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Runaway globalization and the cultural imagination of dependency

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This essay argues that globalisation is nothing but a renewed ideological onslaught by the western powers to reify their culture of racialised subjugation of Africa and other third world countries. To do so they persistently resort to the age old untenable argument that climate and geography are responsible for Africa's underdevelopment. Apart from shifting the blame of Africa's crises away from the effects of their direct actions, the climatic and geographic justifications for the African crises is an attempt to justify racial inequality which works to the political and economic advantage of the West. Globalisation and globalism by their nature and design therefore work hand in hand to ensure a hegemonic consciousness among Africans such that even their responses to globalisation is imagined and mediated from the pedestal of dependence, thereby entrapping them further into the conspiracy of Western globalised world. The way out for Africa is to respond to globalisation via the prism of "globalisation from below", that is, to continue to determine their terms for partaking in the global in the context of their own existence. **Key words:** globalization, globalism, ideology, dependency.

Preamble¹

The "facticity" of the factuality of globalization always tends to monumentalize itself, obfuscating its systemic construct and rhetoric as ideologically and racially dimensioned. Globalization therefore is propagated as ubiquitous and a given, it is seen both as an intellectual concept as well as an ideological product. By this it describes concrete conditions while at the same time it prescribes particular futures. However, absent from within these conceptualizations and critique is Africa as a spatial and epistemic presence (Magubane and Zeleza 2004:166). This essay examines the relationship of complicity between economic globalization and the spread of ideologies that are not only "racialized" about African character, capabilities and potential but also tries to locate Africa's performance in the global phenomenon within a geographic and climatic articulation. By linking progress to climate and using environment to establish a hierarchy of regions neo-imperialist scholars reinscribe the superiority of Europe and North America in the global equation. African response to globalization paradoxically takes varied forms which incorporate ideologies from the North. This can be found in the cultural imagination of dependency as expressed in the media and other forms of cultural expression in Africa.

Runaway globalization

Since the MacLuhan prediction of the world as a global village became a reality the phenomenon of globalisation has acquired an inflationary character of runaway especially in the ways in which global finance seems to break ranks with traditional information transfer constraints and regulation within national parameters or even industrial productivity (Appadurai 2000: 3). No ideology has taken over the world so comprehensively as globalism. This is because it is an ideology that constitutes and constructs itself on every pedestal of being and becoming. On the political realm, it serves liberal democracy as the quintessence of human and societal organisation, on the economic front it prompts itself as the bastion of emancipation from poverty and on the cultural arena where it delivers its most devastating blow it offers itself as the gateway to human civilization and evolution. Yet with all these awesome credentials or potentials, globalisation remains at best an uneven structural and ideological process which engenders and spreads the culture and practice of unevenness and preference that is determined by human constructed frameworks. This runaway nature of globalisation has been aptly captured by Appadurai (1996, 2000) as the "world of flows". He stresses however, that this flows "are not coeval, convergent, isomorphic, or spatially consistent" but "relations of disjuncture" which catalyses difficulties and attritions within local contexts leading to the "fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance" (Appadurai 2000: 5).

As Roberts (2003) observes, global integration is galloping swiftly. This is illustrated by the fact that world trade increased faster than world economic growth by the end of the 1990s (Bryson 1999). As a consequence, the economies of localities, regions and nations and their people have been left at the mercy of international and transnational webs of trade, finance and investment game plan. But while this integration softens differences and difficulties for some, it has indeed become notoriously uneven as it exacerbates spatial and social differences for others (Smith 1984; Harvey 1989, 1996). And as Appadurai (2000:4) rightly points out this unevenness echoes in the resources for knowledge production that are essential for the democratisation of research communities needed to produce a global view of globalisation. At the receiving end of this skewed discourse of globalisation is Africa which is excluded from the place-determined and privileging of Eurocentric visions of the world as well as in the ways it imagines globalization (Aina 1997; Mkandawire 1997).

