

EFFECT OF GLOBALIZATION ON TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

There has been increasing concern over the years by scholars and workers on how the world is being compressed into a single space now referred to as “global village”. Countries at various stages of development are increasingly forced to take account of an ever expanding interconnection of socio-cultural issues and religions in the management of their national affairs. The states are increasingly losing their capacity to govern and to regulate in an increasing borderless world with an increasing homogenization and domination of traditional African religion. African societies are forced to accepting uniform moral principles of what is right, wrong belief, within their global religions. Scholars and writers often focus on economic aspect of globalization while neglecting other aspects especially its religious aspect. This paper seeks to examine the concepts of globalization, religion, relationship between religion and globalization and the impact of globalization on “African traditional religion”. The methods of description and comparison were used in the research. Secondary source of data was used for the study. Although, globalization results to religious identity, hybridization of religions, peaceful coexistence and cultural revival, it can also lead to failure of hybridity, anti-rationalist faiths and devaluation of African culture and religion.

Keywords: globalization, religion and traditional African religion.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of globalization has been traced back to the period between 1450-1500AD. A period called the mercantilist period and extrudes by the development of trade in the quest for commercial empires to broaden their markets (Scholte, 2005). 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 economic issue. This is why economists still define it from a purely economic perspective. However, it is now clear that although it was triggered by economic motives, it has far reacting effects in all aspects of life especially in the areas of politics, culture, technology and religion.

Africans have always been skeptical on the benefits of globalization in Africa and some of the African commentators of African extraction on the subject have argued that the continent of Africa has not benefited much from the process (globalization) thereby positing that globalization has actually exacerbated the problems of poverty in the continent. In fact some of them blame globalization for practically all that is wrong in Africa (Zaremba, 2016). Recently, emphasis has been on the impact of globalization on African culture. Bryan (2007) observed that the implications of globalization are that the world is turning into the practice of one market economy, one liberal

democracy and ultimately one westernized cultural heritage. Zaremba (2016) warns that African culture has been diluted to the extent that it is atrophying. The concern over the cultural implications of globalization is for good reasons: apart from the fact that the culture has serious business implications, it is the people's identity and also a binding force that holds them together. Consequently, to lose one's culture tantamount to losing one's identity. Alubo (2012) fixtures this when he stated thus "a society cut off from its roots may thrive for a while on its own momentum but eventually it will wither like cut flowers in a vase". This is a pointer to the fact that globalization constitutes a serious to the cultural and religious values of Africa.

The aim of globalization as it is believed is the emergence of one global culture and religion and that the religion that will ultimately emerge as the global religion will be predominantly American (Yankuzo, 2013). That is Americanization; meaning that there is deliberate and concerted effort by America to impose her culture and religion on the rest of the world.

CONCEPT OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization as a concept has been defined by different authors according to their perspective and usage. Globalization was seen as the closer integration of countries and peoples of the world and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge and people across national borders: a process of creating a global market of investment, trade and information through the integration of economic decision making on consumption, investment and savings across the world (Twiss and Bruce 2000). Kosmin and Keysar (2006) defined globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations which works distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. Ritzer (2008) defined globalization as the spread of worldwide practices, relations, consciousness and organization of social life. Globalization can be defined as a coalescence of varied transnational processes and domestic structures, allowing the economy, politics, culture and ideology of one country to penetrate another. The chain of casualty runs from the spatial reorganization of production to international trade and to the integration of financial market.

Globalization therefore has a multidimensional process whereby cultural economic and political relations increasingly take a global basis. It involves many agents or actors that are instrumental or direct players in the process. These actors/agents according to (Ritzer 2008) include transnational corporations, the multilateral institutions like World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Health Organization and the media. It is the multifaceted nature of globalization that makes it perhaps the most important pervasive phenomenon facing humanity. Western and non western globalization are like an uncontrollable wildfire, it has started and nobody knows where it is taking us, what is evident is that no person, family, religion and society is immune to it. (Yankuzo, 2013). It is therefore shaping our society, labour markets and its pattern of inequality, its consumption and its health as well as its political stability and legitimacy. Globalization is a reality for all because every part of the world is faced with no any option but to live in a global village.

CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGION

Religion is a fundamental, perhaps the most important influence in the life of most Africans, yet its essential principles are too often unknown to foreigners who thus make themselves constantly liable to misunderstand the African world view and beliefs. Religion manifests in every aspect of the life of Africans and it cannot be studied in isolation. Its study has to go hand in hand with the study of the people who practice the religion.

