

# Essentials of Sociology

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**Edited by**

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## Globalization and Inequality

*Olayinka Akanle and Taiwo, Patricia Awa*

### Introduction and Background

It is commonly noted that fingers are not equal. In the same vein, people are not equal. Also nations are not equally. Thus, inequality is a social reality. Hence, societies are marked with varying degrees of inequality and these inequalities can be observed across institutions and codified in societal norms and values as could be observed in roles, status, wealth, power, health and generalized point of reference. This is commonly examined under social stratification concerns and subjects in Sociology and it is generally believed that inequality is a universal phenomenon and as it exists among individuals, it also exists among nations. This is why the world is often considered under bipolarity especially in international development considerations.

This is why the world is not considered one in terms of how well nations have done in establishing development as through eradication of poverty and 'greening' the environment and eradicating corruption just as capacity to influence global politics is also a concern. This is also why there is always allusion to the rich North and the poor South. The rich North being Europe and America and the poor South being Africa, Asia and Latin America for example. Global inequality is also manifested in the industrialized North and unindustrialized poorly industrialized South. Africa is deeply rooted in the South and Nigeria is key actor not mainly in terms of geography of location but presence of negative indicators of development like prevalence of disease, crime rate, poverty, corruption, civil unrest, political instability and so on.

The Washington consensus explains Africa's poverty and general underdevelopment as consequence of bad governance, political irresponsibility and overwhelming state of corruption (see Akanle 2013). Hence, poverty, which is the most predominant measure of African underdevelopment, and general underdevelopment among other indicators of underdevelopment in Africa are also usually considered as a result of lack of transparency and unfaithfulness with privatization and market liberalization dating back to the Structural Adjustment Programme

(SAP) era in recent history. It is however noteworthy that poverty in Africa and generalized underdevelopment by objective measures actually extend post-Washington Consensus as explanatory framework to connect and resonate global inequality accentuated by the complex web of many interactive factors including structural conditions and socio-political history embodied by and embedded in globalization. It is because of the centrality of globalization to the issue of inequality that is a social reality that this chapter in a Sociology book is engaging globalization. The question should then be; why should Sociology be concerned?

### **What is Globalization? The Sociology of Globalization and Inequality**

Sociology being the mother of the social sciences is not only wide but encompassing in the examination of several concepts and phenomena which cut across various disciplines including those of arts and the sciences, thus underscoring its essence in understanding the constructs of other fields. Again, contrary to expectations, it has been proven over the years that sociological interest surpasses the analysis of human interaction and includes the investigation of the processes and effects of these interactions across time and space. Among the numerous current issues that have attracted sociological inclinations are those of globalization and inequality given their implication for group dynamics and development. While both globalization and inequality and their effects have been in existence for centuries, awareness and discourse of their surroundings as well as central issues have dated back only to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the use of the word 'globalization' had only been since the 1960s and early 1970s (Held and McGrew 2003).

Globalization is one of the most difficult concepts to define. This is because of the raging controversies surrounding its existence, meaning and implication for social and international relations and development. In other words, while many scholars believe globalization exists, some do not believe. While some believe globalization is largely negative, others do not believe. While some believe globalization can easily be defined, others believe it is not amenable to definition given its wide manifestations. For the purpose of this chapter however, it is important to define globalization. Globalization simply means the world becoming one small village. It means the world is getting closer than ever before. It refers to the ease with which people and nations relate with one another across space and time. It refers to the ease and speed with which occurrences in

one part of the world affect the others even millions of kilometres away. It is the world bearing the brunt and/or enjoying consequences of actions regardless of distance from the epicentre.

Now, let us also look at some established views about what globalization entails as we continue with our attempts at defining globalization. According to Rosenau (2003), globalization has been viewed in various ways, as one that has to do with “action at a distance” in which an action of a social agent in a particular locality can come to affect or be felt by others in a distant place, as one that depicts “time-space compression” which in other words explains the possibility of overcoming the length of time usually experienced from distance between spaces as exemplified in the way instant electronic communication codes erases the constraints of distance and time on social organization and interaction, as one that connotes “accelerating interdependence” which is understood as an increased dependency and interdependency of nations such that events in one country impacts directly on others just like the economic meltdown which started in America and generally affected the economies of other countries around the world especially in the stock exchange market, so much so that it is now viewed as *global economic meltdown*, one that depicts a shrinking world in which borders and geographical barriers to socio-economic activities are significantly diminished or removed.

