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AN EXAMINATION OF GLOBALIZATION FROM AN ETHICAL POINT OF VIEW

By

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with an x-ray of globalization and the ethical implication of its activities. Ethics is the academic study of morality, while morality is rational man's notion of right and wrong actions in society.

In this sense it is concerned with man's concept of values that guide his life. Globalization is man's attempt to bridge the world's economies, cultures and people in spite of territorial boundaries. In an attempt to make the whole world a single continent, how ethical has the proponents of globalization faired? This is the thrust of this paper.

Keywords: Globalization, Ethics

An examination of Globalization from an Ethical Point of View

According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, "Ethics is the philosophical study of morality" (284), though sometimes common usage interchanges it with "morality" which is its subject matter. In the narrow sense, ethics means the moral principles of a particular group, tradition or even individual, hence the existence of terms such as "Christian ethics", "medical ethics", among others. In this paper, ethics is used in its broad and philosophical sense, however. Ethics can be further defined as the general study of "goodness", "right actions" and "moral responsibility" as it is applicable to both the actor and the recipient.

A.R. Lacey sees ethics in its dominant sense as an "enquiry into how man ought to act in general", (68), that is, actions should not be acted as a means to an end, actions should not be engaged in mainly to achieving one's goal – not minding its effect on the recipient. In discussing ethics, therefore, concepts such as "ought", "obligation", "duty", "right", "wrong", "values", readily come to play. In this sense, *The Cambridge International Dictionary of English* aptly defines ethics as the "study of what is morally right and what is not" (470).

Ethics thus is the study of human actions, man's conduct and behavior. It's main concern is with actions that are right as against those that are wrong. It is the "what ought to be" as against the "what is".

Globalization, in its entirety, is the attempt by developed countries to make the world a centralized globe. It is the pursuit by the developed world to see all continents, peoples, cultures, economies centralized despite territorial and geographical boundaries.

F.J. Lechner, in "Religion, Law and Global Order," understands globalization as the process by which a new order (social, economic, political) comes about on a large scale, bringing culturally distinct communities into interaction with each other (102). In order to meet the needs of man satisfactorily as much as possible, various goods and services have to be provided for by the earth's resources one way or the other. Markets made up of investors, producers, sellers and buyers are channels through which earth's produce are moved and interchanged. To achieve this onerous task, the fathers of globalization came on board.

Presently, markets are often no longer concrete places but abstractions representing the necessary interaction between the costs of production, the asking of prices, and the consumer's willingness to pay for goods and services. This is why C.L. Harper sees globalization as the "amplification of world trade" (366). The effect of globalization is better appreciated when one recalls that trade between distant people has played a major role in human social and cultural integration since time immemorial. Globalization is that which helped products such as Coca-cola, Colgate, Nokia, to be common features in Nigeria. This is why coffee beans that are picked in the tropical mountains of Columbia, probably ferried by a ship constructed in Japan is available for consumption in Nigeria. Citing the effect of globalization on trade, Harper has this to say:

> The volume of world trade accelerated exponentially since the 1950's, and the proportion of total world gross product accounted for by traded goods and services grew much more rapidly than the total value of world goods. International

merchandise trade, in 1992 worth more than $3.5 trillion, grew at an average rate of 5.4% a year since 1950 ... (368).

History of Globalization

How did globalization come to be? Modern day world trade (i.e. globalization's consequence) began effectively after World War II, as diplomats were determined to outwit the economic depression and inflation that the World War ushered in. Before now nations erected trade barriers by means of high tariffs mainly to protect home industries from foreign competition and competitors. According to Harper, cost of importation was as high as 60% of the cost of production (368) thus protecting the products by limiting its marketability outside the country of production. Consequences of the World War II however resulted in the search for "market expansion, sales, profits, and mutually beneficial economic growth, as well as improved living standards of the world's people" (368).