Traditional African religion is the indigenous religious belief and practice of the Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans of which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans (Moreira, 2014). Through modern changes, the traditional religion cannot remain intact but it is by no means extinct. The adherents of the indigenous religion are very conservative, resisting the influence of modernism heralded by the colonial era, including the introduction of Islam, Christianity, Western education and improved medical facilities. Generally, these traditions are oral rather than scriptural and include belief in supreme creators, veneration of the dead and use of magic and traditional medicine (Alubo, 2012).

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

Religion and globalization are like two Siamese twins that involve two basic possibilities; religious responses to globalization and religious interpretation of globalization. Many religious commentators understand globalization as economic, imperialistic and homogeneous process (Scholte, 2005). They share the economic/political perspective evaluating globalization as anywhere from a threatening challenge to the manifestation of evil in the world. Religion and globalization persistently engage in a flexible relationship, in which the former relies on the latter in order to thrive and flourish while at the same time challenging globalization. In many respects, globalization in the segment of the literature is a successor term for what used to be censured as the capitalist system. This is why (Zaremba, 2016) said that “globalization is a threat to religion and religion is the greatest resistance to globalization”. Accordingly, globalization results in religion’s violence and the unjust oppression of the majority of people around the world. For instance, between 1980-1995 in the world, there were 72 civil wars (ethnic, national, religious and racial grounds), as well as another type of war (state against state). This continued after the 1995 (aggression in Yugoslavia in 1999, civil war in Angola, Liberia, Sudan and bloody ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and military intervention in Afghanistan), (Zaremba, 2016). It threatens local and indigenous cultures and religions, imposing a particularly burden on women. For example, Moreira (2014), said that “The colonialists came with the belief that women were to remain creatures of the private domain. Women were to preoccupy themselves with domestic issues and leave the ‘real work’ of ruling and running the nation in terms of politics and economics in particular to the men. The role and position of the pre-colonial African women did not conform to this concept of women. Hence, the implementation of policies seated in this myopic perception of women led to the erosion of women’s position in society”. This was the socialization that African society had to adopt.

Another segment of both the religiously inspired and the secular literature see a much closer relation between globalization and religion, it is said that religion has essential role in shaping globalization (Liman & Onyetube, 2013). Globalization is one of the forces that have in the past been instrumental in binding different regions of the world together. With globalization, religious institutions such as Christianity, Islam and Hindu have spread throughout the world. (Moreira, 2014)

EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Globalization has actually made much impact on African traditional religion both positively and negatively. These impacts have been analyzed critically below

POSITIVE IMPACT

- 1. Religious revival:** Globalization has played a tremendous role in providing a context for the current considerable revival and resurgence of different religions. Today most religions are no longer relegated to the few countries where they began. They have in fact spread all over the globe through globalization. This is why Scholte (2005) said that accelerated globalization of recent times has no doubt enabled co-religionists across the planet to have greater direct contact with one another. Global communication, global organizations, global finance etc have allowed ideas of the transworld Umma (Muslim community) and the Universal Christian Churches to be given concrete shape as never before (Ritzer, 2008).
- 2. Source of identity:** being a source of identity and pride, religion has always been promoted by its adherents from one part of the globe to another, thereby making it to be embraced by as many people as possible. Muslims for instance, aspire to establish the Umma (a community of Islamic believers). Having paved way for religions to come in contact with each other and provided a context for them to flourish. Globalization has brought different religions to a stage of competition and conflicts. Globalization transforms generic into world system of competing and conflicting religions. The process of institutional specialization has transformed local, diverse and fragmented cultural practices into recognizable system of religion (liman and Onyetube, 2013).
- 3. Globalization as a source of peaceful coexistence:** globalization has impacted positively in the unity of people's culture, religion and political resources in African societies. People who migrate from one part of the world to another in search of a better life often depend on their religion and their religious institutions to address an array of attendant problems. Religion can furnish them with a strong sense of identity and integrity in a situation where they may find themselves strangers. Churches, Temples, Mosques, and Synagogues can serve as a home away from home where one can speak ones language, eat ones food, congregate with people who shares ones situation and even attain a measure of status that one is denied in the new host society. In fact globalization engenders greater religious tolerance across areas such as politics, economics and society. (Kosmin and Keysar, 2006). Stating further, these authors insist that "globalization brings a culture of pluralism", meaning a religion with overlapping but distinctive ethnic and interests interact with one another. Religious organizations in African continent have been involved in

interreligious dialogue. The parliament of the world's Religions of 1993, first conveyed during the 1893 Chicago World Exhibit, brought the world's diverse faith traditions from African indigenous religion, the major religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), to any form of faith that would agree to civil dialogue through mutual encounter to use their similar values and discuss world affairs. (Twiss and Bruce, 2000)

