

ECOSYNTHESIZING THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: IMPERATIVES FROM WOLE SOYINKA AND IYORWUESE HAGHER

By

Joel A. Fanyam
&
Richard K. Gbilekaa

Abstract

The Nigerian society has paraded a myriad of problems owing to globalization which has threatened the disappearance of the Nigerian cultures and values leading to a chaotic and bizarre physical, economic as well as social environment. Whereas the benefactors of this trend are the world economic powers, whose policies and activities are poised to suppressing Nigeria's economic development; Dramatists have joined other experts in questioning the environmental conditions of the country and the economic strength in competing in the global world. The summary is that Nigeria has been on the losing ends in the global society. To salvage this situation is the continuous literary construction on the importance of the Nigerian cultures and values against the foreign invasions for the purpose of preservation, education and sales in the global market. Two Nigerian plays are employed as paradigms in this exercise.

Introduction

In retrospect, the decades of the 1960's and 70's will probably be regarded as a major watershed in the reconstruction of the experiences of peoples of African descent in the New World. (Uya 1).

There is perhaps no better way to express globalization than the "New World". Since a period of over 25 years after the Nigerian Civil War and the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), to cater for the development of Nigeria along with its western counterparts, lots of issues have come on stage to decide the fate of the nation. These issues are however centered on assumed people oriented programmes and projects that have been embarked upon by various regimes or governments that have ruled the country for over this period. The governments have embarked on programmes costing millions or billions of naira aimed at reviving the fledgling agricultural sector, petroleum or energy sector, transport and educational sectors without conclusion. Every year Ministers say that by next year's budget there will be huge increases in the federal allocation to these sectors to ameliorate or solve their dismal performances but these resources end up in peoples pockets where a huge chunk of it, is pushed to the European banks rather than the said sectors.

Nigerian experts across different disciplines have been questioning with grave reservations about how the nation is ruined by the leaders at the helm of affairs. Emphases have also been so much placed on foreign assistance. Instead of looking inward on the problems of the country, there has been concerting efforts at shifting the problems to other countries by collecting loans that cannot be adequately serviced in time thereby, handing over the country to the deciding gavel or under the mercy of the debtors. Moreover, a lot of lip service is displayed to the Nigerian populace.

These factors opened Nigeria up for many benefactors

globally in sometimes negative ways and little positive ways. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan collected by the Nigerian government in 1986, for instance enslaved Nigeria economically until by 2006 when the loan was wavered by the World Bank. The loan was collected to service key sectors of Nigerian economy but nothing was done in respect to that; regrettably, little monies that was generated internally that could have been used for other purpose was channeled to service the debt in unreasonable proportion.

Furthermore, since so much emphasis is laid on foreign assistance, Nigerians are incapable of doing anything except those in western countries. Construction works goes to foreign companies, food processing industries, oil companies etc. Virtually all economic sectors come under the control of foreigners. To worsen matters, educational experts leave the shores of Nigeria for greener pastures in the western countries, thus creating a gap in Nigeria but rather building and enhancing technological growth in the West. Obafemi affirms this when he said that,

it is true, of course that an impressive number of third world and African intellectuals have moved, for all sorts of reasons, to western academe, and are making an impact. Indeed, in the field of science and technology, these intellectuals are making noticeable contribution. In the field of humanities, especially literature and creative literary production, some of the brightest and best writers and intellectuals of Africa are in Europe and the United States...(47)

Children belonging to the upper class in Nigeria seek for

admission in foreign lands and leave the country in numbers. The Nigerian government herself has shifted her attention from the agricultural sector which once constituted the strength of the country to the oil sector which was experiencing boom. Incidentally, very serious global politics in Nigeria started in the oil sector. People made so much money from the oil companies, foreign investors became only but more interested in oil production little or no attention paid to the environmental degradation of the areas where they were trading. Hostilities started emerging especially in the oil producing areas where the inhabitants started feeling cheated of their resources. Meanwhile, the foreign companies made huge economic gains and returned little to the country. With the upsurge of crises in the Niger Delta oil producing region, this raised more concern and foreign media reports about insecurity in the country, thereby painting the nation black but neglecting the selfish interest of foreign countries in the global world.