Globalization is the brain-child of the owners of big companies and corporations with means of production. These were they who sought for free market for their products and came under the tag 'More Developed Countries' (MDCs). Their targets were the 'Less Developed Countries' (LDCs) such as India, China and Africa, among others. The former, that is, MDCs metamorphosed into Multinational Corporations and Companies (MNCs), operating in and among many different countries without necessarily being based in any particular one. They can be referred to as Transnationals also.

Tools for Globalization

The first major step taken towards the realization of a free market was the agreement reached pertaining to trade rules, policy, and dispute resolution referred to as General Agreement on Trade and Tarriffs (GATT). Harper says the first of these agreements was struck in 1948 among the major MDCs war powers. Between 1948 and 1996 there were eight rounds of such GATT talks "each resulting in freer flows of international trade;..." (368). The GATT was so successful that by 1994 it had over 100 signatories with other 30 countries bound by its policies.

The European Union (EU) formerly known as the European Community or European Common Market is presently the largest and most advanced trade zone, comprising of most Western European nations. Its focus centres on the reduction of tarrifs, arrangement and procurement of cross-border labour, passport and license agreements. For C.L. Harper, the EU

> has become the world's largest ...free – trade zone, encompassing the mostly duty- free trade of Portuguese oranges, British oil, Danish herring, Finnish lumber, Italian fiats, German industrial machinery, and most everything in between (369).

The above represent the industrial world – the producers, while the remainder (i.e. the unnamed) are the consumers of products, that is, the available market that is open for acquisition and exploration.

Partly to promote GATT and partly to respond to the EU the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into existence. As a result, in 1989, a free trade agreement evolved between the United States and Canada while in 1991 Mexico, a third nation, joined. Unlike the EU, NAFTA's focus is not political and economic integration. Instead, its target is towards free exchange of products, commodities, services and investments. To further promote free-trade zones and custom unions, regions also entered into agreements. These include MERCOSUR in Latin America comprising Argentine, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, while another one headed by Japan is Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In 1990 George Bush of the U.S. also initiated the Western Hemispheric trade zone center based at Texas' A & M International University, a public service institute. Its main purpose is to study globalization focusing at the Western Hemisphere, their economic, political and social interactions. It's research programmes are targeted at trade agreements, tarrifs, customs, regional and national economies, politics, business development, finance, the environment and cultures (http://freetrade.tamiu.edu/about_whtc_mission.asp22 April 2013).

The World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which originally came into existence in 1944 (during the second World War) is another major tool in the hands of globalization. About 700 bankers and diplomats met in Bretton Woods with the intention that the "WB would be funded by the MDCs to provide development and increased living standards around the world, and world peace" (Hawken, 379). With funds paid into this account war-torn Europe was reconstructed after the World War, after which the World Bank (WB) focused its attention on LDCs. Today it is associated with providing massive development loans to nation-states.

World Trade Organization (WTO), a further tool, is the only global international organization that deals with the rules of trade between nation-states. To effect this, it has agreements that are negotiated and signed (agreed to) by the bulk of the world's trading nations. These agreements are ratified in their parliaments. The goal of the WTO is to assist producers of goods and services, exporters and importers to conduct their business in a conducive atmosphere.

It was established in January 1995 based on the Uruguay Round-Table negotiations that lasted from 1986 to 1994. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland with 159 countries as members as at March 2013 (www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/tif_e.htm April 22, 2013).

The Approach of Globalization to International Trade

Most of the treaties that are aimed at making the world a single market that can be traversed economically is targeted at increasing the total volume of international trade. This goal is approached through the following:

Free Trade: This is the unlimited flow of commerce between sellers and buyers across borders. Free trade, according to Harper's understanding, is "simply (requiring) that existing trade regulations be administered in a way that does not discriminate against foreign companies" (370). The high point of the free trade agreement is the emphasis on the economic principle of comparative advantage which insists "that a country should specialize in those goods it produces most efficiently and trade with other countries for the goods they produce most efficiently, even if both countries can produce comparable goods at home" (370). This aids specialization for all nation states involved in the globalization process. Each nation is admonished to remain and do that which she knows how best to do.