Africa is not only depicted as "falling out of the world economy" in comparison to happenings in East and Southeast Asia (Agnew and Grant 1997), it is also theorized as a centre of perpetual crisis epistemologically, economically and culturally. The rhetoric of crisis that has dominated Western thought about Africa since the first tragic encounter between the continent and Europe has not only continued to endure but has continued to sustain the ideological essence it insists on propagating. Historically Africa has been part of the global process having a manifest presence in the socio-

economic, political and cultural construction of the modern world albeit in a non-beneficiary basis. The nature of globalization which accelerated rapidly in the twentieth century clearly focused on new processes of subjugation which lies at the root of what is called the African crisis. This new and hyper form of globalisation demonstrates the severity of the orchestrated spread of ideologies of the West and its imposition on the rest of the world. The consequence of this phenomenon is what Hardt and Negri (2000) allude to as the “spectral reign of global space” and underscores the question posed by Gibson-Graham (2002) as to whether “a global regime is consolidating itself not so much through institutional initiatives but through subjects who experience themselves as increasingly subsumed to a global order”. By implication those who are located within the local are designed to be subordinates incapable of upturning that status. Natter (2004) points us to the fact that “the deployment of the concept of globalization itself performs ideological effects that are part of globalism’s own legitimization and seeming inevitability”.

Globalism as racialized ideology

For Africa, globalism has resurfaced the ideology of its supposed inferiority by theorising climate as the bane of its development. A 2001 essay which was widely covered in a broadcast report by one of the three major news networks in the USA, the ABC television news on October 10, 2001 and subsequently on their website clearly illustrates the re-emergence of Hegel. In the ABC report, scientists publishing in the *Journal of Economic Growth* theorised that better economies are located in places with cold weather. The economists tried to justify their claim by saying that colder weather was responsible for the concentration of so much of the world’s wealth in temperate regions rather than in the tropics. William Masters, the author of the study asserts: “what we are finding is a 1 to 2 percent per year difference in growth rate between temperate and tropical regions” and he goes on to chastise those who may be opposed to the view that notwithstanding the contribution of institutional factors, cold weather will continue to determine who gets and stays rich and who stays poor (also Masters and McMillan 2001).

Echoing this intellectual and academic justification of poverty that borders on racism, Sachs argues that there is an economic connection between climate, geography and society and calls for a shift from states to regional complexes defined by some mix of environmental and cultural endowments. To Sachs this kind of mix enables a better context for understanding how development works. He illustrates with Brazil where he argues that the state would be better analysed by dividing the country between a better endowed and technologically rich South and an environmentally and culturally impoverished and technologically poor North (Sachs 2001, also Harvey 2001). Illustrating further, Sachs points to a range of countries in the tropics that

are “geographically disadvantaged” and therefore are “cursed” with “geographical penalty” and “geographical deficit” (Sachs 1997). Thus despite globalization or capitalism’s new universality many south countries will still be left behind (Bassin 2003). To prosper therefore according to Sachs and Bassin, the tropics have to be in a dependent relationship with the developed world that can then feed it with its temperate-zone exports (Sachs 1997, Bassin 2003).

Even though the ABC report touted itself as the first time that economic and cultural advancement has been linked directly to climate in which environment was theorised as a justification for inequality of regions and their inhabitants, the reality is that this racialized ideology has always occupied Western epistemology and thought. George Louis Buffon’s *A Natural History* (1748–1804) and Carl von Linne’s *The System of Nature* (1735) are publications which expounded the notion that providence was responsible for the hierarchical order in nature. To Buffon even though all humans derive from one ancestry, biological and climatic causes stem differences in intelligence, habits and customs. By his ordering, the European is the highest in the scale of human, moral, rational and evolutionary capacity while non-Europeans are ranked lower (Buffon as quoted in Natter 2004: 7). In his writings on race, Kant (1775) echoes Buffon and Linne as he reaches the conclusion that the species of humans are made of distinctly four varieties. The best was the original ideal human which was no longer in existence on earth but which when in existence was located in the cold and temperate regions of the world and as Eze (cited in Natter 2004: 7) quotes of his posthumous lectures on physical geography, “humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites”.

