

**GLOBALIZATION AND ‘AFRICANIZATION’ OF CONTEMPORARY POP MUSIC:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Globalization is the essence of the contemporary world order. As a dynamic evolutionary process, globalization identifies both with homogenization and hybridization of cultures. The process of globalization has been associated with the paradoxes of globalism and localism: the global is getting rather localized while the local is becoming increasingly globalized. The impact of globalization on aspects of world’s civilizations has been tremendous. With reference to popular culture, the influence has been far-reaching. This influence has often been described as westernization in view of its western predilection. But whilst contemporary popular culture has been overly reflecting the dynamics of western cultural homogenization, its pop music component tends to have been corresponding to an ‘Africanized hybridization’. This has been exemplified in some inter-related tendencies, viz: (i) African artists are currently dominating the pop music art worldwide (ii) African ‘sound-scapes’ feature very prominently and predominantly in the music (iii) African ethno-musicological heritage find copious and profound expression in the prevailing genres. The study thus explores how globalization tends to be transforming contemporary pop music into a sort of an Africanized pattern. Relying on a discursive descriptive analysis, the study problematizes this ‘Africanization’ tendency, drawing its implications for the history, theory, and praxis of cultural globalization. Capitalizing on the global exploits of Afro-pop, Reggae/Ragga and Hip-hop/Rap, the paper posits that the influence of globalization on contemporary African popular music is promising; underscoring thereby a prospect for sustainable African renaissance in the era.

**Keywords:** Africanization, African renaissance, cultural globalization, globalization, homogenization, hybridization, pop music.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization is evidently the essence of the contemporary world order. It is the consummation of the age-long transformation of the world into global society, based on advances in communication, transportation, and information technologies (Onu, 2004; Okoli, 2017). The world in the Twenty-first Century is thus characterized by “the integration of humanity and the compression of temporal and spatial dimensions of human interaction worldwide”, (Chirila-Donciu, n.d), such that economic, political, ecological and socio-cultural “events in one part of the world quickly come to have significance for people in other parts of the world” (William, 2009: para 1).

The impact of globalization has been radically tremendous in all facets of the contemporary society: politics, economy, environment and culture. Within the sphere of culture, globalization has brought about wide ranging global exchanges and diffusion in the areas of education, sports, religion, ideology, and popular culture. The dynamics of globalization has vigorously transformed how cultural products are made, circulated and consumed. It has equally transformed how the associated capital is generated and appropriated (Varboord & Brandellero, 2016).

The transformative impact of globalization in the arena of popular culture is immanently evident on the field of music. From the perspective of African music, Agawu and Agawu (2016, p.305) interestingly observe that the impacts of globalization “have combined to make African music more and more audible and less and less avoidable in many parts of the world”. More elaborately, Agawu and Agawu (2016, pp.305-306) opine thus:

One can nowadays attend mega concerts in parks, on college campuses, and in community theatres and dance halls in Berlin, Paris, Toronto, Moscow, Madrid, Melbourne, Rio, Atlanta, and New York and observe thousands of (mostly) non-African youths dancing enthusiastically to African beats...Nowadays, recorded African music can be heard on any number of radio or TV shows, accessed at various internet sites, including YouTube, and of course listened to in the personal listening libraries of millions of young people strapped to iPods. This is nothing less than an explosion of African music onto the world stage.

The paper examines the seeming ascendancy of African pop music on the world stage in the era of globalization. Among other things, the paper problematizes this apparent seeming ‘Africanization’ of contemporary pop music against the backdrop of the theory, history and praxis of cultural globalization. The underlying postulation in the paper is that the Africanizing trend in contemporary pop music adumbrates the arrival of African musical form and art on the global stage. The implication of this trend for sustainable African renaissance is hinted.