Protectionism: This was the policy operational in the MDCs before the second World War whereby home industries and products were protected from foreign competitors and competitions. The policy of protectionism still guides much of world trade system today by taking the form of stiff tarrifs on imported goods, reduced quota for imported goods or outright ban on certain goods.

Managed Trade: This is the midpoint between free trade and protectionism. It is achieved through the execution of the agreement by all nations that are members or signatories. It is the concept that helps to manage the world market or products discreetly. Managed trade does not over-protect nation states to their detriment, neither does it throw open the doors of nation states to trade with others with free abandonment that is detrimental to host countries.

A Critical Analysis of Globalization

Globalization, as we have observed, is concerned with the coordination and regulation of the behavior of various nations regarding trade and human well-being. Trade by the intents of the founding fathers of globalization is to be feer in flow. Thus at the Uruguay Round-Table negotiated in 1994, it is said that nations agreed to remove agricultural subsidies. This means that agricultural products were to go for free, or without assistance in its care (cultivation, transportation, etc). This is to the benefit and advantage of the MDCs who are more into processing of such raw materials than their cultivation. It is also said that they further agreed to create international copyright protection for intellectual property.

The neem tree (Azadiracha Indica) found in India, discovered to be very useful in the development of various products as a result of the anti-fungal agents inherent in it was patented. This entitled India to royalties accruing from the use of the neem tree. The rich North who also constitute the MDCs as well as the patenting body however wriggled out of the deal by revoking "51 patents related to the products of this tree ..." (*Nature*, 267), thereby rendering its use and benefits free to whoever can access it.

This is a clear indication of the divide between the North (MDCs) and the South (LDCs). While the North is in possession of the technological know-how, the South is rich in the natural resources. The neem tree of India exemplifies the above. One of the terms of the GATT and the WTO reached through the United Nations (UN) Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the trading off of the disparities existing between both North and South. The North however robs the South off the deal by investing their knowledge in intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), through international patents. In this way, the right of production remains with the North permanently while the

South is cheated of the royalty due her from the natural resources. The resource is thus freely used by the North (Williams, 68).

Globalization is concerned with the coordination and regulation of the behaviour of different nations as regards trade and human well being. This gave birth to the GATT. Unfortunately, it is "full of loopholes, special exemptions, exclusions, projections, and preferential clauses that protect the interest of various nations" (Harper, 1996. 369) This agreement, for instance, gives concessions to special interest groups. At other times tariffs are varied to nation states, while sometimes it is outright give-away to industries that are sufficiently wealthy and sometimes strongly represented in the negotiations. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) like Pepsico, Phillip, Mosanto and Nestle whose executives and officials served as advisory body to the government versus GATT negotiations and negotiators benefit in such lowered or waived tariffs.

The names mentioned above are not small businesses, or farms, neither are they churches nor unions. According to Hawken, the GATT is formulated to favour the MDCs in various ways (97). A careful look at the formulation/structure of World Trade Systems reveal that only MNCs are foundational members. Peradventure smaller organizations will be members in future, they will come in as observers or as members without portfolio. A multinational Corporation (MNC) "is a corporation (that is) chartered in one nation, but with branch offices, operating divisions, and/or subsidiary companies operating in many nations" (Harper, 1996:372). The import of this is that the various divisions of a MDC situated in different countries or various locations within a country (e.g. Nigeria) are enabled to buy, sell and loan money back and forth at special rates. This sometimes means the ability to buy at far less real-world market prices and interest rates.

