Africa in the age of globalization: Perceptions, misperceptions and realities

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Introduction

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Globalisation refers to a set of social processes that are thought to transform our present social condition into one which is global. Steger (2003, p. 7) argues that ‘since its earliest appearance in the 1960s, the term “globalisation” has been used in both popular and academic literature to describe a process and a system that make many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant’. This process is not neutral but a combination of economic, technological, sociocultural and political forces that is shaping the future of the planet (Shell, 2004). This also evokes a greater interdependence and global prosperity. Although globalisation is not a new phenomenon, it is mainly in the 1990s that it has accelerated under the pressure of technological advancement, and also the end of the cold war, which created a belief that the only viable developmental model was the Western economic and political one. This has unfortunately led to Western developed nations defining and dictating the basic processes, policies and content of the new globalised world.

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), globalisation has manifested itself in many different forms and has prompted an important body of literature on how the continent is adjusting to this global transformation. The impact should therefore be analysed from an economic, political and sociocultural perspective. The objectives and norms that are being established are challenged by a reality that is a mishmash of traditional practices combined with economic and social transformation and global integration. Understanding the impact of globalisation on Africa (thus avoiding misperceptions about Africa in the age of globalisation) requires a multidisciplinary approach and a practical analysis of the evolution of the continent during recent decades. As a major player of this rapid transformation because of its economic potential, Africa since the 1990s is trying to adapt to a context for which it does not have a strong influence. Nonetheless, the continent is entering the new global age by defining its strategy to become a player in the new global landscape. In this context, in which all regions of the world are forced to develop strategies to be competitive and deliver the basic economic and political goods to their citizens, African countries are forced to play by new rules of global integration. Although globalisation is mainly analysed from an economic perspective, there is a greater interest in political and sociocultural globalisation that are all parts of the same system. It is therefore imperative for scholars who explore the dynamic of
globalisation to pursue research questions pertaining to how it occurs. What are the driving forces behind the process? How it is impacting different regions of the world? And how is Africa perceived in this globalised world?

**Different Levels of Globalisation and their Early Impacts on Africa**

**Economic Globalisation**

Globalisation is first and foremost a result of the expansion, diversification and deepening of trade and financial links between countries. According to Steger (2003), contemporary economic globalisation can be traced back to the gradual emergence of a new international economic order after World War II. This led developed countries to affirm a strong commitment to expand international trade and establish new binding rules on international economic activities through the supervision of the World Bank system, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (Rist, 1996). This effort to establish a single global market associated with the controversial issue of free trade (a term which meant the exploitation of weak economies, African countries included) has since raised a public and academic debate. With the establishment of the new rules of international trade, many economists from the developing world criticised the dependency or peripheral system that was being created (Amin, 1970; Ferraro, 2008). It is in the 1990s that economic globalisation entered through a full implementation with the liberalisation of financial transactions, deregulation of interest rates (that saw most African currencies weakened), and the privatisation of large public institutions. After all, the ratio of exports to gross domestic product doubled between 1960 and 1990 for the OECD countries (Tabb, 2004). From this economic perspective, the liberalisation of global trade has had two contradictory impacts on Africa’s economy. By forcing countries to open their borders for trade, African consumers have now access to more products at lower cost (with what consequences for the locally produced products and for the local industry?) and it has also contributed to a greater potential for export of the main raw resources and products of the countries. On the other hand, African masses are not yet benefiting from the growth.

Overall, Africa’s economy, like all other regions of the world, though questionable, seems to have benefited from trade liberalisation. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2013) report, all countries accelerated their achievements in the education, health, and income dimensions as measured in the Human Development Index (HDI). All countries have a lower HDI value in 2012 than in 2000. The global economy is more connected and improving, and there is a rise of Southern countries in this process. Perhaps, what the report overlooks were the social consequences of trade liberalisation; underfunded education and health services, retrenchments from the formal sector and the resultant poverty. But the report also warns that progress is uneven within
and between regions (UNDP, 2013). Since the beginning of the century, Africa’s economy has grown steadily and has resisted the economic crisis of 2008. Growth in SSA was 5 per cent in 2013 and this growth is expected to get stronger in years to come (Africa Development Bank, 2013). This has been facilitated by the diversification of partnerships, with China, Latin America, India, Turkey and many middle income countries becoming more active in the continent, and by the increased demand in raw materials and the potential of the continent on this front. Nonetheless, the poverty headcount ratio remains very high in SSA (around 52 per cent) (United Nations University, 2010).

