Globalization Challenges and Change Factors in the Religions of Africa: The Nigerian Experience

Ngozi N. Iheanacho

Introduction

Social change and human transformation are constant variables in the annals of African history and existence. During the pre-colonial period, before 1884, there existed prominent states, political organizations and vibrant societies and kingdoms – band societies, lineage systems, chiefdom and feudal organizations, stateless, and state societies. There was rise and fall of great empires, such as Malle, Songhai, Kanem-Borno, Benin, Ashanti, Oyo etc. Within the middle of the fifteenth (15th) century and the end of nineteenth (19th) century, the international community accepted human trade as legitimate. Slave trade had devastating impact on African societies and human transformation, as humans in this period were conceived as commodities. Nigeria was one of the notable slave market societies in Africa.

African societies' contact with Europeans transformed the pre-colonial socio-political organizations into colonial territories, between 1884 and 1951. At this stage, the hitherto independent states and stateless societies were subjected to foreign rule, and *ipso facto* loss of sovereignty. The 1884 partition of African states under the platform of the Berlin Conference gave legitimacy to the unmitigated European incursion and subsequent alteration of the cohesive political, social, and religious societies of Africa to their interest, and at the expense of the indigenous values of the people. Each colonial power used its home country's ideology and value systems as model to administer their new found colonies. Consequently, African states were 'transformed' into pseudo cultures of Europe, especially of Britain, Germany, France, Portugal etc. Africans were brainwashed in white ideology. Consequently, they lost self confidence and remained in perpetual quest for foreign things. Many African countries' name not only changed, but had appellations attached to such names to depict country ownership, e.g. Belgian – Congo etc. The little contribution of colonialism to human transformation was insignificant to its legacies of economic exploitation, environmental degradation, social dependencies, and foundation for ethnic conflicts, which still hold the people sway in this age.

However, the stages of African transformation are subsumed within the framework of changing world-systems. World-system is a theory in which individual societies are viewed, not as autonomous, but as inserted into the operation of a larger network. It is this network which world-system theorists and scholars like Wallerstein (1974), acclaimed to be the proper unit of analysis through which the fate of individual societies are being determined, principally by their involvement in the world-system as a whole. This is a type of evolution which defines some general directional trend in history. Some countries' participation in the world-system has brought the continent the realities of

decolonization – modernization, which aim at managing colonial legacies and modernizing its institutions and practices to suit the capitalist world system in which the countries must exist. In another approach towards better human transformation is the idea of African renaissance – the "rebirth" of the "original" African economic, social and political liberties that had been eradicated during the colonial period and somehow resuscitated during the early independent stage of African societies. The checkered and staggering transformation trend in Africa created and sustain social distance in human development. This social state of humans in Africa is constantly promoted by international issues and phenomenon, up till the present time globalization is taking its toll on African countries, like Nigeria.

Features and Trend of Globalization
Currently, one of the main factors of society and human transformation is premised on the concept of globalization. Globalization is characterized by integration of economies as a result of expansion, diversification and deepening of commerce and financial links, technology and information exchange, and free movement of people. From the lense of globalization, the entire world is conceived as a single market – one large and unified market, free for all comers and competitors. This is the premise of liberal economic policies currently eulogized in Nigeria, and elsewhere. No doubt, such system afford players – consumers and producers greater opportunity for choices, and low cost. This is because the system is driven by high competition. It is the unrestricted market policies and forces that have eroded the spirit of African socialism, and communal values. The values that are concomitants of globalization are capitalism and competition, with the revolution in information technology as its main driver. The appreciable impacts in information technology – innovations and transfer, blow the wave of globalization phenomenon across the world.

In travel and tourism, we equally observe the impact of globalization. People now travel with ease. There are ready information and immigration guide of different parts of the world. Many people travel for business purposes, others for leisure, health or for other sundry reasons. Some countries' main economic base is even on tourism. This is the case of Egypt, etc.