## **METHODOLOGY, SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

This paper is exploratory and discursive. It utilizes a thematic approach to advance its discourse, relying wholly on theoretical and empirical insights generated from secondary sources. Within the wider frame of cultural globalization, the locus of the study resides in the discursive episteme that interrogates the impact of globalization on the process of cultural production, but also consumption. By cultural production it is meant “the conscious creation of cultural artistic services and goods for both purely aesthetic and personal purposes, and commercial purposes (Breton, 1982 as cited in

Dube, 1996, p.99).The crux of the globalization-cultural production discourse is to understand how cultural flows (cultural products and capital) arising from globalization emanate and circulate from point of production to that of consumption. More pertinently, the discourse is also concerned with ascertaining whose interests that are served in the process (cf. Deloumeaux, 2016).

As a veritable example of cultural goods, pop music nicely fits into the cultural production schemata, within the wider remit of cultural globalization discourse (Deloumeaux, 2016).So, to properly appreciate and situate the stake of Africa in the globalizing arena of pop music, it is germane to ask fundamental questions regarding whose identity, values, and/or interests are being promoted thereof. Here, the analytical posers adverted to in Bender (2001) are found quite apposite: i. Who are the ambassadors? ii. In what language do they communicate? iii. What images of African/Black culture convey? iv. What stereotypes do they further or dispel? v. In what ways is Africa beneficiaries of the global exposure and visibility?

The aforementioned questions, among others, would form the points of reference in the course of the paper. The remainder of the paper is broadly organized in five sections. Following the foregoing is a section on conceptual clarifications, whereby the key terms that constitute the conceptual thrust of the paper are considered in an effort to situate their operational-cum-contextual meanings. This is in turn followed by a theoretical discourse on the nexus between globalization and culture, which is designed to dovetail into the theoretical framework of the paper. Next is the examination of the nexus between globalization and contemporary pop music from the standpoint of the rising profile of some African popular musical genres on the world stage. This is followed by a section on the implications of the outcome of the analysis for history, theory and praxis, with reference to the question of African renaissance and its sustainability. The last section is the conclusion, which winds up the paper.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Three basic terms constitute the conceptual thrust of this paper namely globalization, Africanization, popular music and African renaissance This section considers these concepts in turn in an effort to situate their operational meanings in the context of the present discourse.

**Globalization:** This refers to the transformation of the world into a global society, characterized by interconnectivity and inter-dependence (cf. Onu, 2004). According to McLean and McMillan:

Globalization is about the universal process of processes which generate a multiplicity of linkages and inter-connections which transcend the states and societies which make up the modern world system. It involves a dramatic increase in the density and depth of economic, ecological and societal interdependence, with ‘density’ referring to the increased number, range and scope of cross border transactions; and ‘depth’ to the degree to which that interdependence affects and is affected by, the ways in which societies are organized domestically (2003, p. 223).

Globalization is characterized by the dynamics and dialectics of spatial and temporal integration on the worldwide and regional scales (Penalver,2002; Chirila-Donciu, n.d). It is a dynamic and complex phenomenon with multifaceted

expressions in the realms of politics, economy, environment, and culture (Okoli, 2017). This paper is concerned with the cultural dimension of globalization, which has to do with the socio-cultural manifestations of the globalizing trend.

**Africanization:** The concept of ‘Africanization’ is applied in its problematic sense in this paper. In this regard, it denotes an attempt to indigenize something to an African essence (Brizuela-Garcia, 2006). Africanization, therefore, means the cultural process whereby non-African practices, concepts, process, or systems are indigenized or adapted to an African modus. Contemporary understanding of ‘Africanization’ owes a lot to the contributions of Africanist historians and philosophers who use the concept to represent the effort towards reclaiming the true African origins and essences from the adulterating heritage of colonialism and external civilization (Maake, 2008; Franke *et al*, 2008; Scuttner, 2010).

Extant scholarship on ‘Africanization’ is fraught with deep-seated philosophical cum academic polemics and cynicism. The tendency is depicted by Maake (2008, p. 24), who opines that “Africanization is an inchoate, if not a desirable state, and has to be seen in the clear perspective of history before we can even contemplate a tropism forwards”.

**Popular music:** Simply put, popular music is the genre of music that appeals to a mass audience within a contemporaneous time and space (Taylor, 1997; Onyeji, 2002; Shonekan, 2012; Okuyade, 2012). According to Ojukwu, Obielozie and Esimone (2016, p.117), “Popular music refers to all contemporaneous music with broad, immediate and implicitly transient attractiveness which appeals to a mass audience. Such music is quite receptive to people since they are familiar with its idioms and does not require guided listening”.