It is in this same light that Akanle (2011a) simply referred to globalization as “*the world becoming a global village.*” Anthony Giddens (1991) views globalization as the “*intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.*” The effect of globalization in a nutshell is reflected in its ability to shrink distance, space and time, reduce stress and expand horizon. However, this can be dependent on economic capacity to afford its cost without which a “gap” or what may be considered inequality can be created. Again globalization refers to the process of extending social relations across world-space. Such extensions arise from the movements of people, things and ideas.

Thus, while concepts like integration and internalization can be viewed as outcomes of globalization, it may be difficult and erroneous to define the concepts in terms of the two concepts alone as the MIR<sup>2</sup> of globalization are more complex, complicated and dynamic always coming up with the binaries and dialectics of globalization imperatives. Largely, globalization is a process whose beginning or end is difficult to determine. In fact, this is why it is called a *process* because it is still an

intellectually and practically raging tornado sweeping all issues on its path. Thus, it will not be inappropriate to place it on a continuum bearing in mind several issues such as technology, time, space, trade, government, companies, investment, information and culture. The list, of globalization's manifestations, implications and ramifications<sup>2</sup> for people as individuals, groups and nation, though is inexhaustible.

### **Aspects of Globalization: The MIR (Manifestations, Implications and Ramifications) in Practice**

The MIR of globalization are wide and all-encompassing in every aspect of life. In fact, there is hardly any part of life that globalization does not appear. Globalization is all about life and society in consequence. This is why two basic paradigms of MIR of globalization have appeared namely; The Convergence School and The Divergence School. The Convergence School are those scholars who perceived the world becoming similar and identical, especially culturally, under the corrosive influence of globalization which has forced many nations to adopt the modal more predominant cultures (cultural assimilation). The Divergence School are those scholars who perceived that globalization has actually made nations more reclusive and protective of their cultures thus becoming more culturally insulated. For them, rather than globalization enabling cultural homogeneity, it has actually led to satellite cultural emergence and cultural heterogeneity.

For the purpose of this chapter, we have adopted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) MIR framework of the aspects of globalization. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the year 2000 identified four basic aspects of globalization. These are trade and transactions, capital and investment movements, migration or movement of people and the dissemination of knowledge. Furthermore, scholars who support the effect of globalization, argue that it improves standard of living and allows poor countries and their citizens to develop economically. However environmental challenges such as climate change, cross-boundary water and air pollution, and over-fishing of the ocean are linked with globalization. Globalizing processes affect and are affected by business and work organization, economics, socio-cultural resources, and the natural environment. Globalization has the tendency to make issues of social concerns like the characteristics of a locality get erased or become

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<sup>2</sup> We term this MIR of Globalization

general (Tomlinson 2003, Carpenter 2009). Also, a huge connection is seen across cultures and social issues like religion, politics and economics especially at the macro level. Hence dimensions of this wide phenomenon are viewed economically, politically, ecologically, religiously, culturally and so on.

**Ecological globalization** refers to global environmental phenomena and involves issues like population growth, access to food, worldwide reduction in biodiversity, the gap between rich and poor as well as between the global North and global South, human-induced climate change, and global environmental degradation. Economic globalization involves intensifying and expanding economic interrelations around the globe (McNeil 2008). It generally summarizes the increasing effect of moving goods, services, technology and capital across economic borders. This effect is reflected in the economic interdependence of nations and their economies across the world.

While the business globalization focuses on the reduction of international trade regulations such as tariffs, taxes, and other obstacles that suppress global trade, economic globalization refer to the process of increasing economic integration between countries which leads to the emergence of a global marketplace or a single world market. It encompasses such things as the emergence of a new global economic order, the internationalization of trade and finance, the changing power of transnational corporations, and the enhanced role of international economic institutions. Economic globalization can be viewed as either a positive or a negative phenomenon depending on the line of argument. Currently, trends in globalization can be significantly accounted for by developed economies through means of foreign direct investment, reduction of trade barriers as well as other economic reforms and, in many cases, immigration while integrating with less developed economies.

