

Exiting The Whirlpool? Pan-Africanism Caught In The Crossfire Of Identity and Globalization

Tatah Mentan, Ph.D., Lentz

Post-Doctoral Fellow in Peace and Conflict Resolution Research
Center for International Studies, University of Missouri-St.Louis.

Tel:1-651-642-1312

inmentan@yahoo.com

Abstract-

Africa's peoples and cultures have been subject to dramatic external interventions and influences enmeshing them firmly within the world capitalist system. The successive population decapitalizations, conquests, colonizations, and associated cultural imperialisms of Arab and European, Islam and Christianity, the haemorrhaging of literally millions of Africans constituted by the slave trade, and more recently the rapid "modernization" and spread of capitalist consumerism have all transformed and internationalized cultures, conceptualizations, and commodities. This increasingly powerful process of convergence has captured the African popular imagination to the extent that "globalization" is as much a subject of media interest as of academic enquiry.

Yet convergence and globalization are not all-embracing, unidirectional, and homogenizing processes. Rather, their impact varies greatly in extent and intensity over time, across space, and within and between cultures and social classes. Moreover, counter-movements, both conscious and unpremeditated, are occurring simultaneously. Pan-Africanism has been one of such counter-movements. How can a renascent Pan-Africanism thus assert its identity within these global networks of interconnections?

The overall aim of this study is therefore to examine the ways global forces impact upon African societies; the ways in which African societies have an impact upon the globalization process; and the comparative, cross national and cross cultural comparison of global processes as they relate to Africa. This aim implies the use of Pan-African history to construct Africa's futures in this era characterized by: (a) the Information Super highway through the computer and the Internet; and, (b) the economic super highway through global capitalism, transnational corporations and international trade.

Economic integration today involves a contest between two visions. One is rooted in the neo-liberal economics of the IMF, World Bank and the World Trade Organization and sees African integration as a subset of globalization. The other, which underpins the Pan-African ideal, seeks to create space for Africa-centred development and to forge a better deal for Africa from the global system. Here lies the litmus test. Will the Pan-African Ideal help the continent to exit the whirlpool of decapitalization and deterritorialization by the ravaging forces of globalization? If so, how? These are the challenging questions facing Pan-African intellectuals and which this paper attempts to grapple with.

The reason for this analytical focus is that history provides the starting point-both the initial and boundary conditions-for making new moves and opening the future to African possibilities as well as the projection of positive goals. History is also a storehouse of the data on Pan-Africanism and thus offers essential insights that are largely missing or are under- explored in most conventional accounts of globalization.