Pop music is an important aspect of the contemporary global popular culture industry (Throsby, 2002; Achtenberg, *et al*, n.d). It is generally characterized by the following: i. currency and contemporaneous outlook ii. mass-audience appeal iii. trans-generational orientation iv. transient attractiveness v. familiar and fashionable idioms vi urban and cosmopolitan outlook, etc.

**African Renaissance:** This loosely refers to revival of African civilization. It is instantiated in the global ascendancy and dominance of aspects of Africa’s cultural heritage in the realms of beliefs, practices, art-forms, celebrations, and performances. The notion of sustainable African renaissance is used herewith in reference to the sustainability of Africa’s global cultural exploits on the world’s stage in the era of globalization.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION: ISSUES AND THEORIES**

Globalization is characterized by expansive and extensive cross-cultural exchanges and diffusion (Delonmeaux, 2016). The transnational dynamism of globalization makes it possible that cultural products produced in sub-national, national and regional localities are circulated and consumed globally (Dube, 1996; Salm, 2010). Cultural globalization, therefore, “implies that cultural exchange between countries expands and that countries around the globe increasingly enjoy foreign cultural goods besides their domestic production (Achtenberg, n. d, p.5).

The international circulation and appropriation of cultural goods, services, and capital in keeping with the imperative of globalization is a dialectical process that yields contradictory outcomes. Here, the local often get globalized and the global correspondingly get localized; all in varying dimensions and degrees (cf. Onu, 2004; Okoli, 2017). More

importantly, this dynamic process makes it possible for civilizations to negotiate, infiltrate, subvert and negate each other in such a manner that typifies the ‘syntheses and antitheses’ of civilizations. This trend has been variously characterized in the extant literature as Americanization, Africanization, Westernization, de-Westernization, and the like (Maultsby, 2005; Iwabuchi, 2010).

The cross-cultural exchanges that characterize cultural globalization are a matter of ‘give and take’ (Wang & Yue-yu, 2005). But this ‘give and take’, although largely reciprocal, is not necessarily mutually beneficial to all nations. In effect, the process and outcomes of such exchange are never even (cf. Penalver, 2002). Scholars have over the years sought to come to terms with how the process of cultural globalization impact on nations; and their endeavours in this regard have yielded three important theoretical perspectives (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Cultural Globalization**

<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	<b>Highlight(s)</b>
Homogenization	One-way cultural flow from the global core to the periphery, leading to Western cultural hegemonization or imperialism.
Glocalization or Hybridization	Global cultures are not unilaterally imposed worldwide but are actively adapted according to local circumstances.
Multiculturalization/Multiculturalism	International cultural flows lead to cultural blend or co-existence in such a manner that there are no longer distinctions between the dominant cultural core and the dominated periphery.

**Source:** Achtenberg, P. *et al* (n. d, p. 5).

All the above theoretical perspectives are relevant in explaining Africa’s experience with cultural globalization. While the theory of homogenization forecloses the possibilities of African cultural renaissance on the global stage, the theory of multiculturalism obscures the innate cultural imperialism of globalization. Together, the two cannot plausibly explain the potential and/or prospects and African-biased cultural renaissance in the arena of contemporary pop music. The perspective of this paper aligns with the theory of ‘glocalization’/‘hybridization’, for it recognizes such an affirmative possibility, however problematically. It is in the light of this fact that the paper appropriates the theory of cultural hybridization as its analytical anchorage.

### **Globalization and the Africanizing Tendency in Contemporary Music**

That African music is gaining a global popularity is a truism. More fundamentally, it is a platitude that this trend is associated with globalization; hence “it is not surprising that African music has become a global phenomenon in the twenty-first century” (Agawu & Agawu, 2016, p. 5). There are important influences that account for the rising profile and popularity of African music and pop music in particular, on the world’s stage. These factors are (i) the Afro-

Diasporconnections (ii) the Information and Communications Technology's (ICT's) revolution, and (iii) increased international migration and networking.