In general, the continent’s image has improved drastically in recent years. From being perceived as a ‘hopeless continent’ in the 1990s, Africa is today a ‘continent on the move’. But, the current pattern of Africa’s economic growth is worrisome given the fact that the region has a young and growing population and will, according to the United Nations Population Fund Division, account for about 29 per cent of the world’s population aged 15–24 years by 2050 (United Nations, 2012). A big issue the continent still faces is how to make this growth beneficial to the masses and reduce poverty. Today, it is mainly multinational corporations and the African elites that are benefitting from globalisation. According to the Africa Panel Report (2013), in many African countries, the poor have seen their share of income shrink. Rising inequality is slowing the rate at which growth reduces poverty.

Globalisation optimists maintain that it has served a dynamic engine for growth, opening the window for diverse opportunities in terms of goods and services, creating employment and boosting government revenues. But, the limit of economic globalisation comes from the demand that whatever the nature of their economies, their level of development, and whatever their location in the global economy, all countries must pursue a common set of economic policies. Seen this way, economic globalisation is a conscious programme of restructuring international economic relations in line with a particular set of interests and vision. It is also perceived by some as nothing more but a new order of marginalisation of the African continent. Its universalisation, rather than engendering new development ideas in Africa, subverts its autonomy and powers of self-determination (Akindele, Gidado and Olaopo, 2002). Through closer economic cooperation, pan-African organisations and regional organisations of the continent are taking proactive measures to define and implement the needed reforms to better benefit from globalisation. Through the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD, 2001), the African Union has launched its own strategy to combat Africa’s depressed economic state and to lift its citizens out of poverty (Kotzé and Steyn, 2003). Also, regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and others are all working toward a greater integration of their economies. The challenges are to ensure that the new strategies are effective and implemented by member countries and to understand also that economic growth alone will not solve all the problems of the continent.
Political Globalisation

Contemporary manifestations of globalisation have led to a radical ‘deterritorialisation’ of politics, rules and governance (Steger, 2003, p. 56). We are witnessing a development and strengthening of global governance institutions, and they are dictating the conditions, processes and strategies of political institutions within countries. These processes, related to the generation and distribution of power, raise the important set of political issues pertaining to the principle of state sovereignty, and the growing impact of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations. Obviously, these themes respond to the evolution of political arrangement beyond the framework of the nation-state. Today, political globalisation is most visible in the rise and influence of supranational institutions and associations held together by norms and interests that are supposed to be common. Robert Cox (1999) sees this particular form of global governance as a conscious political project with ideological justifications, including the claim of inevitability.

Since the 1990s, international institutions have linked economic development with the implementation of ‘good governance’ strategies through basic Western democratic principles. Since, African scholars have debated back and forth the question of democracy in Africa (Olaitan, 2006). The issue has been reduced to accepting liberal democracy or rejecting it for its inadequacies (Ake, 2000). The supporters of liberal democracy use a minimalist argument that it is better than nothing, which has reduced the potential for innovation, and has been very limiting for exploring more culturally adapted models. Many globalisation researchers believe that political globalisation based on Western ideals might facilitate the emergence of democratic transnational social forces. Most criticisms boil down to the charges that such vision indulges in an abstract idealism that fails to engage current political developments (Steger, 2003).

The democratisation process in Africa has been mixed. After years of one-party system, dictatorship; military coups and regimes, the continent has engaged in a democratisation process that has been uncertain with progress and setbacks facilitated by a complex interaction of local and global forces. Although political turbulence is palpable across the continent, there is also a manifestation of a struggle to expand the political space, transform power relations and claim individual and group rights (Osaghae, 1999). There is a gradual and dynamic political transformation taking shape in Africa, and it is therefore important to track and measure the evolution and development of good governance on the continent.