Labour migration equally account for significant impact of globalization and human transformation. In its inbound and outbound dimensions, it brings about changes in society and human development. Consider the numerical strength, and the globalization implication of people, especially the young, who crave for visa lottery of different countries of the world. The trend of movement from the less developed nations to the developed is another teething problem of globalization. Globalization has led to the influx of migrants into political entities, including illegal migrants – choking up political systems to the point of inability to control and manage. Economic and political groupings operating in the global system undermine territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, under a neo-liberal ideology that, Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory called "savage capitalism" – a type of capitalism which assumes almost a religious character, as greed becomes a virtue, competition a

commandment, and profit a sign of salvation. In the system, dissenters are dismissed as non-believers at best, and hereties at worst, (Henriot 1998:6).

In the main, globalization has assumed the feature of distinguishing factor in international social stratification of the world today. Globalization wears a feature and phenomenon of war of space, in which those who are mobile with potentials of easy movement throughout the world win, creating meaning and value for themselves. The scenario offer a flow of unending choices, and by implication, unending risks, danger and troubles. Consequently, the world is in continuous transformation and change, and *ipso facto* problematic factors to cope with, (Ritzer 2008:578-579).

Cultural globalization is a major perspective of transformation in African countries, like Nigeria. The easy contact and intercultural communication underlying globalization usher in new cultural elements such as language, technology, music, ideology, belief, food, clothing, etc. in our societies. All these culminate into new perception, life style and alteration in a people's worldview, individual aspiration, personality formation, and indeed the transformation of society, different from what it was before. Spotlight of the implications of this aspect of globalization in Africa vis-à-vis Nigeria is the pre-occupation of the subsequent section of our essay.

Globalization, Culture and Religious Challenges

As a paradigm shift and emphasis on the gamut of observable cultural globalization, we turn attention to operationalizing the challenges and change factors which the variables and trend of globalization have brought to bear on the religions of Africa. Here the religions of Africa is referred to as Islam, Christianity and African indigenous religion. Although, Islam and Christianity are imported traditions, but their propagation, acceptance and flourish justify such perception and recognition. Islam and Christianity are recognized as indigenous to African countries, like Nigeria because they have been part of any known written history of Africa, (see Dopamu P.A. 2000:xvii).

Religion is a paradigm of culture and cultural globalization. According to Huntington (in Ritzer 2008:581), world civilization has passed three phases and relationships till about 1990. But given the collapse of communism, the main contentions and controversies in the world now revolve around religion and culture – a fundamental aspect of living in which cultural globalization has brought significant alteration into African societies, like Nigeria. Globalization in this dimension of Nigeria's life has changed events and phenomena under which the religious traditions that flourish amongst the people are enmeshed. Old practices and belief systems are disappearing or perceived to be obsolete, while new patterns are favoured and embraced. The scenario is enhanced by the sustained and increasing integration, interconnectedness and interdependence of different societies around the world, under the phenomenon of globalization. Hence, no society or part of the world is seen as separate or standing out alone.

Cultural globalization is currently challenging, bringing about rapid and radical religious change, and societal transformation from different aspects of our social system. Such phenomenon has induced changes in human perception

of the environment and life, new ways of thought – that are direct onslaught on traditional worldviews, aspirations and value systems. Consequently, there are question puzzles: is globalization aiming at homogenous culture in the world i.e. 'global village'?, or will it end up crystallizing cultural diversity traits and consciousness of culture, and value differences in parts of the world?

The variables of globalization are impacting effectively on the religion and cultures of the world, in all perspectives. The process of interconnectivity, as a vehicle of globalization makes it possible that what obtains in one parts of the world, including social movements are rapidly communicated to other parts. By this means, globalization has induced and transmitted many socio-cultural changes, and sundry human development ideologies responsible for religious change, the world over. Many Western societies now have at one end, originally, religious buildings and institutions converted into warehouses, while at the other end of the city, foreign religions which were hitherto alien to the societies are flourishing. In the main, globalization accelerators – internet, television, telephone and other facilities of the information revolution age expose all peoples of the world to new cultures, and religious practices. But for specificity, we narrowed the phenomenon of globalization and its impact in Nigeria's religious landscape.

