materials could be imported from an environment where they are available to another environment where they don't exist. Thus, globalization is popularizing certain architectural designs irrespective of national boundaries. Skyscrapers and malls adorn cities all over the world. Although such architectural designs were peculiar to Western cities, they have become ubiquitous features of big cities worldwide.

Sometimes the adopted architecture might not really be suitable for the receiving environment. In sub-Saharan Africa poorly ventilated Western style buildings adorn the cities in an environment whose climate is predominantly hot. Religious organizations also popularized their unique architectural designs worldwide. Christianity and Islam have their distinct architectural traditions. A glance at the architecture of their worship centres would instantly reveal it is a church or a mosque.

4.6 Political Institutions

Political cultures worldwide have been influenced by globalization. Western democracy is often projected as the ideal system of government. Western cultural political institutions have been replicated across the globe. In most countries, it is either the British style parliamentary system of government or the American style presidential system of government. Many countries have also incorporated into their political culture, the doctrine of separation of power, which was traditionally alien to them. Most countries in the world have adopted term limits for their leaders. Traditional British judicial system has also spread across the world, especially among English speaking nations. Government bureaucracy across the globe nowadays tend to have similar structures.

The world has witnessed increased bonding of international politics. Many international bodies cultivate and spread peculiar political culture across the globe. The United Nations promote the culture of democracy and political freedom among member states. The European Union is shaping and streamlining European political institutions to become same across Europe. All the member states share same political ideology.

V. Multi-Monocultural Dichotomy: Globalization or Americanization?

One of the challenges of globalization is the question of which values from which culture are to be globalized? How can we talk of the globalization of values in a multicultural world? This is a crisis at the core of the globalization of values. There is no gainsaying that the most powerful globalizing institution in today's world is the US government. Most of the institutions driving globalization are rooted in the United States of America. The influence of the government and people of the United States pervade these institutions. The United Nations has its headquarters in New York. It depends heavily on funding from the United States government and the US military for the sustenance of its bureaucracy and the enforcement of its sanctions. The United States is among the five nations that have veto power at the United Nations. The United Nations is the most powerful global institution, globalizing the politics of the entire world. The World Trade Centre, the most powerful tool of economic globalization is sited in the United States. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are sited in the United States. The USA hosts most of the powerful conventional and social media companies in the world. These media organizations use their platforms to spread American cultural values across the globe.

There is an epistemological as well as a sociological problem in driving monoculturalism in a multicultural world. The crises generated by these culture-globalizing forces have led some countries to restrict the use of some tools of globalization. In China for instance, the use of Internet and satellite televisions are heavily censored [14]. In North Korea, Internet is so restricted that it is nearly proscribed [15]. Iran equally censors the use of satellite televisions [16].

The Cold War in many respects was a crisis of the dichotomy of monoculturalism in a multicultural world. First, the leading powers in the respective blocs had to spread their political culture in the countries that make up their respective blocs. Then the two blocs antagonized each other seeking to impose their opposing political cultures on the other bloc and the rest of the world. It was a failed, forceful attempt to enact monocultural globalization in a multicultural world. That was before the commercialization and the popularization of the internet though.

The rise of global social networking sites and the social media in general brought the world much closer culturally. There seems to be a build-up towards cultural synthesis among a significant proportion of the globe. The global social media networks are gradually evolving a global value system. In most cases, the government is entirely unable to regulate the contents people exchange on social networking sites. Contents creation on the social media are entirely citizens directed. The social media networks have gradually evolved a sort of global value system that is neither entirely pro West nor pro East; neither Christian nor Moslem, European nor Third World. The driving values seem to be social justice and personal liberties. There is no doubt that Western values are more pronounced on the social media networks but other cultural values are far from silenced. On the contrary, in most instances, the social media have given them greater expressions. It is doubtful if the world would ever have a single global culture. What is certain is that the world would continue experience greater tolerance and greater awareness of other cultural values. As people increasingly interact on global proportions, cultures will continue to blend and synthesize.

VI. The Counterculture from China

In many ways, the People's Republic of China is the antithesis of the United States of America both as a global power and a powerful globalizing force. Unlike America that has been the world's greatest firing power, China achieved this feat without firing a single shot. China is endowed with enormous human and material resources. It is the most populous nation on earth and an enormous cultural force. China became a counterforce to the West led by the United States in the cultural contest for control over the instruments of globalization and the values to be globalized. China deployed its enormous human and material resources to copy Western technology and adapt it to the Chinese culture and environment. Technology plus enormous population became a powerful combination for China.