Social and Cultural Globalisation

Cultural globalisation refers to the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe. Although culture is a very broad concept, it relates to the symbolic construction, articulation and dissemination of meaning. Meyer and Hannan (1979) describe world culture as binding society and individuals in the economy,
polity, culture and social interactions. It is clear that globalisation has its own set of cultural attendants which profoundly influence the life of people everywhere. The exploding network of cultural interconnections and interdependencies in the last decades has led some to suggest that cultural practices lie at the heart of contemporary globalisation. Facilitated by the internet and other new technologies, the dominant symbolic systems of meaning of our age such as individualism, consumerism and various religious discourses circulate more freely and widely than ever before.

Globalisation has generated a lot of controversy with regard to the rise of a global culture. Apparurai (1996) suggests that we are witnessing the rise of an increasingly homogenised popular culture underwritten by a Western ‘culture industry’. Western norms and practices are gradually being transported across the globe as the acceptable way of behaviour. Socioculturally, the mass media and advanced means of communication have aided the increasing dissemination of Western values and way of life as a standard for all people and cultures. This can be seen through the proliferation of individualism and consumerism. Olasunkanmi (2011) argues that today, individualism has replaced unity of purpose, and it has become a destructive element in African society.

Africa is confronted with the challenge of cultural diversity that has been a characteristic of our global age. It is clear that there is a link between culture and development; culture can serve as an ultimate catalyst or even hindrance for development. Considering the position of Africa today within the globalisation process, this would entail examining the relationship between culture in terms of cultural diversity and imperialism and globalisation. Local contexts in the world are more and more dissolving into a worldwide network of interactions under the influence of technological innovations (Africa seems to lag behind these technical innovations that hinders its development pathways). Globalisation in its present forms and stage strongly promotes a global world culture without local specificity or validity, a process that could be devastating for African cultural identity. But the consumption of mass media worldwide provokes both openness and resistance to cultural pressures.

**Resistances to Globalisation**

The powerful globalising market forces are challenged both by people and countries. There is a distrust fuelled by the need of societies to maintain their independence and identity and the formal and informal mobilisation resulting from the discontents the process has created. Globalisation is being contested as a false universalism leading to a new global division of labour and power, new regionalism and resistance politics (Mittelman, 2000). The emerging structure of global governance is also shaped by an increasing ‘global civil society’ which is mainly questioning and resisting globalisation. Since the beginning of the 21st century, ‘antiglobalist’ arguments are beginning to receive more attention
in the public discourse. This is heightened by how extreme corporate profits are leading to widening global disparities in wealth and wellbeing. Many believe that they must protect themselves and others from the negative consequences of globalisation. They use different types of arguments and means to advance their political agenda. These groups range from those in the North trying to protect their culture, identity or religion, or those who are fighting against global poverty and the extreme power of multinational corporations. This has led in recent years to street confrontations against the IMF, the G8, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other organisations identified as the gatekeepers of globalisation. Social movements such as those fighting for water and electricity in Soweto, for land in Botswana, or against environment destruction by oil companies in the Niger delta, raise questions about the viability of globalisation, and also call for a revaluation of subsistence economies and local democratic politics as alternatives to globalisation (Gibson, 2004). Globalisation will not discourage the desire and attempt by the many excluded from trying to maintain their identities, to fight for the preservation of their basics rights and explore political alternatives with more social justice.

Globalisation presents a natural contradiction. It offers major benefits (principally to ‘developed’ countries), including gains in productivity, technological advances, higher standards of living, broader access to consumer products at lower cost, widespread dissemination of information and knowledge and a release from long standing social hierarchies in many countries. Yet, there is a price for integrating in this global framework and adopting its practices (Mittleman, 2000). According to Tabb (2004), evidence suggests that ‘financial liberalisation delivers little, leaves poor countries especially vulnerable, and that on balance, privatisation and deregulation have tended to increase inequalities within countries and globally’ (p. 24). Resisting the process has also become both regional and global.