Regarding the Afro-Diaspora connection, Agawu and Agawu (2016, p.307) observe that significant retentions of African music could be found on the "sounds-capes of many nations." These nations include those of the Americas and Caribbean whose musical forms bear enormous retentions of African heritage, namely "Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Dominican, Republic Haiti, Jamaica, Peru, Puerto Rico, United States of America, and Uruguay" (Green, 2015, p. 5). The musical traditions of these nations today, to a large extent, bear deep-seated "African roots resulting from the shared history of the African slave trade executed under European colonialism" (Green, 2015, p.1).

Prominent examples of the Africanized musical genres include Reggae in Jamaica, Samba in Brazil, Rumba in Cuba, and Calypso in Trinidad (Agawu & Agawu, 2016). The geo-cultural spread and dominance of Africanized musical forms in the Hemisphere and West Indies has been historically significant. According to Green (2015, p.3) "The music of the Americas, African, Caribbean and African-America (North-South) represents a triumph of reinvention of the self, a transformation of culture emerging from the crudest conditions yet capable of maintaining an African Identity".

The advent of globalization has further consolidated the African heritage of the musical expressions of the contemporary world pop music (Rockwell, 1981). So, in addition to Afro-Diasporic influences, globalization of African music and, 'arguably', 'Africanization' of global music, has been promoted by factors such as explosions in ICTs and transnational migration (Letts, 2003). ICTs have bolstered the portability, transmissibility and visibility of African music, thereby promoting its global reach and patronage. Allied to this is the dynamics of transnational migration and networking which affords an enabling social capital for the promotion of African music globally (Muehrer, 2012).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that African music is actively responding to the imperative of globalization in specific ways. But while it is simple and logical that African pop music is globalizing based on the indicators highlighted in the preceding paragraphs, it is problematic to establish that contemporary pop music is Africanizing. Suffice it, however, to note that the presupposition of this paper is that contemporary pop music bears Africanizing tendencies. As submitted by Wilber (2017, para10) "Almost every current popular musical genre has roots in earlier musical styles created by African American musicians". In the subsections that follow, attempt is made, however discursively, to pursue this argument towards a 'tentative' conclusion from the examples of Afro-pop, reggae/ragga, and hip-hop/rap.

**Afro-Pop:** This refers to a variety of contemporary African music genres that are characterized by dynamic, electric-mastered rhythm and urban idioms (cf. Shonekan, 2012). This derives from regionally dominant music styles, such as the West African highlife, East African Taraab, and Central African Soukus or Makosa. Contemporary Afro-pop is characterized by the articulation of modern African and Afro-American beats (cf. Charry, 2012). As a mode of musical expression, Afro-pop is characterized by the tendency towards "linking the past to present, merging African and non-African styles, and highlighting artists who reside in multiple localities and manage a mosaic of cultural resources in the age of globalization" (Salm, 2010, p.1328).

The influence of Afro-pop on contemporary world's musical terrain has been so dramatic and immense. The art form has produced a corpus of world-class celebrities who make waves on globally competitive music charts in the West. A recent

case in point is Nigeria’s D’banj whose global hit titled “Oliver Twist” reached number two (No. 2) on the UK R & B chart in 2012 (MsAfropolitan, 2013). Some other reigning Afro-pop artists who are currently globally revered are highlighted in Table 2 alongside their global Twitter following.