This ideology that seeks divine explication for poverty using the pretext of difference creates the fundamental grounds for the kind of dependent relationship that works to the advantage of Europe and the West but to the disadvantage of Africa. And it is the basis, I submit for globalism and globalisation. The skewed nature of the practice and dividends of globalization needs to be explained just like slavery was explained, just like colonialism was explained and just like neo-colonialism which is the forerunner of modern globalization was explained. Runaway globalisation says Natter, echoing Bassin and Sachs “happily heralds the burgeoning universality of triumphant capitalism” even as “divisions between societies and regions are going to persist, and that economic-material-and thus human, social and civic-conditions will most decidedly not converge” (Natter 2004: 8). Adegbola (2005) has craftily narrated this condition of globalisation as the tyranny of the strong over the weak. Drawing from history Adegbola shows how powerful individuals, nations and ideologies have always expressed control over others as a means of satisfying their needs and wants. He tells the story of the 12th century Mongolian conqueror Genghis Khan who created one of the largest land empires in history from western and eastern Asia in 1209. Khan’s globalisation entrepreneurship was facilitated by efficient horsemanship and effective archery in addition to his astute military strategies and tactics. But

as Adegbola points out, what Khan lacked was the capability to communicate with his field commanders at the extremities of his vast empire. Today, in addition to a more formidable war arsenal, the West have the supersonic capacity to turn our world into a space of flows, thus providing the powerful with what the powerful normally do, subjugate the weak (world) to feed its empire of globalisation as it has done for centuries. And in the construction of this global empire, information and communication has become the greatest missile. We therefore need to critically understand how differences in ecological, cultural, economic, political, and social conditions are produced and to ascertain whether differences in geography are what in reality produce the unevenness and inequality of globalization.

Africa and globalism

To understand difference Lefebvre (1991) encourages us to examine the way and manner in which production, reproduction and reconfiguration of space is the essence of the political economy of capitalism and as Harvey (2001) adds, "the question is not how globalization has affected geography, but how these distinctive geographical processes of production and reconfiguration of space have created the specific conditions of contemporary globalization". What we see in effect is globalism's efforts to umbilically attach individual societies to the global capitalist economy in a way that do not just re-produce capitalist relations that are extant, but rather reconstituting simultaneously the scope of such relations in the process (Beck 1997, Luke 2003). With specific reference to Africa this process has a long history dating back to the era of slavery. Today attempts to discuss slavery are always treated as an escapist enterprise. Yet, we cannot ignore the ricocheting effects of that momentous historical experience. It cannot be wished away as agents of Western propaganda want us to do simply because, it provides the major beginnings of the skewed relationship of unevenness that characterize globalization and power relations in the world today. The same justifications that undergird the slavery are the same rationalizations that produce the ideology of globalism – a racialized explication of difference that positions black Africans as "fetchers of wood and drawers of water" which continues to be the prism through which blacks are still largely seen and regarded today.

The first wave of globalization can be rightly located in slavery and the mercantilist economic system because it represents the driving essence of globalization: the generation of economic, political, cultural and ideological intercourse between transnational and domestic structures in which one partner (transnational) is dominant. Slavery as the linchpin of the mercantilist system enabled the mercantilist principle of subordinating the economy of the colony to the metropole such that its exports are sold solely to the "mother country" while its imports emanate from same. Williams (1994: 65) argues that slavery "stimulated capitalism, provided employment for Brit-

ish labour, and brought great profits to England". Taken to the Americas to work on sugar and cotton plantations, the enslaved produced the raw materials that fed the industries in Britain. Slave labour was therefore a significant contributor to British industrial enterprise which employed hundreds of thousands of Englishmen as Renatus Enys writing in 1663 attests: "the strength and sinews of this western world" were the Negro slaves (quoted in Williams 1994: 30).