A further concession made by GATT to MNCs is the opportunity to declare economic loss in transactions between its divisions, culminating in tax write –offs. Again, a MNC is allowed to establish a headquarters in a nation that is having low or zero taxation rate, but free to do business in nations with higher corporate tax rate. In this way, the former nation housing the low/zero tax rate would not benefit from the deal. At the same time it has been observed that most of the key staff required in the Headquarters Office are from the parent corporation – to be treated by the host country as expatriates. Hence, at best low income, semi-skilled or non-skilled jobs and appointments are those available for the host nation.

Tax accruing from the Headquarters outfit may be so negligible that it may not impact the host nation's economic situation positively. The MNC may intentionally produce products that are not relevant to the populace of the host nation, thereby making her a transit camp. A MNC is again allowed to sell products in one country that are banned in another. Thus if the ban is as a result of low or substandard quality, or where a product is proven to be of environmental hazard, it can be sold where environmental issues are not of interest yet (though the health of the populace, the vegetation, climate, etc will be adversely affected, nonetheless.) I share in the opinion of Harper that " Multinational Corporations scour the world for profits, cheap resources and labour, tax havens, and lax environmental regulation, thus manipulating the natural comparative advantage of many nations" (372)

It is appropriate to conclude that financial gain is the main goal of the MNCs and MDCs. Production of goods and rendering of services is secondary, hence their exodus to LDCs with less tax rates, and drive to sell products such as contraceptives, infant formulas, pesticides, substandard pharmaceuticals, among others, that are banned in their home countries – not minding the health implication to man his environment. MDCs, MNCs and their globalization drive facilitate cross-border flow of capital, labour and technology. Nigeria thus was besieged at a time with subsidiaries such as Bhojson, U.A.C., U.T.C., Leventis, Barclays Bank, Standard Bank, WATECO Motors, British Petroleum (BP), among others.

Globalization's goal is to make geographical boundaries and national identities irrelevant- culminating in economic concentration of assets, conglomeration and merger of companies resulting in mega corporations. Hence, goods are exchanged in a moment's notice through e-banking, e-marketing, e-services; with the aid of common currencies such as dollar, euro. These are bought and exchanged through e-banking with the aid of credit cards, Western Union transfer, etc, culminating in economic growth. Summarizing the growth of the MNCs, Hawken says it this way:

> By the 1990s, the 10 largest businesses in the world had collective revenues of $801 billion, greater than that of the smallest 100 nations of the world together. The 500 largest companies in the world controlled 25% of the world's gross output but employed only .05% of the world's population (91 – 92).

Who are the MNCs but the technocrats of the MDCs, and these are they that are behind globalization, moving from zones where sales outlets are congested to LDCs zones where abundant market abounds. These are they that formulated the GATT terms, making the economic principle of comparative advantage its highpoint. This principle however tends towards protectionism as it insists on each nation doing what it knows how to do best. In this way, the technological North remains technological, while the agrarian south remains so. There is no room for technological transfer, nor the South ever developing to become a MDC. In the final analysis, this would culminate in the following: higher cost of consumer goods, circulation of inferior goods and worse of all, the continued existence of uncompetitive industries. This arrangement encourages Nigeria to remain a crude oil exporting nation till eternity.

It seems therefore that globalization is not an advocate of total free trade or free trade is not total deregulation, but neither should it be the elimination of product standards, worker friendly rules or bye-pass of environmental regulations. Trade as advocated by globalization is more of a managed (or manipulated?) trade. This was why the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was formed in 1964 to protect the interest of the LDCs.