**Table 2: Some Popular Contemporary African Musicians& Twitter Following**

Artiste/Country	Twitter Following	Remarks
Amr Diab/Egypt	3,454,405	Amr Abd El-Basset Abd El-Azeez Diab, is an Egyptian popstar with a B.A in Arabic Music from the Cairo Academy of Arts. Amr Diab has received 7 World Music Awards and with over three million followers on twitter.
Hamza Namira/ Egypt	3,094,216	Namira is an Egyptian pop singer, songwriter, instrumentalist and a political activist. The subject matter of his songs cover Arabic modern culture, social and humanitarian issues. Namira gained prominence in the wake of the 2011 Egypt revolution that led to the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak. In 2014, his songs were banned from state radio stations from being critical of the Egyptian government.
Saber Rebai/Tunisia	1,822,234	Saber Rebai is a Tunisian Arab singer and composer with his popularity spanning across the Middle East and some Europe. Saber Rebai has released a total of 10 albums and has been on tours across Europe, USA and Australia.
Wizkid Ayo Balogun/ Nigeria	1,527,063	Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun, who’s better known by his stage name, Wizkid, is a Nigerian popstar. He bagged the BET Awards in 2012 along with other plaques on the strength of two solo albums.
Salma Rachid/Morocco	749,847	Salma Rachid is a Moroccan vocalist. She gained prominence after participating in the second season of the Arab idol where she made it to the top five.
Tiwatope Savage/ Nigeria	1,014,110	Tiwa Savage is an R&B singer and songwriter. In 2006, she contested in the UK edition of the X Factor and finished in the final 24.

**Source:**Fadoju, L. (2015);<https://techcabal.com/2015/04/30/spinlet-index-who-are-the-most-popular-african-musicians-on-twitter/>

African pop artists have excelled in terms of global celebrations and collaborations. Through such international engagements, they have been able to promote their career, but also the African heritage on the global stage. In this respect, “migrant musicians on the African continent have established intricate network between Europe and home, often returning from abroad to re-energize in their local communities...”Whether performing at home in the continent or abroad, Afro-pop artists celebrate the essences of African identity and culture (Nwadiigwe, Chouala, Omenya, Kah, Ayele & Nwangi, 2017). Embedded in their celebrations and performances are conscious and unconscious projection of aspects of African identity and heritage.

**Reggae/Ragga:** Reggae music is one of the most authentic and most vibrant musical retentions in the African Diaspora.Originating the Caribbean Islands, reggae bears copious elements of African roots. Reggae music became a

dominant genre of contemporary world music in the 1970s following its internationalization and popularity in the Americas, Europe and Africa. Of this transformation, Green (2015, p.5) remarks that “reggae emanating from the Island of Jamaica in the Caribbean resounds and is actively cultivated everywhere from Hawaii to Malawi.”

By mid 1980s, “an electronic, techno-pop-based variation of reggae, known as ragga or raggamuffin” had emerged (Belagie, 2009, para 5). Over the years, reggae and ragga have dominated world’s music stage, with artists like UB40, Shabba Ranks, Shaggy, and Sean Paul topping Popular Music Charts and winning coveted awards. The adaptive and subversive character of reggae music has made it stand the test of time, influencing other genres of music without losing its essence and originality fundamentally. Today, elements of reggae could be found in Afro-pop, Afro-Latino Hip-hop, American Hip-hop, and like (Bender, 2001; Dennis, 2006). Other world music forms, such as dance-hall, gospel and country, have also been influenced by the lyrical and rhythmic patterns of reggae. The Afro-skewed heritage and character of reggae/ragga has been sustained amidst the dynamics of cultural globalization to which it has been exposed.

**Hip-Hop/Rap:** This is a form of music that originated in New York in the 1970s, following the creative endeavours of immigrants of Caribbean ancestry. Overtime, the music form evolved into a subculture that encompasses street-life styles, break dancing, graffiti, to mention but a few. The African roots of Hip-hop are attested to by its Caribbean origins. Over the years, the music art has been dominated by Afro-American youngsters who use the medium to celebrate their black history and identity (Bender, 2001; Dennis, 2006).

Contemporary rap music in the West is, more or less, an ‘identity movement’. It has promoted “black visibility” (Bender, 2001, p.730), in a socio-cultural milieu where African youths have often suffered stereotyped identity bashing. But besides providing a veritable platform for “black visibility”, it has also provided a pretext for anti-social activities, such as gangsterism, drug abuse, street violence, hooliganism, vulgarism, queer living. A typical instance of this disservice is the issue of street-identity divide and violence. In respect of this, Dennis (2006, p.730) comments that:

As much as rap music has done to create Black visibility, it has nonetheless incited violence and dealt Blacks a setback by creating of mimicking Black identity divides on the geographic (East v. West Coast), gender/power (“Pimps” and “Hoes”) and other (“Players” and Playa Haters”) lines.