It is easy to see how slavery became an ideology that services a particular interest. Slavery, Magubane and Zeleza (2004: 167), posits "was responsible for the emergence of both racism and the ideology of race". Having successfully dehumanised the black race to its advantage, it was necessary to look for justifications to explain what obviously was beastly and inhuman hence racism became the consequence of slavery. As explained by Pieterse (1995: 59) when the moral weight of slavery became too heavy and it had to be abolished, racism became the buffer between abolition and equality. With racism came the next wave of rationalization that Africans (blacks) are intellectually inferior and therefore needed the guidance of superior white mentality to progress or unfold into the process of human development. This was to pave the way for the colonization of Africa.

Europe's success with industrial capitalism necessitated a spread which unleashed intense competition. To conquer and maintain markets for their produce as well as to ensure adequate and continuous supply of raw materials, it was necessary to secure the colonies. This then led to the scramble and the partition of Africa. To Boahen (1987: 32) the scramble was an "almost hysterical reaction to the crisis in industrial capitalism, feeding on fear that economic and hence political future of an industrial country rested on the exclusive control of markets and raw materials". Using colonialism therefore the colonial powers were able to tie the economies and political cultures of their colonies to the capitalist economies of the colonial powers, a system which was vigorously sustained even after independence. Colonialism was also responsible for turning the colonies into export oriented cash crop based monocrop production centres thereby killing or decreasing significantly food production and the practice of diversification. Again even after independence, this pattern has largely remained especially because independence was more of flag stuff than substance—the former colonies were tied through trade, currency and foreign exchange earnings to the apron strings of their 'former' colonial masters. As Magubane and Zeleza (2004: 169) point out, "the ideological dimensions of colonialism and the scramble for Africa were both profound and enduring. The idea of race as a permanent, immutable, biological characteristic by which the humanity of populations could be ranked found its highest expression in the ideologies used to justify conquest and subjugation".

The combined forces of slavery and colonialism produced a hegemonic order in which Africans socialised into the ways of the west come to believe that Europe was

superior in all dimensions, and even those that agree to racial equality still share Europe's superiority by believing that African interests are better served by subservience to Europe especially to the former colonial masters. In the mould of this crop of Africans are elites produced by the colonial educational and political machinery such as: Blaise Diagne, the Senegalese representative in the French Chamber of Deputies, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Samuel Ajayi Crowther to name just a few. Thus when independence was extracted, most of the Africans who took over were practicing the systems of their departed colonial lords and virtually doing their bidding. Those that tried to argue and struggle for real independence, like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Patrice Lumumba of Congo were hounded and killed by a conspiratorial web of intrigue that is traceable to the former colonial masters and America. In addition to elimination of perceived non-cooperationists and support for puppets rulers sympathetic to them, the "former" colonial powers also employed several devices including aids, loans and structural adjustment programmes to secure the dependence of Africa. Claude Ake (1995: 23) puts it succinctly: "uneven globalization is not only a process but also an ongoing structuration of power" as much as it "is the hierarchization of the world-economically, politically, and culturally-and the crystallizing of domination. It is a domination constituted essentially by economic power".

The real import of globalization in Africa has been the various economic theoretical experiments aimed primarily at servicing those that control the drivers of the global machinery such as the IMF, World Bank and of course WTO. Structural adjustment programmes and deregulation the twin forces of global relationship with Africa have not only truncated post-independence development efforts but have led to what Nabudere (2000: 53) aptly captures as the "third colonial occupation". The Lagos Plan of Action signed in 1980 by OAU heads of state insists that Africa is not progressing because of deteriorating terms of trade, growing protectionism of wealthy nations, high interest rates and burgeoning debt service commitments (The Lagos Plan of Action, 1981). In an essay first published in 1968, Arrighi and Saul, argue that "surplus absorption" which engendered the conspicuous consumption of urbanised elites and sub-elites who are in bureaucratic employment coupled with the huge consumption of "labour aristocracies", the transfer abroad of profits, interests, dividends while restraining the growth of agricultural productivity ensured the dependence of African economies on world demand for primary products (Arrighi 2002: 11). Advancing this argument further in 2002, Arrighi (2002: 17) explains that what lies at root of the African crisis far from geography and race is "the nature of the crisis that overtook world capitalism in the 1970s and in the response of the hegemonic power, the United States, to it". Arrighi (2002: 21) argues that the US which was a major source of world liquidity in the 1950s and 1960s had by the 1980s become the world's largest recipient of foreign capital and therefore the world's main debtor nation.