Globalization phenomenon takes premise from the transformation of our traditional societies – from the simple state of cultural homogeneity and agrarian life, with sacred oriented leadership and institutions, to a new world order characterized by new politico-economic world system. The surge of globalization's capitalist impulse stamped its dominant influence in the world, following the decline of communist power. Therefrom, the variables of globalization, like high level of individual initiative, politico-economic groupings, competition, and free enterprise which it ushered into African societies like Nigeria have devastating effect on traditional mode of production, communal living and the underpinning corporate religious responsibilities that are concomitants of the system. The trend of globalization phenomenon, especially of its interconnectivity of societies and cultures of the world through communication technology, pose challenge to the religions of Africa. One of the challenge here is that the sanctity and conservativeness of our religions can no longer be safeguarded. Hence the unmitigated influx of new cultural patterns and religious practices obstruct the exclusivity of the peoples' religious beliefs and practices. On the individual level, many Africans now question with ease, their traditional religious practices, with a view to accepting new found secular, and capitalist ideologies of globalization or 'diluted' religious practices which are easily amenable to capitalist spirit.

The trend of capitalism as the soul variable of globalization is even more profound in Christianity, and Islam. These religions have equally responded to the materialist spirit of globalization, by crystallizing positive disposition, and preaching concerning money as a means of attaining human transformation, and meeting human needs, and salvation here on earth. Simple life style, and less interest in things of material value, which were hitherto ideal and fundamental religious teachings of Islam, and Christianity are fast

disappearing for preachings oriented in the capitalist ideals of globalization. Instead of accepting poverty, Nigerian Christians, and Islamic faithfuls are exhorted to doggedly crave for wealth, as exploiting and sharing in the material resources of the world is perceived, and renascently interpreted in terms of divine blessing and gift for God's children to enjoy. The only difference from the secular spirit is that Islamic, and Christian faithfuls are exhorted to crave for wealth devoid of fraudulent, and violent means. Globalization forces have pushed the religions to align their beliefs and practices to changing world order, driven by capitalist indices. The trend also lead to change in the life of the human players. Many Nigerian faithfuls of Islam, and Christianity flout the teachings against fraudulent cravings. Yet, when they acquire wealth through foul means, they are not scolded, but allowed to celebrate their exploit in the house of God. Consequently, wealth acquisition is conceived to be a divine index, and symbol of recognition, legitimacy, and earthly fulfillment.

Globalization is taking negative toll on indigenous African knowledge and skill. Many Nigerian languages, and those of many other African societies have been predicted to be on the part of extinction. We are meant to understand the discrimination of African indigenous languages not being global, and not means of international transaction and communication. While we accept the benefits Western languages bring to us, we are however, moved to wander whether our indigenous languages are totally irrelevant and useless to the present trend of human development and transformation, (Ikeme 1999:18). With the globalization facilitated indigenous knowledge loss, the peoples' indigenous religious practices are on the part of decline and extinction, as both traditional knowledge, local languages and religion are rapped up together in Africa, and moreso in Nigeria. The loss of one is the loss of the others. That is, the loss of indigenous knowledge, and the loss of indigenous language is the loss of African traditional religious language. In recent time UNESCO has lamented that such loss lead to loss of humanity's intangible heritage. In no part of the world is this challenge more serious than Nigeria, and other African societies.

Cultural knowledge obliteration pose further challenge, as it cause strain to the values of community life, solidarity and corporate existence, for which Africans are known. Rather than such heritage passed on easily to the young, the values are being replaced by the individual spirit, and cut throat competition of the capitalist propelled global system.