At the moment, Nigeria is classified as a nation of thieves and kidnappers because of the selfish and greedy nature of her leaders who were/are supported by the foreign nations who accept(ed) huge monies from them into their foreign accounts, who also allow(ed) them own companies and large houses. Nigeria is a bribery and corrupt country because of the selfish interest of foreigners who first made away with Nigerian resources through bribery in the name of incentives. All these factors and trends were allowed to eat deep into Nigerians for the interest of the Nigerian foreign counterparts.

However, with the wake of Nigerian literature challenging these interests, countering marginalization and alienation in the discourses of underdevelopment all over Nigeria in the 21st century, a conscious spirit has been build to examine globalizational effects and consequences through participation on the side of the investors and benefactors (those assisting and those assisted). We shall here consider some few Nigerian plays in synthesizing these issues.

Conceptualizing Globalization and Ecosynthesis

There are different views to the concept of globalization but we shall look at it from the context of this paper. On this note, globalization can be coined as the interaction and movement of internal and external communities of nations in such a way that they can influence, impact or affect one another for personal, group, national, international or global benefits either in substance or space, psychological or social, through technological or traditional cultural means. Obafemi captured such impact when he said that:

In the globalizing world, the African civilization is beset with a real danger of marginalization, or, at best, abnegation and renunciation, when what it requires is re-affirmation, and revalidation. ...especially of the historical and literary disciplines, is an engagement in rigorous reconstruction of the essence of the continent's identify, in a world, which dashes toward a shrinking universalism. He/she requires also to cognize the state of crisis of consciousness and awareness, which it presently experiences, to finally, provide illumination, enlightenment and ethical perspectives and options for coping in a postcolonial, global world (47–48).

Meanwhile, the advanced countries interest is usually contrary to this. The intention of the Western countries especially the World powers is to maintain their dominance and build prestige around their territories as the centers of control in the world, so that, other countries can be suppressed and asked to adjust their policies to suit their own interests and become subordinates of their own policies. On this stand too, there are no problems or wrongs seen to be committed on the part of the citizens of these countries, their companies or institutions, especially at instances when it involves the weak nations like Nigeria. Under the influences of globalization Nigeria has become a dumping country for all inferior goods, sinister crimes, poor imaging and adulterated cultures. Of course, these are situations caused by the leaders of the country with the full support of the super powers for imperialist reasons.

Moreover, the world powers have never seen that an ideology that is intellectual, political or economical, benefits the rich and poor at the same time. What is enjoyed by the Western countries takes many years before it is enjoyed by the weak nations or better still never enjoyed or enjoyed at very low level and quality. Furthermore, the weak countries are psychologically cajoled into a state of disbelief for anything by themselves. Falola points out that African intellectual are part of a “globalized world” as consumers of products and ideas (4). Their frameworks and universities benefit from national and global resources and ideas. The kind of connections they make, the preferences and choices they establish between national and global knowledge are based on the imperialist

propaganda of capitalism. This means that they have attached themselves to the theories, ideas, and epistemologies of the western countries above their indigenous ones, which is a syndrome that must be curtailed. Africans and indeed Nigeria should not enjoy the attractions of globalization at the expense of the national interest to become agents of imperialism, which means that global knowledge should not be regarded as an alternative to indigenous ones. This is because the global center displays cultures that annihilates and are incongruous with the Nigerian indigenous culture and knowledge. It offers the room for a display of knowledge and manipulations that look attractive and deceptive to the pride of developed nations against the underdeveloped countries as further means of exercising control.

However, this does not mean that everything about globalization is on the negative. It also possesses some positivism in the area of information dissemination, presentation, access and usage. This makes it possible for literary works of African or Nigerian construct to be presented electronically to the globe for access and usage. It is only unfortunate that the space is under the control of the developed countries and so they decide what should happen, to allow other countries host up certain information or not. In fact, the foreign media has often used this means to publish information that are obscene about Nigerian culture to the global world, while they don't display such about themselves. Alali (11) explained that two incidents enabled focus on Africa as a terrorist continent –the 2001 September 11 terrorism, when the two World Trade Centre buildings were reduced to

rubbles and parts of the Pentagon destroyed, and the 1998 bombings of the US Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, as well as public demonstrations that displayed strong anti-western (particularly, anti-American) sentiments in Nigeria, the Sudan and Somalia were broadcast to the entire world. Such information is however dangerous and prone to attacks by enemy countries. The foreign media has been used to make assuming and conclusive statements concerning certain things about Nigeria. It is on this note that Falola (4) advises that, Nigeria (Africa) had previously witnessed the attempt to impose global (European-centered) ideas on its people, as part of the colonial project of imposing western civilization on so-called primitive people, therefore controlling and making decisions on their behalf.