According to him:

This was a reversal of historic proportions that reflected an extraordinary, absolute and relative, capacity of the US political economy to attract capital from all over the world. It is likely that this was the single most important determinant of the contemporaneous reversal in the economic fortunes of North America and the bifurcation in the economic fortunes of Third World regions. For the redirection of capital flows to the United States reflatd both effective demand and investment in North America, while deflating in the rest of the world. (Arrighi 2002: 22)

From the above it is obvious that far from inferiority status, far from climate and geography, the enterprise of globalization was not designed to benefit all people, rather it was racialized to explain and justify the tyranny of the powerful over the weak, to foster an ideology of racial superiority which fertilizes a robust economic condition that subjugates the African into a dependent relationship with the emperors of the global empire. This is an empire in which some regions of the world muster the power to compel the world market to work to its advantage while the others are deceived into an almost fatal acceptance of the inevitability of globalism thereby instituting a cultural imagination of dependency.

The cultural imagination of dependency

My first baptism into the cultural imagination of dependency happened when I tried to convert from Protestantism to the Catholic Church. I was enthralled by the colour and the spectacle (I guess) of the celebration of mass. I envied the altar boys who looked like little fathers and the precision with which they go about their duties. I like the orderliness and of course the fact that my senior brother was Catholic so that even though I was in a Methodist mission high school, I chose to become Catholic. After attending catechism and passed I was ready for baptism. I was told I had to change my name since my indigenous name was equated with heathenism as such represents an identity of the devil to which we all Africans are automatically ascribed until we are washed clean and delivered from his clutches by Christianity. As one of the privileged beneficiaries of this deliverance, and a born again, it was incumbent on me to change my name (read identity) to reflect my new status. Since I did not know which names were good, or what they meant, my godfather an amiable school teacher chose names for me. My baptismal name was Thomas and my confirmation name was James. In one fell swoop my identity exemplified by my name Ijenkeri was wiped out, I became so to say, a new creation answerable to the consciousness of the English, whose names I have become invested with. After the renaming, I could not possibly connect to the name, and when I went home during the school break and told my father the story, he was furious. Not even the assurances that his name which

I bear as my surname or family name was intact could calm him down. Thank God my father was furious, because, I never used those names again.

The second incident came several years later. I had graduated from university with a PhD was a lecturer and actor of repute having made several stage and television appearances. It was in the year 2000 and the Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria, Mr Bayo Oduneye and his deputy Dr Ahmed Yerima came to my university to audition for the production of *Attahiru*, a historical play about one of the sultans of Sokoto who resisted colonialism. During the audition, the director was more interested in the ability of the actors to speak like the queen, it does not matter that some of the actors were award winners. When I noticed the director's discomfiture at the way we were pronouncing the English words, I made sure; I read lines from the play with the heaviness of my accent. Of course none of us made the cast. I began to wonder was it not bad enough that we going to do a Nigerian historical play in English? Must we also speak it not in the way that it is spoken and understood in Nigeria, but the way it is spoken and understood in England? And to say that this came from the apex cultural establishment that is supposed to protect Nigerian identity was most disturbing. As I ruminated on the incident, I could not but wonder how our consciousness has been enslaved and made dependent to an extent that quality and excellence can be measured in deference to what and how it exists in our former colonial motherland.