When the experience of Africa is considered in the lights of these developments, the feeling that emerges is rather mixed. In theory, natural resource wealth should strengthen economic growth and provide governments with the opportunity to support human development. In practice, it has led Africa to poverty, inequality and violent conflicts. The growth model of the continent is not sustainable. On one hand, the continent is going through an important growth phase, while on the other, the manufacturing sector shares less than 10 per cent of GDP and agriculture remains at subsistence level (African Union Commission, 2013). Another big challenge for the continent is unemployment (leading to labour migration) and a growing youth population.

The Way Forward

African countries are in the mist of interesting transformation, but have so far palpably failed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the globalised
economy of the 21st century. Because of its abundance in natural resources, some countries are taking advantage of Africa’s wealth. Successive summits between China-Africa, Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development (TICAD) between Africa and Japan, India-Africa Forums are few reminders of the potential the continent presents to the international community. It is in this context that we need to continue to reflect on Africa’s experiences and realities and identify the way forward.

As Kofi Annan states, ‘Africa is standing on the edge of enormous opportunity. Will we invest our natural resource revenue in people, generating jobs and opportunities for millions in present and future generation? Or will we squander this opportunity, allowing jobless and inequality to take root?’ (Africa Progress Panel, 2013, n.p.). To achieve high quality growth, Africa should address several issues and continue the analytical work necessary to better understand and define its role in this globalised world. The continent needs to have a greater voice in the global institutional framework. The controversy over whether or not Africa is sufficiently integrated into the global economy, whether globalisation bears opportunities or constraints for the continent, is inevitable but also less relevant. Indeed, globalisation can have positive impact on Africa’s development, but only if it is guided properly. While globalisation undercuts a host of countries to create an ‘autocentric’ development strategy, the most important for Africa is to define the terms in which it will integrate the different levels of globalisation. This will require new transformative leadership, economic integration, good governance, industrialisation to create employment for a growing population and greater access to education.

Organisation of the Book

This book is structured in four parts, each focusing on a specific theme. Part I, ‘Social and Institutional Development’, has four chapters that focus on the relationship between globalisation and socioeconomic development in Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. In Chapter 1, ‘Globalisation and Africa: Critical Historical and Deconstructive/Reconstructive Epistemic Reflections’, Ali Abdi provides a discursive analysis of the constructions of globalisation, which he perceives as hegemonic. Consequently, he suggests that the contemporary constructions of globalisation as the dominant livelihood perspective in the world at large and for Africa in particular need to be conceptually and theoretically reanalysed and practically challenged. In Chapter 2, ‘African Development Post-2015: Sustainable Agency or Reversion to Dependency?’, Timothy Shaw explores Africa’s possibilities for development. He asks the question whether Africa can sustain its choices and options in pursuing its development programmes or revert to dependency on ‘developed’ countries. Shaw argues that after a decade since the formation of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), Africa is now claiming agency rather than assuming dependency. This chapter suggests
that as African diversity is increasing so is their conceptual potential in a number of fields.

Having hope and confidence in Africa’s political and democratic developments is a theme in Lamine Diallo’s Chapter 3, ‘Democracy and Governance in Africa: Lessons from Senegal’. Diallo argues that since the 1990s, Africa has been undergoing rapid democratisation, a process which is a component of political globalisation that aims to spread Western models of democracy and governance across the world. His thesis is that democratisation which is being imposed on Africa by both external and internal forces has led to few successes, but many problems and challenges in different regions of the continent. However, geopolitically, Diallo postulates that Senegal has built a reputation of being a stable country capable of addressing major political crisis since its independence.

In Chapter 4, ‘Globalisation, Sovereign Debt and Adjustment Programmes in Africa: Implications for Creditors, Debtors and Policy Makers in Europe’, Gloria Emeagwali discusses Africa’s sovereign debt, adjustment programmes and the interconnections of the latter with globalisation. Emeagwali compares SAPs in Africa and the debts crisis in Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain (PIIGS). The ongoing debt crisis across the Atlantic, in PIIGS, is a case similar to what African countries went through. The chapter addresses a number of questions: What does the African experience suggest to the newly emerging debtor countries, now in the process of adopting variations of structural adjustment? What cautionary notes should be heeded? Would there be unequal development, and if so, would this lead to interregional conflict? Was the African sovereign debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, unique in any way? Are there any lessons to be learnt, from the African experience, in countries such as Portugal, Italy and Greece?