However, the colonial library that emerged ultimately failed because of the Nigerian (African) Nationalism that was powerful enough to create alternative ideas. Even now in the 21st century, Nigerian literary scholars have continued the literary nationalism to counter global influences and images that are inimical to the positive development of the country. This has facilitated a phenomenon of conscious necessity to rehabilitate the Nigerian cultures and ensure an integration of the various ethnic groups in the country, especially in the current global politics. It is accepted that there are diversities in the cultural practices in Nigeria which foreigners usurp to rule the country. A simple reduction or eschew in the application of non-indigenous cultures will do the country some good and in the process re-strategize and harness the country's potentials. Ricard puts it that the disparity of cultural references in

Nigeria forms the central problem of the African writer. How he will orientate the reality that he presents? (59). But the answer lies in the fact that every writer belongs to a culture and as Nigerians we should write in our cultures and celebrate our own.

Incidentally, no other culture is as interesting, understanding and simple as one's own culture. Thiong'O captures it succinctly that the choice of language (which is cultural) and the use to which language is put is central to a people's relation to the entire universe (285). There is no way a person who is schooled knowledgeable in his culture will not be useful to his society, nation and the universe. However, globalization has to some level infiltrated the originality of most Nigerian cultures thus fulfilling the imperialist intention, destroying Nigerian cultures, and promoting western cultures. Idachaba and Dandaura (141) affirm that with economic and technological inequalities increasing globally, and with a fast developing and advancing Europe, the gap between the so-called 'developed nations' and 'the developing nations' in the area of cultural exchange seem to be expanding rather than decreasing because Europe controls the space, which is the most important tool of globalization and hence Nigerian cultural heritage is disappearing and we are increasing by becoming dependants than producers.

Ecosynthesis on the other hand is an exploration and analysis of the environment of the literary creations that have attempted to document the Nigerian cultures in a globalized society. By this concept, environment is not restricted to the physical surrounding but extended to the psychology, moral

and social situations of the people whose nature is cultural. Indeed, the cultural life of a people determines the nature and expectations of their environment. The buildings, farms, crafts, politics and sculptors that form the environment are all part of a peoples culture. Nixon avers that,

ecocritics have historically been drawn more to discourses of purity: virgin wilderness and the preservation of "uncorrupted" great places. However, we shall focus on the historical destruction of Nigerian cultural environment, values and the importance of preserving them as defended in some Nigerian dramatic literary creations.(715)

Ecosynthesizing the Nigerian Plays in a Global Society

The first of these synthesis lies in the cultural belief of the Nigerian people in relation to their environment as represented in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* where the concept of the unborn, the living and the future is tied together into one. Here Elesin who is to undergo a transition process abrupt it for want of earthly excitements. Obafemi captures it that:

At the height of his dance around Oyo, Elesin decides to marry a virgin girl and thus blend funeral drums with wedding celebrations –a paradoxical situation which reveals the ritual wedding of life and death. The outcome is the unborn: the pregnancy of the virgin bride of Elesin. The marriage between Elesin (now a member of the ancestral world) with the virgin (the living) ensures the incarnation of the unborn. Coming out of the bridal bed, Elesin announces

that he has wedded earth and passage and the continuity of the race is guaranteed.(128)

This explanation is relevant not to the play but the communal living of the people and their cultural expectations. Culture demanded that Elesin should die and meet his boss in the spirit world even though he made a mistake in the process. Unfortunately, this was compounded by Mr. Pilkins and his wife whose non understanding of the peoples' culture decide to prevent its fulfillment as obscene, barbaric and uncultured. The consequences of this action are the calamities that will befall the environment in future instead of blessings, as a result of anger from the ancestral world. This reason also gives rise to the death of Olunde as an appeasement to the ancestors. What it means is that the selfish display of supremacy of one's culture above the other as Pilkins attempted to do, was to suppress the cultural practice in the land and then create the room for many people to die in future if Olunde had not died to replace Elesin his father.