In spite of the above downside, rap music has been a valuable ‘African’ contribution to the contemporary pop music (Sullivan, 2001; Hilbruner, 2015). This contribution must be appreciated in the light of its historical African-American connection. But while the Americas have presented the enabling promotional space and capital, Africa largely remains the fountain of the associated ethno-musicological influences. After all:

America owes much, if not all, of its musical innovation to African Americans. Without the musical contributions of African Americans, we wouldn’t have most of the popular music styles we know today. Everything from rock to hip-hop to bluegrass has been influenced by traditional African music styles and the music created by African slaves in America. (Wilber, 2017, para 1)

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND ITS SUSTAINABILITY**

The state of contemporary pop music could be linked to a cultural panorama characterized by dynamic and dialectical adaptations in the fashion of 'give and take' (Wang & Yueh-yu, 2005). Of this scenario, Charry (2012, p.166) succinctly notes that "everywhere there is a mixture, collision, and collusion (citing Stapleton & May 1985). The globalizing context and imperative of contemporary pop music is such that sundry musical genres 'intermix' and redefine one another in fundamental manner. In this context, "Africa impacts on the West and the West impacts on Africa" (Stapleton & May 1985 as cited in Charry, 2012, p.166).

African pop music artists are utilizing the platform and opportunities offered by globalization to promote and project African contents through their songs and performances. Accordingly, Dennis (2006: iii) observes that "these performances are strategically appropriating and combining 'foreign' elements together with 'local' ones to celebrate their cultures, redefine localities and accentuate their 'blackness'". In this process of cross-cultural diffusion, an aspect of African music art has gained international, even global, recognition, acceptance and dominance. Although pessimists have predicted that African music would lose its essence in the process, it has been posited that given its strongly entrenched and resilient Africanist foundations, African music "will not lose its identity" (Charry, 2012, p.167).

The strong expression of Afro-biased characteristics in contemporary pop music points to the fact that globalization is benefitting African after all. This is in contradistinction to the dominant cynical standpoint to the effect that Africa is always fatally at the receiving end of the globalization process (Iwabuchi, 2010). More importantly, the outcome of the study tends to align with the "hybridization" perspective of cultural globalization that "global cultures are not unilaterally imposed, but are actively negotiated and adapted according to local circumstances" (Achtenberg *et al*, n.d, p.5).

Overall, the significance of the foregoing is most salient in relation to the arrival of Africa's cultural heritage on the global stage. Through such vital expressions and exploits in the arena of popular music, Africa is re-asserting itself as a mother-civilization. Alongside the Africanizing trends is the immanence of African renaissance, also as a veritable globalizing force. Africa can capitalize on such an opportunity to strengthen her strategic bargain in the globalization order in order to leverage capacity for sustainable progress. But her prospect in that regard largely depends on how good she is able to make the opportunities so provided. This, vitally, boils down on the question of sustainability.

## **CONCLUSION**

Globalization is the essence of the contemporary world order. It is a fundamental force that has found expression in a fact of society, including the polity, economy, ecology and culture. Globalization is characterized by historical dynamics and dialectics. The dialectical essence of globalization is best understood with reference to the apparent unity and conflict of its forces. While cultural globalization has often presented pretexts for 'clash of civilizations', it has nonetheless provided veritable avenues for cross-cultural diffusion and hybridization worldwide. Although it is plausible to argue that globalization brings about transnational cultural assimilation, it is highly contentious as to whether the process is beneficial to all nations.

Contrary to the views of against and skeptics, who posit that globalization is almost entirely inimical to Africa, this paper posits that the impact of globalization on Africa's popular music has been potentially positive and promising. The paper demonstrated how contemporary African pop music forms have gained worldwide currency, recognition, acceptance and ascendancy under the influence of globalization. Arguing from the arrival of Afro-pop, reggae/ragga and hip-hop/rap on the world's musical stage, the paper hereby submit that contemporary pop music may as well be responding rather promisingly to the imperative of African cultural renaissance. Comprehending this trend in its historical significance would require a more rigorous empirical study beyond the current exploratory effort. But by the way, the task of sustaining the gains of the moment is critical in making good the promise that the scenario holds.

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