### **Political and Cultural Dimensions**

Political globalization refers to the intensification and expansion of political interrelations around the globe (Manfred 2009). Political globalization includes aspects like the changing place of modern-nation state in today's world as well as the role and direction of our global political systems involving the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe (Manfred 2009). Political aspect can also be seen in the ascendancy of democratic adoption and accommodation around the world including in the Middle East. Culture being a very broad

concept, has many aspects, but in the discussion on globalization, the influence of media and technology on people's culture and its extended role of shaping of identities, orientation and desires as well as the increase in global language are given enormous attention. This has been broadly regarded as *The CNN Effect* and this is mostly observable in the cultural patronage of the youth (see Olutayo and Akanle 2012; Akanle 2011a). This is however not to indicate that the adults and elderly are insulated especially in the age of internet and G.S.M.

Appadurai (2003) has also given a more robust and academic classification of aspects of globalization especially as an interface of culture and social relations and international dealings. For Appadurai's (2003) there are the *imagined world landscapes* for comprehending the contemporary world under the influences of globalization; globalized activities and these occur and operate in five major and predominant ways. These are *ethnoscapes* (as people move internationally), *technoscapes* (technology linked international corporations), *financescapes* (global capital, currency markets, stock exchanges), *mediascapes* (electronic and news media) and *ideoscapes* (official state ideologies and counter ideologies as could be observed in the effect of Chinese CCTV, Arabs *Aljazeera* and American *CNN* in the quest to capture global culture and political economy under politico-media drive hegemony) given the recognition of the transcendental effects of globalization (see also Akanle 2011a; Akanle 2009).

Globalization as a concept depicts a process whereby the world moves beyond the barriers of time and space through technological advancement and encompasses interactive and integrative processes of people through driving forces such as international trade, investment, information and technology. Its effects on the environment, culture, political systems, economic development and human general well-being in societies around the world are invaluable and draw attention to the differentiation and inequality they create among humans (Al-Rodhan and Gerard 2006).

While globalization makes social interaction easy and fast through technologies like mobile phones, internet, TV cables and electronic networks, it has also widened the gap between the rich and the poor in the society and adversely influenced the priorities and behaviours of the youth who are naturally characterized by experimentation and adventures. For instance in order to feel a sense of belonging and *flow with the trend of time*, many youths are seen with black berry phones which are more often used for chatting and face booking, whose cost of

recharging may come before the cost of textbooks needed by an undergraduate student to pass an exam. Again, a class of students who own this kind of phone are created leaving those who do not out of the circle when demands such as *can I have your pin-code so I can ping you* are not replied with expected responses.

### **Globalization and Gender Inequality**

While not undermining the fact that globalization has contributed positively to societal development, its effect in creating inequality especially with reference to gender, cannot be swept under the carpet. Globalization has positively influenced and increased women's participation in labour, thereby narrowing the gender gap in labour participation, however, this has not reduced the inequality it creates especially because women still earn less and occupy more inferior positions when compared to their male counterparts (Aina 2012). This has in turn affected the place and voice of women in the society. Women are seen to be very differently positioned in relation to the markets in different parts of the world.

For instance in Nigeria, more women work in the rural areas and in the informal sector than the men hence women's contributions to informal sector and agricultural sector are put at 80 and 70 percent respectively (Aina 2012, Otite and Ogionwo 2006). Despite these contributions, measures are yet to be put in place in these sectors to improve the well-being of women taking into consideration their reproductive and domestic roles. UNRISD (2012) corroborated this view:

Increase in female labour has coincided with increase in informal and unprotected forms of work in general, and among women in particular, limiting their access to employment-related social protection.

Again women's participation in lower paid occupation is attributed to occupational sex segregation (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD 2012). Certain unwritten norms debar women from participation in some kinds of jobs even when it comes to vocational skills. For example it is rare to see women work as carpenters and mechanics. In the same vein, more men are engineers and geologists, while fewer men will be seen in nursing profession as compared to becoming doctors. A deep look into the capital requirement and per capita income of these skills would reveal lesser risk, lesser prestige, lesser power, lesser profit and lesser pay for those that are dominated by

women (see Akanle 2011b). This is because men and women are consciously or unconsciously deemed fit for particular kinds of jobs with the superior jobs being reserved for males and the subordinate kinds of jobs for the females. More so, the names accruing to professions like nursing and midwifery sort of stereotype them to be female professions especially in Nigeria and other developing countries. Even when they are lucky to access better paid jobs, it is easier for men to make available from their families to access such jobs, while females in such positions may be considered irresponsible mothers and wives, except they get adequate support from their husbands which is usually rare.