The 'push and pull' factors of globalization – travel and tourism, pose another dimension of challenge and problem to African religions, and the human players. Globalization enhance urban social system which challenge traditional societies, religious practices, and institutions, given the resultant population density, changing status, heterogeneous culture, and some degree of alienation it ushers into the society. At the individual level, people find themselves in different social settings and value system, which redefine their self concept and image, different from those of their traditional societies, and religion. Again, the complexities of globalization enhanced urban life also facilitate proportionate complex problems for religious faithfuls and their clerics: such as mixed marriages and divorce, childlessness and adoption, labour migration of married

people, career and family responsibilities etc. All these impact on the personality formation and transformation of Nigerian societies, and human development.

Interreligious dialogue is another dimension of cultural globalization, challenging the sanctity of African religions. Through the information revolution of the new world system intercultural contact is promoted. Through such interreligious forum, and communication technologies, a gamut of foreign religious ideas are cross exchanged. Consciously or unconsciously many of such ideas and practices are adopted, incorporated and internalized in a host culture and religion. This type of cultural borrowing is moreso in West African societies like Nigeria, where the people are held sway by things foreign. Thus, world parliament of religions was held in 1893 in Chicago; in 1986, in Asisi Italy under the auspices of Pope John Paul II; in 1990 it was in Moscow, bringing government leaders, scientists and religious leaders together to work towards saving the environment. Yet, there are periodic intra-religious Conferences, such as those of World Council of Churches (WCC), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) etc. Globalization is in process in the frequent meetings held by leaders and representatives of different religions, who come together to discuss global issues, from time-to-time. Religions have made global issues a perspective concern of their faiths. In Nigeria, one other feature of this globalizing effect on religion is made manifest in Godianism, a modified paradigm of Nigeria's indigenous religion. Godianism equally attend World Parliament of religions through its leader, Onyioha. As Godianism exports traditional religious ideas, it also bring home foreign ideas to bear on the indigenous religion. Godianism is a Nigerian example of religious syncretism, facilitated by cultural globalization. Consequently, it has lost the touch of original cultural identity of the people, and caught up in legitimacy problems, (see Nwala in Onunwa 1990:33).

The global fact of crystallizing women's right, from the underlying philosophy of liberalization, increased choices, and competition is another challenge and change factor to African religions. The variables of globalization promote women's liberation from oppression, and inequality in social location, and life chances, towards redressing the obstacles posed to women's transformation and development, by the traditions of the world. In this case, no part of the world that is a major spotlight than Africa, vis-à-vis Nigeria where traditional institutions are profoundly holding people sway. The trend to better the lot of women has taken significant toll on religions in the world. In Judaism, women in the Reformed and Conservative branches are ordained for sacerdotal roles. In Buddhism, Nuns are agitating for equal rights and voice with the Monks. In the Shinto derived new religious movements, and the Christian science, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican Churches entrust church leadership to women, to the status of bishop. The global trend for women's right has equally led to new translations of the sacred literature of various religions, to emphasize gender neutrality of God in theistic religions, (Molloy 2002:498-500).

Nigeria is equally gripped by the force of global opinion on women. In traditional religion, women are questioning customs and practices which they

allege marginalize and dehumanize them. The usual areas of conflict are: marriage practices, patriarchal systems of inheritance, widowhood institution and its cohort practices etc. Agitations arising from such areas pose serious challenge and problems to traditional societies, and religion. Hence, many religious practices are flouted by the women. Consequently, threatening signs of polarizing the societies along male-female divide loom large. Examination of the implications of such aberration in the traditional worldview, and factors of social order pose adjustment and remedial problems to the people's ontological balance and harmony.

In Christianity, the underpinning gender ideologies of globalization have enhanced women's participation and role in their churches. Many Nigerian women are 'New Church' founders and leaders, with enviable numerical strength of followership. In the orthodox or main line churches, Nigerian women are not quiet recipients of men's leadership initiatives. They are still agitating steadily to be ordained priests, to enable them occupy more exalted and prestigious positions in the church hierarchy.

In Islam global ideas about women are equally making Nigerian women to raise critical questions over their status, and the human development implications. Thy now organize themselves in groups and bodies with the common objective of improving the lot of Muslim women. They challenge such practices as Purdah, early marriage, girl child discrimination in formal education etc. These challenges pose ideological conflict between the fundamentalists and conservative practices of the faith, on the one hand, and global women advancement ideologies.