I paint these pictures to create the contextual basis for the way and manner in which Africans are responding to globalization. We do not only react from the basis of inferiority but also use the very paradigms that globalism use to construct us in explicating ourselves and by so doing, venerating the hold of the global ideology on us. The condition is so hegemonic that we have come to accept the "facticity" of it as the factuality of the reality. In the realm of language where this finds eloquent elucidation, the colonial language has not supplanted indigenous languages but is threatening to annihilate many of them. Since language is "the fundamental space of flows" and 'the medium within which the totality of human knowledge is coded,' (Adegbola 2005: 4) it means it is within language and its associated particulars that the global media enterprise globalises. Language is the major ingredient of information which is the brain and the heart of runaway globalization. While the empires of yore were built by the force of arms, the global empire of today is built and secured by the control and manipulation of information and information machinery: its generation, dissemination and of course control.

Global information thrives on elaborate and intricate infrastructure which is almost for Africa one hundred percent imported. Like other technologies, Africa as a created dependency lives on importation and technology transfer. Denied the ability to develop its own technological momentum through dumping and the killing of initiative, Africa suffers acute poverty of the infrastructure that gives expression to effective information generation, manipulation and dissemination. Even if the prob-

lem of Africa's poverty of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is resolved today, only a miserable percentage of the elite in Africa can take advantage of it. The simple reason is that these ICTs have been designed to be understood and used in the English language. The tyranny of English language even overwhelms other European colonial languages like French, Portuguese and Spanish who struggle desperately to keep pace with the speed of English. The statistics speak for itself: 80% of the content of the global ICT infrastructure is in English. Less than 3% of the content of global information infrastructure is from Africa and even then most of this 3% is in English (Adegbola 2005: 5). Since English is the dominant expression of the United States of America and Great Britain, it is obvious in whose global empire the world especially Africa is located.

In the global empire ICT firms and dealers are at the centre of a new world information economy. To achieve this the national monopolies of the telecommunications sector needed for security and national control of development have to be slaughtered in the alter of deregulation and opening up of markets to international competition (the cardinal basis of globalization). Aronson (2001: 543) points out that "the Thatcher-Reagan regulatory revolution undermined monopolists, encouraged domestic and international communications competition in national and international communications, and unleashed significant technological innovation" (read invasion). Nowhere is the control of the global information as devastating as in the movie and television industry. In fact even predating the global information explosion, movies and the television has been at the forefront of conveying the cultures and values and by implication the ideology of the producers and spreading this to the rest of the world in order to capture the imagination of others and hold them captive to the alluring potentials of the producing society thereby creating a dependency syndrome. Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell and Wang (2005: 9) disclose that US companies own 40–90% of movies shown in most parts of the world. In these movies "Los Angeles–New York culture and commerce dominate screen entertainment around the globe, either directly or as an implied other, and the dramatic success of US film since the First World War has been a model for its export of music, television, advertising, the Internet and sport".

In essence the globalised world is a moment in which we are victims of "the global triumph of the United States and its way of life" (Hobsbawm 1998: 1). The critical force in the construction of this triumph is cultural domination. When you dominate a people's mental processes, it means you have arrested their ability to think and conceptualize the world in any other but your image. The importance of this arrangement is simple, the dominated are acculturated into believing and accepting that the US is superior and what emanates from there must therefore be superior. Within this superiority however, must be argued, is the real superiority of the white who own, control and benefit from America's triumph. Celebrating America's triumph, a one

time American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger declares: "globalization is really another name for the dominant role of the United States" (cited in Miller et al 2005: 9). In pursuit of this his consulting firm, Kissinger Associates, charges America to consolidate its global empire by winning "the battle of the world's information flows, dominating the airwaves as Great Britain once ruled the seas" and this is justified because "Americans should not deny the fact that of all the nations in the history of the world, theirs is the most just, the most tolerant, the most willing to constantly reassess and improve itself, and the best model for the future" (Rothkopf 1997: 38, 74). Of course we do know now that the charge has been fulfilled for the collapse of communism left America alone to compete with itself in dominating the world. American liberal democratic ideal and its free market project are the issues in the world today. The role of American movies in ensuring the dominance of American racially based ideology and globalization dates back to early 20th century. As early as 1912, it became clear to exporters of Hollywood films that they were forerunners for the demand for US goods. Indeed the US commerce Secretary in the 1920s, Herbert Hoover eulogised the role of American movies as advancing "intellectual ideas and national ideals [...] as a powerful influence on behalf of American goods" (quoted in Grantham 2000: 53).