In an analysis of this racial dimension Zinsou say that in reality racism creates shame, and first in the racist himself (317). Truly, racism can be seen in the actions of Pilkins against Elesin and Olunde when one considers the inter plays of colonialism in Nigeria. However, he (Pilkins) was shamed as what he tried to stop occurred in another way. Although Soyinka did say that *Death and the King's Horseman* should not be considered as a clash of cultures (Obafemi 127). Such interpretation finds itself more celebrative in the face of globalization, as a strong statement in incidences of daunting one's culture as inferior to the other, whereas all cultures are

good to those who practice them. Moreover, that it is difficult for the playwright to cage or restrict the reader's interpretation of a play text. Art is conceived as the cultural practice geared toward the intentional production of artifacts which by virtue of their grace, elegance and beauty give rise to pleasure in our contemplation and savoring of these qualities (Kieran 217). This means that every writer is a writer of his/her society just as the interpreter of a written work of art is an interpreter of the dynamics of his/her society which has to do with his/her experience(s).

The peoples' culture creates their environment through values that help in developing the land. The Tiv society in north central Nigeria for instance, believe in the spirit world and some trees are considered sacred abodes of these spirits which helps in protecting and developing forestation. Such cultures if forced out will remove the discipline in respecting and controlling the environment and then give opportunities for misconduct. This explains why the cultural belief system of the people is very sacrosanct and the interference of globalization poses threats to it. In this regards, Soyinka rejected cultural impurity by refusing the tenets of foreigners who know next to nothing about the cultural environment and exigencies in Nigeria within the Yoruba milieu. After all, Ojaide points out that:

Now, however, there appears to be a growing awareness that "others" are not much different from "us" after all, and that we all share similar problems and a common humanity.(1)

This explains why supremacy of culture is not and

should not be important in our global affairs. However, things are different as Zinsou (315) puts it, that whether immigrant or original inhabitant, the urge to cause defeat to the 'other', to humiliate and use 'the other' for one's own purposes seems to me to be a source for conflict in relationships between groups of people, and also the grounds for racist behavior. So Olunde makes it clear to Mrs. Pilkins that the Nigerian culture isn't inferior, as he cites an instance of cowardice culture in a glamorized honour to a Western prince even in a time of war in the following conversation:

Olunde: Yet another error into which your people fall. You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you.

Jane: Not so fast Olunde. You have learnt to argue. I can tell that, but I never said you made sense. However cleverly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse –it's feudal! The king dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get!

Olunde (Waves his hand towards the background. The prince is dancing past again –to a different step –and all the guests are bowing and curtsying as he passes): And this? Even in the midst of a devastating war, look at that. What name would you give to that?

Jane: Therapy, British style. The preservation of sanity in the midst of chaos.

What it means is that, that which is good to another may not be considered good by another, like the proverbial saying which

goes that, "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder". On this idea, McMahon affirms that it seems a descent is inevitable into the notion of beauty as purely a matter of personal response, which makes nonsense of the way judgments of beauty are defended in practice (229).

In Iyorwuese Hagher's *The Travails of James Skott*, the imperialist activities about third world countries' debts are synthesized. Rajiv travelled all along spending thousands of rupees in London to plead for the cancellation of third world debts and he is told the contrary in the following conversation:

Rajiv: And I will be very happy to turn her down. In fact, I am here to begin an indefinite hunger strike until the third world debts are either forgiven or cancelled.

Guadelupe: (another passenger jumps into the conversation). You are a dead man. Do you think these people care whether you are dead or alive? Don't waste your life, grab a grenade or some explosives, and then I believe you will be heard. Hunger strike? Don't forget Bobby Sands, they left him to die.