The global trend in the quest for women's right in religion is another dimension of teething problems and challenge to our religions. In many respects the agitation has led to the re-examination and redefinition of human sexuality. The scientific advance in contraceptive and medical break-through in the reproductive system have led to the conception that sex is not all necessarily for human procreation, but for intimacy, pleasure, self-expression, and self understanding. This renascent awareness has led to many religious' faithfuls questioning the various religious teachings and ethics on sexuality. Followers agitate for their religions change of position against the background of such global awareness on sexuality. Loss of virginity is now being tolerated in traditional religious societies, while divorce is common in churches these days. Gay marriage is yet another dimension of the challenges which the wave of globalization have posed to religions in Africa. The wave of such practice is gradually increasing its tempo as a major problem to cope with in this age. Sexual related matters that were given traditional conception and definition no longer hold.

Many hopeless fertility cases that were handled spiritually in African religions are now treated by modern medicine. Fertility drugs and in vitro fertilization are two major technologies of improved conception. But the procedures are expensive, making it affordable only to the rich. This equally add to the feeling of the people that wealth is of utmost importance to human, as against spirituality, and *ipso facto* decline in religious flourish. The global

advance in reproductive medicine now make birth control measures easily affordable and administered. Contrarily, this negates the Traditional religion, Christian, and Islamic common belief that the number of children a woman bears is divinely determined. There is the outright termination of pregnancy, global organ traffic, market and transplant, genetic engineering, semen bank, and cloning. The global market on human, and obliteration of natural human incarnation channel is inimical to the teachings of African traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity.

Globalization is a concomitant of the revolution in information technology. It is the devices and networks – micro-electronic technologies, such as celephone, the internet, and e-mail innovations in communication that drive globalization, helping to reduce the barriers of physical distance and contact, (Ikeme 1999:2). This unfettered information passage of globalization give different understanding of the religious worldview of Africans, replacing, and eulogizing global trends that are alien to the people. Although, the technological advancement in communication give opportunity for tele-evangelism, and consequently offer new choices in human development and transformation of society. But many of the choices are divergent to traditional, and orthodox religions. The global trend has continued to foster 'irreligious persons', and obliteration of sacred order. The phenomenon encourage secularism, and giving religious interpretation to 'other' life issues and yearning. In the global age, Nigerians are increasingly taking to secular life – while traditional religious worldview continue to decline in influence. People now look at life issues and phenomena from experience, and ideas in this world, no longer from divine revelation, or from a world beyond the physical, or from religious authorities or religious traditions, (Molloy 2002:508). As advancement in science and technology continue to accelerate globalization, as its concomitant, religion will continue to loose its grip, while the secular vision of life continues to flourish. Consequently, Nigerian societies now have agnostics in traditional religion. Many of the people now crave for profound life in globalization's spirit of competition and free market, without reference to God or other spiritual beings. Both scientific and theoretical agnostics in Africa, and Nigeria in particular are beginning to jettison, or even replace traditional theistic religious beliefs and practices of their indigenous culture. In effect, the trend usher in different paradigm of human transformation and personality formation, alien to the people.

The spirit of openness, free market, and competition that are features of globalization have exposed African environment to degradation. In the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, ecological and biodiversity loss, via intense oil exploitation to meet global market forces and demand have defiled the area with its incessant oil spillage, pipeline explosion, gas emission, and flaring. These have brought severe hardship to the people, changed their ideology and perception of life. The people's religious institutions and practices are threatened, as sacred groves, creeks, rivers and shrines that adorn the places are devastated. The loss of these sacred heritage have also led to the people's loss of identity, and traditional perception, definition of life, and view of the world, and