Part II of the book, ‘Technology and Global Partnerships’ has four chapters that focus on global partnerships that include Africa’s relationship with China and Japan and the role of local and international nongovernmental organisations. The section also looks at how digital technology is spreading in Africa. In Chapter 5, Akbar Saeed and Oliver Masakure demonstrate the importance of digital technologies to Africa’s commercial development. The two scholars argue that while African countries have invested in ICT (information and communication technology), they need to do significantly more or they will fall further behind other developing regions. Saeed and Masakure employ regression analysis based on data from the International Telecommunications Union to show that broadband penetration is generally low and varied across Africa. For them, more problematic is the evidence that indicates increased use of personal mobile technologies as broadband penetration improves. Consequently, available broadband for commercial applications and services remains deficient even in those countries that have invested significantly in their infrastructure.

Kathryn Mossman’s Chapter 6, ‘Aspirations for Senegal: Exploring International NGO Partnerships’ examines the partnerships between local and international nongovernmental organisations in Senegal. She concurs with Lamine Diallo that Senegal has been portrayed as a hopeful place in a continent afflicted
by poverty and conflict and that it has been celebrated as a model of democracy in Africa. Despite this portrayal, the Senegalese people have experienced a wide range of socioeconomic and political challenges. In this context, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged as major players in the effort to grapple with these issues. Mossman notes that these organisations have flourished in Africa in recent years as they have been called to supply services to populations that states have increasingly lacked the ability and/or will to provide. This chapter delves into the operations of local Senegalese NGOs and their international NGO partners in their attempt to work with local communities to improve areas of health, education, human rights and the economy. Similar to Mossman’s NGO discourse on Senegal, Gilbert Tarugarira deliberates on the connection between globalisation and the role of NGOs in Zimbabwe in Chapter 7, ‘Globalisation, NGOs and Multi-Sectoral Relations: The Zimbabwean Experience 1980–2012’. Tarugarira’s interpretation of the relationship between globalisation and NGOs is that the advocates of globalisation see NGO activities as a progressive force generating employment and raising living standards, while critics see the same activities as a means of expropriating the resources of the poor countries by drawing them into debt and accelerating environmental degradation. Using Zimbabwe as an example, Tarugarira argues that countries vary considerably in the extent to which civil society organisations are active in national life as well as how open they are to the impacts of globalisation. An overview of the patterns of interaction in Zimbabwe shows that government and NGO relations have unfolded on a terrain tainted with suspicion and mistrust.

In Chapter 8, ‘China-Japan Rivalry in Africa’, Bertha Osei-Hwedie analyses the pattern of competition between two global Asian economic giants, China and Japan, for economic partnerships and spheres of influence on the African continent. Osei-Hwedie contends that the Sino-Japanese rivalry stems, primarily, from the need to access Africa’s mineral and energy resources, as the two countries are the world’s largest consumers of oil, which is critical to their booming economies. Consequently, investment, trade and grants form essential parts of Chinese and Japanese economic diplomacy on the African continent. Osei-Hwedie concludes that the involvement of China and Japan points to the need to discuss the importance of the African continent in contemporary globalised economy, and reignites the debate on whether the continent has become vulnerable to exploitation by Asians giants or reaped the gains.

Part III, ‘Gender, Migration and Settlement’ consists of three chapters that explore gender issues, migration and the acquisition of new identities in new homelands. In Chapter 9, ‘Evidence Based Policy-Making in the Age of Globalisation: Measuring the Impact of Chinese Investments on Women in Sub-Saharan Africa’, Isioma Ile and Mulugeta Dinbabo explore the effects of China’s investments on women’s informal trade in Africa. The authors utilise evidence-based policymaking (EBP) to position some myths and realities about the impact of Chinese investment. They agree that the impact of Chinese investments in sub-Saharan Africa is substantial. It can be argued that it is positive as it has reduced
prices of commodities and enhanced the consumption power of consumers. On the other hand, it can be argued that it has reduced Africa to a dumping ground for cheap substandard imports and perhaps brought about high scale of job losses amongst women. This chapter focuses on women, given their role in families and poverty alleviation. The authors provide explorative and descriptive discourse on Chinese investments and its impact on women in selected sub-Saharan African countries.