The implication of foreign debts on the third world countries including Nigeria in the 21st Century is enormous. It is a clear tactic to keep the third world countries poor and possibly dead as the interest rates and conditions of debt become more and more stringent, tasking and high. Indeed, if the benefits of globalization is to make all countries in the world mutually beneficial to each other, sharing and growing

economically at par as the world adjusted economic programme, all debts, activities and conditions that are inimical to development of the third world countries (like Nigeria) should be cancelled and stopped. The imperialist activities in the oil producing areas of Nigeria, which remains chaotic with an alarming extortion of the country's resources at the expense of peanuts given to some influential members against the masses, such as reflected in Ola Rotimi's *If... Tragedy of the Ruled* and Dandaura's *Venom for Venom*, synthesizing the damage in this area and the resultant terrorist activities within Nigeria, as is also been 'assistedly' caused by the developed countries should stop for a globalized vision. *If... Tragedy of the Ruled* and Dandaura's *Venom for Venom*, showcase the Niger Delta environment and the inhabitants facing traumatic experiences, good drinking water is scarcely available, fishes are destroyed in the rivers, crop production is stunted and life expensive, due to the activities of foreign oil companies operating in the region. Oil spillage has often destroyed arable land and youths violent protest against this omen has being destroying and displacing the people instead whereas, not much is done by the oil companies on the positive direction to save the people's lives.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is more apt to begin this conclusion with Falola's (22) statement that we have to keep decolonizing African knowledge, turn to indigenous creativity and ideas, empower the marginalized voices, shed light on the tremendous energy and success represented by popular

cultures, market women, artisans, and local cultivators, among others in Nigeria. Dramatic and literary pre-occupation have strived to recreate the Nigerian experience, reconstructing it by creating a conscious awareness in the masses both national and foreign, towards rebranding positively the Nigerian image and identifying the culprits of under-development so that they can be jettisoned by the masses for a re-organization and positive restructuring of the country for better development in a global world.

Nigerians in the global world must sell something. Idachaba and Dandaura say that Africa goes to the international markets only to buy, but sells next to nothing (140). meanwhile, Nigeria has something to sell which is its culture. Therefore, the position of Nigerian literature in this global world is continuously constructing the message on the benefits and importance of Nigerian culture because no other culture can be a solution to the Nigerian environment than the Nigerian culture itself. Once this is done, the future has hope.

Works Cited

- Alali, O. Andy. "Media, Violence and Terrorism in Africa". *The Journal of African Communications*. Vo. 6, No. 1, 2004.
- Dandaura, Samu, Emmanuel. *Venom for Venom*. Lagos: Dat and Partners Logistics Ltd., 2010.
- Falola Toyin. The Humanities and the Politics of Development and Globalization. Being a Keynote Address presented at the International Conference on Developing countries and the Millennium Development Goals: Challenges for the Humanities. University of Abuja, November, 2008.
- Higher, Iyorwuese. *The Travails of James Skott*. (2001).

- Idachaba, Aduku, Armstrong and Dandaura, Samu, Emmanuel. "The Scramble and Partition for Content: The Place of Africa in a Globalized Programmes Market". Eds. Emmanuel Samu, Dandaura and Alex Chinwuba Asigbo. *Theatre, Culture and Re-Imaging Nigeria*. Keffi: Society of Nigeria theatre Artists (SONTA), 2010.
- Kieran, Mathew. "Value of Art". Eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO AESTHETICS. London: Routledge, 2002.
- McMahon, Anne, Jennifer. "Beauty". *The Rutledge Companion to Aesthetics*. Eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Nixon, Rob. "Environmentalism and Post colonialism". Eds. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. .Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Ojaida, Tanure, *The Dreamer's Distant Love: Contemporary African Literature, Globalization, and the Quest for Peace*. Eds. Sunday E. Ododo and Charles Bobunde. *Obafconfab Book of Proceedings*. Abuja: National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 2010.
- Olu, Obafemi. *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision*. Lagos: Centre for black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), 2001.
- Olu, Obafemi. *Public Discourse on the Humanities: Culture, Language, Literature, Theatre*. Ibadan: University Press Plc, 2008.
- Ricard Allain. *Theatre and Nationalism: Wole Soyinka and Leroi Jones*. Femi Osofisan (trans). Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1983.
- Rotimi, Ola. *If...A Tragedy of the Ruled* _____.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horseman*. Ibadan: Spectrum books, 2002.
- Uya, Edet, Okon. *African Diaspora and the Black Experience in New World Slavery*. Calabar: Clear Lines Publications, 2005.
- Zinsou, Agbota, Senouvo. "Literature and Current World Politics: Power, Racism and Globalization". Eds. Susan Arnolt and Katrin Berndt. *Words and Worlds: African Writing, Theatre and Society*. Trenton, African World Press, Inc., 2007.