It's main concern was with commodity trade and agreements. Its effectiveness has however been doused when GATT included provisions that catered for the LDCs in this area in 1974. The activities of the UNCTAD has since been reduced as it now convenes every four (4) years "primarily as a forum for the exchange of views, but does not negotiate treaties." (369). As helpful as the World Bank (WB) renamed the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development has been to LDCs, a second look at its operations are revealing. It determines, for instance, the type of projects that it finances. These are large-scale, capital-intensive, centralized projects, for example. Porter et al have this to say: "In the 1970s and 1980s, it supported rainforest colonization schemes in Brazil and Indonesia, Cattle ranching projects in central and South America, and tobacco projects in Africa" (Porter et al 1990.54)

The WB, it is discovered, prefers massive physical projects, such as large hydro electric dams, construction of highways, erection of power plants, and such public works. These however are beneficial to the elites in LDCs mainly at the expense of the economy and the politically powerless. These elites are the wealthier and sometimes more educated few. They become the local brokers for the MNCs and MDCs, and ethical issues that pertain to interpretation of meaning and implications of agreements between the MNCs and the unskilled employees may evolve. The pertinent question is, will the local elites broker terms that are favourable to his unskilled kinsmen and fall out of favour with his international employer(s)? This is more so since MNCs pay lower wage to nationals of LDCs. Again, where the local elite serves as consultant between the MNCs and his semi-skilled/unskilled national, will he relinquish all benefits due to his kin? So far, the LDCs are outsmarted. They may have welcomed globalization envisaging technological transfer and development of the production sector which has not and will not be, due to the enforcement of the economic principle of comparative advantage. Fluctuation in the exchange rate affects the LDCs a lot, and most of their purchases from the MDCs are transacted with international currencies. French, summarily puts it this way:

> In its first 50 years, the planets biggest benefactor (i.e. WB) has loaned hundreds of billions of dollars to LDCs, yet much of that world remains desperately poor with badly plundered natural resources (*World Watch* 7; 4: 17).

This is more so as the World Bank prefers its loans be repaid in quantifiable economic returns. This definitely is not the way to better the economic and social standards of the poor. This is not morality in display by the MDCs/MNCs. Chossudovsky's candid opinion about the WB and I.M.F. and their teleguided reforms is that they are "nothing less than the legalization of money laundering" (15). Ethics, the declarer of the good and the bad, of what ought to be as against what is, is at opposite ends with money laundering.

Globalization has successfully "challenged the ideas of fixed boundaries, identities, truths and power and instead have put stress on the fragmentary and the impermanent nature of boundaries" (Paasi, 462). It has successfully erected economic borders that signify "one of the deepest divides in the world as far as the standards of living in the respective states are concerned" (Paasi. 2003.463).

Globalization has redefined boundaries and borders to mean "zones of mixing, blending, blurring and hybridizations" (Bhabha 57), thereby synthesizing materials and symbols and bringing together power relations (Thrift. 1996). This is why Lintner inquiring into cross- border crimes defines it as a concoction of the native and foreign. Using the city of Macau which is located at the crossroads of Asia, but being ruled by European Portuguese as his example, he says Macau is

> a mix of Chicago in the 1920s, pre-war Shangai and Casablanca: a sanctuary for gangsters, gunrunners, pimps, prostitutes, gambling tycoons, corrupt officials and secret agents of Western as well as Eastern powers. Add modern technology, and Macau more than any other city in Asia has become a centre for international organized crime in an era when globalization has made borders irrelevant, at least for the mobsters (2003.92).

Cross border atrocities are not applicable only to Asia but to the whole world. More than ever, man has become very "professional" in his endeavours. Professionalism becomes synonymous with "daring", "unemotional", "cold-blooded", "faceless", etc. Companies sell substandard goods with impunity, assassins cut down targets without remorse, terrorize harmless citizens blatantly, people possess unpaid for goods (with the issuance of non-existent credit cards), etc.

Anderson and O'Dowd understand globalization as the process of "border crossings" and blurring of the spatial categorizations between "us" and "them" (598) But Gellner, an analyst of nationalism, is more apt when he says the map of the world is being recreated to have

> very little shading; neat flat surfaces... clearly separated from each other,... generally plan where one begins and another ends,... (with) little if any ambiguity or overlap (139).