It is clear from all the above that our cultural imagining in Africa is that of dependence and it is difficult to be otherwise as long as the current practice of globalization sustains. Culture is critical and the reclaiming of it is instrumental to benefiting from any global arrangement. Epskamp (1992: 243) alerts us to the fact that "culture is necessary in order to give purpose and credibility to one's own existence. Rob people of their culture and you rob them of their reason of being." Culture is the substance of identity which expresses itself via common language, history, ethnicity and a sense of belonging. Culture is dynamic and not static but there still must be something recognizable that binds individuals to the values of their communities and the distinctiveness of their being and which serves as the pedestal upon which they articulate and manage their world. But when these capacities are taken away or supplanted by other powerful cultures, then one becomes a perpetual appendage. As long as the western idea of white superiority and the conviction that it represents the model of progress remain, Africa will remain at best subjects of an imperial culture. Until what Agnew and Corbridge (1995: 166) calls "the hegemony of 'transnational liberalism'" is dismantled our imaginings will continue to be constrained. Murden (2001: 459) captures this eloquently:

The level of cultural penetration embedded in the new hegemony was unprecedented. The liberal politics of the West was translated into a wave of democratization across the world. Just as significant was the influence of what Benjamin Barber called McWorld: the inescapable experience of consumer icons, mostly American, such as Coca Cola, McDonalds, Disney, Nike, and Sony, and a landscape of shopping malls, cinemas, sports stadiums, and branded restaurants.

As can be clearly seen the various attempts to rationalize globalization as beneficial to all people of the world is a ruse, rather it is simply an ideological cover to dominate others especially black Africans using a contrived argument of racial superiority to justify inequality. In the process the US and Europe have been able to develop a massive and daunting infrastructure of dominance, one which embeds to the consciousness of Africans and make them to respond to globalization via the prism of dependence.

Conclusion

Even though the major response to globalization remains the cultural imagination of dependency, a few intellectuals and activists in Africa and the West, like the World Social Forum and the International Forum on Globalization have been advocating alternatives to the current global empire led by America. This alternative has been located in “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below” subsidiarity (Appadurai 2000: 15; IFG 2002). The central and critical issue to this movement is that people consciously enter the relationship of globalization at their own terms, of their own volition and according to their own design, that they have control over the process and the outcome and that it is recognised as their right to do so. At various national and local levels also, reactions to globalization by these few have been to perform exit from the state; disenchantment with the nature and operations of the capitalist market and a rejection of the operations of the labour market. Relying instead on the capacity of the people and their voluntary participation, these initiatives and “globalization from below” converge in the arenas of agenda, ideology and practice. The initiatives and “globalization from below” are linked by their common search for alternatives that are independent of the trappings of conventional globalization wisdom, alternatives that focus on locality and relationships. Though this search may not and is not without difficulties and contradictions, they nonetheless capture the fervent of socio-cultural and economic relationships that are being constructed and reconstructed in a context that contests the ubiquitousness of globalization. However, as Esteva (1992: 27) cautions, local initiatives “will not be able to survive the siege organised around us, unless an institutional inversion soon materialises. Such change will only be possible if the myriad of local or even personal initiatives, now flourishing at grassroots, get not only momentum but public visibility, articulating an alternative to the dominant discourse.”

Note

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Counter-narratives Conference, the University of Winchester, United Kingdom, 3–6 April 2006.

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