Derogatory and shameful practices like “prostitution” are not only assigned feminine titles but also attributed to the female folks in Nigeria, whereas it is usually an act practised by both male and female genders. These are made global through technological gadgets like computers, internet, smart phones, magazines and so on with female prostitutes being viewed as sex materials displayed for sales and exploitation, while the male prostitutes are viewed as sexually active individuals displayed to satisfy the sexual desires of interested persons. Again the concept “witch” depicts something negative while “wizard” shows that the individual is either a guru or genius. The term “mother tongue” is only attached to women to remind women of their role in the rearing of children to include teaching them societal language.

Furthermore, despite the increase in women’s role in the labour force, domestic and reproductive roles which are culturally attached to women are still not altered or favourably divided to reduce the stress and pressures they experience in combining both roles. The case is more unfavourable for women in African countries and Nigeria in particular where most cultures hold it that “the place of the woman is in the kitchen” and expect that women who participate in the labour force must not be found wanting in her domestic responsibilities. Whereas, those who oppose this view opined that domestic responsibilities be paid for. Budlendar (2008) conducted a study in six countries most of which are developing countries and discovered that domestic and care work would constitute about 10 to 39 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of any country, if assigned a monetary value.

Globally the identities of females are tactically erased especially in most Nigerian cultures upon marriage. The customs and traditions expect women to change their surnames to that of their spouses after which they are usually addressed Mrs. “A” being the surname of their husbands. This is aside the fact that the women’s rights and freedoms are seemingly

left for their husbands to determine as they will require their permission to display these as the men possess the right to exercise authority over them. Although a lot has been said on the need to encourage the girl-child education, women are still disadvantaged when it comes to access to capital, labour (from others), skills, education and experience. These affect their capacity to flow with the trends of globalization which require their development in these areas. Unfortunately, women still experience barriers to read as much as their male folk because of their reproductive and domestic responsibilities. These responsibilities of women as wives and mothers slow down their academic progress especially if they embark on such after marriage except such women decide not to bear children within this period which again becomes an issue to be contended with, in the larger society (Aina 2012).

Whereas, a wife who progresses educationally but not when it comes to the marriage and family institution (a highly valued institution in African), is not so free either. For instance a woman who is unmarried between the ages of 30, 40 and above and highly educated may be viewed as “out of place” because she is “not under the authority of a man” and cannot perform the expected reproductive and domestic roles whereas the case may not be so for a man under such circumstances. Such a woman may be viewed as having personality problems and considered arrogant because of her high educational attainment. Hence the female folks are always faced with pressures to balance education and career with their homes with either of them suffering neglect; while the other progresses except if the spouse gives adequate support to the woman. The challenge of balancing these responsibilities in order to grow up the ladder in an environment or organization that does not take into consideration these multiple and stressful roles in promotion criteria for women becomes a great concern for interested agencies and scholars.

### **Conclusion: Aggregating the issues and the International MIR**

What we have done in this chapter is to engage globalization and tease out its practical ramifications and its inequality interface. As globalization has been shown to impact gender inequality, it also affects nations as they relate. As it gives opportunities to nations to have global exposures and take advantage, it also incapacitates poor and weak ones by opening them up to global exploitation. The point must be made that poor nations can never sustainably exploit globalization benefits as the global arena is laced with contestations, competitions and conflicting interests and power play. Power and rich nations set the rules of the game for their benefits and change the rules and goal posts at will,

depending on prevailing realities and whose interest is on the line. As the rich and powerful nations continue to increase their global and national gains through globalization, the poor ones continue to relate on unequal terms only hoping against hope that they will benefit in future. The issue in global relations is thus relations of the unequals yet it is survival of the fittest.

In fact, the case of inequality induced and sustained by globalization relative to the rich and poor nations' relations is so critical that Akanle and Olutayo (2010) termed it the relations of the giants and the dwarfs which can never be balanced and mutually beneficial. It is thus not surprising that regardless of the intensity and duration as well as continuity of globalization most, if not all, African nations remained *unequally yoked with the developed nations* who largely continue to exploit them and keep them perpetually unequal (see also Akanle 2011c). While not holding the brief for the poor and corrupt nations of Africa and Nigeria, Asia and Middle East for instance, globalization and the inequality it enables among nations is partly responsible for the poverty, crises, conflict, wars and underdevelopment of nations. Largely, it must be noted that globalization is a double edged sword and field of gladiators where weak nations can never benefit except they re-strategize. If the current inequality framework of globalization persists the rich nations will continue to get richer while most poor nations will continue to get poorer!

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