In 1978 the then President of the U.S. Jimmy Carter appointed the Presidential Commission on World Hunger, charged with the following tasks:

> to identify the basic causes of domestic and international hunger and malnutrition; to assess past and present national programs and policies that affect hunger and malnutrition; to review existing studies and research on hunger; to recommend to the president and congress specific actions to create a coherent national food and hunger policy; and to help implement those recommendations that focus public attention on food and hunger issues (Mappes and Zambaty, 394).

One may ask why the U.S. should be concerned about the hunger situation in the world and how this affects her. She boasts of harvesting "more than half the grain that crosses international borders. Its corporations dominate world grain trade. Its grain reserves are the largest on earth".(395). By way of preservation, "its advanced food technology" (395) helps to keep excess grains stored for the future. The majority of the hunger-stricken populace are situated in the LDCs or the developing world as the commission prefers to call them.

One of the reasons why the commission was set up was to maintain the national security of the U.S. This, to my understanding, means that her security will be at risk when hunger stricken people invade her territory for refuge purposes. In order to keep the peace at home, therefore, the U.S. is ready to champion the course of the hungry. Closely following the foregone, is the dependence of the economic vitality of the U.S. on a healthy international economy.

This, to my understanding, implies that the stability and vitality of the economy of the U.S. is dependent on the health of the international economy. Serious world food crisis gendering to famine could lead to political disorder which could disrupt her economy. It is argued that

> To sustain a healthy global economy, the purchasing power of today's poor people must rise substantially, in order to set in motion that mutually reinforcing exchange of goods, services and commodities which provides the foundation for viable economic partnership and growth (Mappes et al, 396).

There is no record of any LDC that has benefitted from the generosity of the U.S. that has culminated in "exchange of goods, services and commodities". Instead it has been a case of one – the LDC relying on the other- the MDC.

The thought that arises is, should not the U.S. and other MDCs coach the LDCs to cultivate, harvest as well as preserve their food base? Must they be handed the caught fish for supper rather than be taught the act of fishing? In the final analysis, the intention of the U.S. Presidential Commission on World Hunger tallies with the intents of globalization, which is to foster her "trade, foreign investment and foreign affairs"(Mappes,2002:394) with the LDCs. It is indeed the world being characterized by networking people, transnational corporations and suprastate levels of governance (1995).

Globalization has aided the sale of genetically modified foods, ignored the issues of adverse reaction to drugs (ADRs) resulting from the administration of such and instead focussed on the anticipated profit. In this way, consumers are deliberately deceived by ignoring the potential risks anticipated or as Glasner and Rothman put it,

> ADRs do not... hit the headlines, although it has been estimated that in the USA some two million people suffer from them, and of these over 100,000 die each year. ADRs are the fourth largest cause of death in the USA (406).

The pharmaceuticals go further to circumvent government's attempt to regulate their activities and even sink "substantial amounts of ... capital into... the future for health care and diagnostics – the 'snip-chip' and its associated self-diagnosis, during dispensing technology" (406-407). How can one justify the presence of toxins in foodstuffs, the sale of genetically modified (GM) seeds to farmers of the LDCs by the MDCs. They explain away their deliberate mischief by pointing to the need to feed the poor, but this is not enough justification considering the long term effect of these seeds on the populace. Where is the place of conscience, the act of truth telling and doing the right thing?

With globalization commerce is more abstract, eliminating the face-to-face relations in traditional markets that enforced ethical values. This was by way of the service provider avoiding the sales of corrupt goods in order to sustain patronage. With globalization MNCs and MDCs wield both economic and political powers which transcend those enforced by nations with physical boundaries. MNCs and MDCs are not concerned with morality or ethically approved behaviours, they are focused on the anticipated profits.

Ethics, on the other hand, is concerned with the values by which we live our lives (Jacquette, 489). It is governments, civic organizations, NGOs, among others, that concern themselves with the issues of social well-being, sustainability and the quality of civic life. Globalization will be ethical when its terms of reference, its goals, the reasons for its existence are reviewed.

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