China became a counterculture and counter diplomatic influence to the United States at the global scene. It did not take long for China to launch its own satellites into the orbit, create its own social networking sites and beamed the Chinese cultural values across the globe. Of course, China did not remain immune to Western cultural influences. McDonalds dot its major cities. But the Chinese are masters of adaptation, they embraced all this and adapted it to their own ends. Today, Chinese restaurants dot the cities and suburbs of the United States. The Chinese have also been using international diplomacy to advance Chinese cultural values across the globe. The Confucius Institute dot universities across the globe. They are centres for learning the Chinese language and the Chinese culture, stoutly sponsored by the Chinese government. The Chinese government offers thousands of scholarships across the globe to attract young intellectuals to come to China to advance their studies while of course getting exposed to Chinese cultural values.

In the contest for the values to be globalized, China has successfully waged a countercultural offensive to counter the dominance of the Western value system on the global scene. Chinese social media platforms dot

the social networking sites. TikTok, the current social media platform making cultural sensations worldwide, is of Chinese origin.

VII. Conclusion

This work has intricately dissected the influence of globalization on the spread of cultural values. It has also weighed on the clashes of cultures occasion by the forces of globalization. Globalization does not happen in vacuum. It happens within a culture and tends to spread the culture that drives its instruments. Other cultures often use same instruments to push a counterculture or their own values, creating a globalization of a plurality of values rather than a homogeneity of values as might be perfunctorily presumed in relation to the facevalue of the term “globalization”. It is doubtful if the world would ever adopt a particular culture but what is certain is that cultures worldwide will continue to blunt out their edges and synthesise as globalization increasingly makes cultures open to the influences of other cultures.

References

- [1]. Fortes, M. (1936). Culture Contact as a Dynamic Process. An Investigation in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1155239>
- [2]. Ebo, S. (2022). Random Thoughts on the Dynamics of Globalization. <https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol10-issue6/Ser-3/N10068691.pdf>
- [3]. Sen, A. (2002). Does Globalization Equal Westernization? <https://www.theglobalist.com/does-globalization-equal-westernization/>
- [4]. Vogeks, E., Perrin, A. & Anderson, M. (2020). Most Americans think social media sites censor political viewpoints. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/08/19/most-americans-think-social-media-sites-censor-political-viewpoints/>
- [5]. Bigo, D. (2009). Immigration controls and free movement in Europe. *International Review of the Red Cross*. <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r23987.pdf>
- [6]. Mahbubani, K. (2013). Why the United Nations Is Kept Weak. *The Globalist*. <https://www.theglobalist.com/why-the-united-nations-is-kept-weak/>
- [7]. Miyamoto, Y. (2017). Culture and social class. *Current opinion in Psychology*. <https://cclab.psych.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/323/2017/09/Miyamoto2017.pdf>
- [8]. Wittwer, J. (2018). The 10 cultural universals. <https://successacrosscultures.com/2018/05/25/the-10-cultural-universals/>
- [9]. Caprar, D., Devinney, T., Kirkman, B. *et al*. Conceptualizing and measuring culture in international business and management: From challenges to potential solutions. *J Int Bus Stud* **46**, 1011–1027 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2015.33>
- [10]. Mahmoud, M. (2022). Globalization: A phenomenon of cultural dominance. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350792215_Globalization_A_Phenomenon_of_Cultural_Dominance
- [11]. Conrad, A. (2017). The linguistic colonialism of English. *Brown Political Review*. <https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2017/04/linguistic-colonialism-english/>
- [12]. Ebo, S. (2019). A critique of ultra-material empiricism in Kwame Nkrumah. *Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy* (3)1. <https://nigerianjournalsonline.com/index.php/NJP/article/view/134>
- [13]. O’Hair, S. (1995). Cassava. <https://hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/CropFactSheets/cassava.html>
- [14]. Wang, Y. (2020). In China, the ‘Great Firewall’ Is Changing a Generation. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/01/china-great-firewall-changing-generation>
- [15]. Fisher, M. (2015). Yes, North Korea has the internet. Here’s what it looks like. <https://www.vox.com/2014/12/22/7435625/north-korea-internet>
- [16]. Greenberg, A. (2016). The Ingenious Way Iranians Are Using Satellite TV to Beam in Banned Internet. <https://www.wired.com/2016/04/ingenious-way-iranians-using-satellite-tv-beam-banned-data/>