ipso facto loss of religious and cultural identity and legacies. The implication is that globalization is a negation of the principles of sustainable development – which emphasis is on ensuring that the cravings, and the exploitation of today, in the process of development does not jeopardize the chances of generations yet unborn. That is, the integration of the needs of the weak, the unborn, and environmental friendliness in all human development and adaptation activities. Contrarily, the liberalization idea of globalization concerning the environment is that the market should be left free, on the belief that it would enhance human development and growth, and that increased resources will be ploughed back for environmental protection. Therefore, in an integrated global system, the rate and quality of resources outflow from Nigeria and other African countries is bound to grow, and *ipso facto*, the pace of consequent ecological degradation, while price of the natural resources continue to fall, and unstable in increase. As the resource base erodes rapidly, so will Africa's living standards, (Uzonwanne 1999; David 1997).

The global trend of New Religious Movements (NRM) has increased the problem of globalization on African religions. Although the flourish of NRM's is a global fact, its origin is not traceable to Africa, especially Nigeria. In America it started with the Apocalyptic and millenarian Movements in the mid 9th Century, led by William Miller. Since then a plethora of other movements have emerged, and are exported to other parts of the world in the phenomenon of globalization. In the East, NRM's were already triving in China and India as far as 18th Century. But NRM's took a different dimension in the socio-political life the region from the following century, with increasing numerical strength. Thus, the Post – 1850 religious Movements reflect the impact of the West and Western forms of political, economic, and cultural imperialism. From the 19th century awards, the newly industrialized and expansionism West advance into Asia for God, glory and gold. Western nations secure in their sense of political, military, economic, and cultural impropriety and armed with either an expansionist Protestant Evangelical faith or an equally expansionist Catholicism. This social challenge is more profound in China, and Japan, (Merriam-Webster 1999:799-807).

In Nigeria, the challenge and radical change brought by NRM's as a paradigm of globalization portend danger for the subsistence of indigenous religions and cultural values. NRM's have found Nigerian soil a fertile ground to flourish. They exist as concomitants of social change, modernity, cultural pluralism, the scientific thought pattern of life, and currently the globalization trend of world systems. Most of their activities are onslaughts on indigenous religion, and cultural indilutions. They condemn, and even destroy the institutions. Yet, many of the NRM's engage in practices which suggest a vicious take-over of indigenous religious practices as in ritual prediction (divination), pneumatological beliefs and healing methods. These new approaches to traditional systems bring about syncretic features into indigenous religious traditions, obliterate old customs, pose identity problems, and erode the religious glue which hold traditional societies together.

Conclusion

Globalization wave is sweeping across nations and cultural boundaries. Hence African countries like Nigeria are not destitute of the phenomenon. In all spheres of life and human endeavour, and the transformation of society, globalization is in process in Nigeria. However, one facet of the world system which is taking much toll on the people is the religious, and cultural perspective. The challenge and change factors which follow this aspect of globalization is profound in Nigeria society, and other African countries. This is because culture in countries like Nigeria embrace everything, and all are rapped up and consummated in religious perception and aura, especially in the traditional religious system.

The feature of interconnectivity, relations and integration in globalization, expose the people to alien cultures and traditions, values, ideologies, uncritical cultural borrowing, and religious syncretism. All these challenge and cause strain to indigenous value system and traditions. The free market principles, spirit of competition and of capitalism which the world system crystallize lead to aberasive and problematic shift in Christian, and Islamic teachings and traditions. Again, it encourage environmental degradation and *ipso facto*, the decline of the religious values which are associated with certain environmental features and ecological resources. These obliterate the religious stability, and grip of the societies, hence constituting profound challenges, and laying foundation for problematic changes in the religions of the people.

Yes, no part of the world can affectively shun the wave of globalization, given that it is a universal phenomenon. But it is the position of this paper that globalization variables, and the effects can be checked and manages. Thus, the products of globalization would be critically assessed from time – to – time. This strategy will allow for a comparative analysis and juxtaposition of the incoming variables and products with the already existing values, and cultural patterns that makes meaning to the people. By so doing, the 'rich and good substance' of our religious and cultural heritage would not be completely lost to globalization trend.

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