Chapter 10, ‘The Cracks and the Crevices: Rwandan Women in the Diaspora Navigating Gender Regimes in Rwanda and Canada’, argues that as women cross state borders they are subjected to ever new gender regimes and must learn to adapt and find ways to navigate the new terrain, finding cracks and crevices that they can exploit to gain control over their lives and circumstances. The author, Anna Ainsworth, studies the Rwandan diaspora women who have made their homes in Canada and concludes that they have left behind the rigid gender norms of their Rwandan homeland, yet, as they acquire and access greater personal liberties in the new Canadian homeland, they find themselves racialised, marginalised and subjected to new gendered forms of discrimination. Ainsworth complains that while Canada affords greater liberties and increased economic security, Rwandan women are racialised and subjected to increased surveillance as their blackness renders them hyper visible, even in as diverse a city as Toronto. Phil Okeke-Ihejirika develops the same theme on racialised immigrant women from Africa that was discussed in Ainsworth’s chapter. Okeke-Ihejirika’s Chapter 11, ‘Gender, Contemporary Realities, and the Challenges of Reconstructing Identities in a Transnational Context’ focuses largely on the lives and experiences of victims of sexual violence in places like Rwanda, Liberia, Sudan, and the Republic of Congo in a specific Canadian context. Using insights from the experience of African immigrant women victims living in Edmonton in Canada, the author exposes the connections between culture and gender violence as well as conflict and transnationality. She highlights the commonalities these women share with both the generality of African women as well as female victims of war across Africa. The chapter makes vivid the various ways in which transnational linkages not only make themselves visible in the lives of these sexualised victims, but also curtail the terms and conditions of living out their everyday lives away from the continent.

Finally Part IV, ‘Education and Globalisation in Africa’ focuses on different aspects of education in Africa in a globalised world. In Chapter 12, ‘Demystifying the Misperceptions and Realities about the Efficacy of Monograde and Multigrade Pedagogies: Africa’s Response to Globalisation in Education’, Charles Kivunja and Margaret Sims discuss the use of monograde and multigrade teaching in Africa. They contend that monograde teaching was used as the gold standard of instruction in the schools in colonial education systems in Africa. The authors argue that the strategy was used, partly because it was what the colonial missionaries knew as what was working at home (Europe where they had come from) and partly because the educators held the assumption that children of similar ages are likely to need similar learning opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills
expected of children of their age. Kivunja and Sims argue that the perpetuation of this myth ignores the realities that African countries face as they try to find ways of providing education for all children. Their chapter uses findings from their research in Uganda and Zambia, together with existing literature to dispel the myth that monograde is superior to multigrade pedagogy.

‘Revitalising Higher Education in the Age of Globalisation: The African Dilemma’ is the theme of Girmaw Abebe Akalu’s Chapter 13, which describes higher education in Africa as a complex enterprise which can best be understood when attention is focused not only on the particular African sociocultural context within which it is embedded, but also increasingly on the impact of globalisation, and notions of Westernisation on the continent in general. The author draws on critical, anticolonial and antiracist perspectives to interrogate the limits of thinking along these lines, and sheds some light on the possibilities of change and development for higher education in Africa in the context of globalisation. In the final chapter, Edward Shizha describes how globalised, internationalised and cross border higher education has created transnational labour for the globalised economy. In Chapter 14, ‘Globalising Education for Globalised Labour Markets: Brain Drain or Gain for Africa?’, Shizha argues that higher education is no longer a skills training process for the local labour market, but has taken a global perspective. Within the wider context of globalisation, Shizha contends that education is regarded now as an international global commodity, playing a remarkable mission in the global economy with investment in people, skills and knowledge. The author points out that in every country, human capital constitutes the most formidable asset and resource for socioeconomic development. The expansion in information technology has resulted in free movement of skilled labour in and out of both ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ nations. Shizha opines that both Africa and other continents are experiencing both the brain drain and/or brain gain that are a result of the globalised transcontinental labour market.

References