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Azzonzi (2013) outlined the negative effects of globalization on African traditional religion as follows:

1. Failure of hybridity: globalization makes religions more conscious of themselves as being world religion, reinforcing their respective specific identities. These identities get strengthened by globalization and cannot in any way intermingle or hybridize since religions have distinct internal structures, their connections to different cultures and their inclusions of different worshiping ways and practices, as the case with Islam and Christianity may be. These two religions contradict and appear incompatible with each other; such religion cannot become hybridized or homogenized as it is claimed, though they always come in contact. Such religions tend to as a result be more inclined towards clashes and competition since globalization is said to bring the world cultures, identities and religions in direct contact with one another, thereby making them hybrid (Mittleman, 1997).

2. Anti-rationalist faiths: globalization is associated with an American or a western project with Americanization and westernization. The hegemony exerted by these two processes, particularly on the third world countries, makes religion related cultures and identities take offensive measures to protect themselves. In this respect, Islam takes caution and resists the encroachment of globalization forces on its cultures and livelihoods in many ways. In fact, it has been difficult for religion to cope with values that accompany globalization like liberalism, consumerism, rationalism etc. Such phenomena advocate scientism and secularism (Moreira, 2014).

Scholte (2005) equates rationalism with globalization and considers religions as anti rationalist. It can be deduced that religion is anti globalization. In fact Muslim faithful have stressed that globalization results to lose morals as seen in western life.

3. Hybridization effect: Globalization according to many scholars is aimed at hybridization of the world cultures around the pattern of the western culture, and since it entails liberal values and norms, religion (particularly Islam) constitutes a challenge to it. This is because Islamic norms and values are incompatible with the liberal value of globalization. Globalization due to the advent of communication and transportation technology and the roles played by the media has contributed to the deterioration of the geographical spaces and boundaries particularly in African society. This has resulted apparently in making the world a small village where people, culture and identities come in face to face contact every day. (Azzonzi, 2013)

4. Devaluation of African culture and religion: just before the rapid widespread of western imperialism and contemporary globalization, there was good understanding, unity and feeling of oneness among traditional African families. Alubo (2012) maintained "that the relationship among

siblings in African culture was generally very cordial and encourages the development of the feeling of oneness and members were conceived as a team, working together for the welfare and prosperity of the family”. Interdependence was stressed and the welfare of all supersedes the welfare and interest of the individual. In fact traditional African societies were well built, well fed, well dressed and well to do based on their customs and traditions. The influx of western imperialism into Africa changes the African social structure and pattern of family life. (Scholte, 2005). The western societies were ethnocentric in their belief that African cultural traditions are inferior and primitive and should be de-emphasized. And that still, many Africans have it somewhere at the back of their mind that the more their buildings, music, dressing and even food appear western, the more civilized they become. To be civilized mean to eat, think, walk and speak like Europeans and Americans, which is simply cultural imperialism and globalization. This is why Zaremba (2016) noted that the impact of globalization is demonstrated in situation where the socio-cultural organization of African societies such as kinship, community organization etc that used to bind members together were weakened by the forces of globalization.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is no doubt that globalization as a process of integration has made positive impacts on traditional African religion. In spite of these positive impacts on religion such as hybridization, source of identity and religious revival, globalization can be said to have exacerbated poverty in Africa. In fact globalization has resulted to loss of cultural identity due to hybridization effect. Though western civilization has many good things to appreciate, overemphasis on it at the detriment of African Traditional religion is not good for our developmental derive, to neglect African cultural heritage is to abandon a good chunk of the criteria that determine Africa’s wholeness and originality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings of the work, it is pertinent to make the recommendations:

Since the positive influence of globalization on African traditional religion is more pervasive than the negative effect, African society should adopt globalization as a means of integration in all spheres of their live.

Since globalization is an agent of unity and hybridization of different African religions, there is need therefore for proper education and orientation on the traditional African religion in the continent. To be educated is to be intellectually, morally, physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually as well as culturally balanced.

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