

# **Globalization as Meta-Axiological Dilemma: The Sociological Implications of Rational Choice Criteria for Local Cultural Deep Structure**

by

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## **Abstract**

This article considers the global displacement of local axiology as a divestiture of cultural deep structure that undergirds individual economic agency within African society. This global process of philosophical divestiture is argued to disengage a highly intricate local axiological set from subsistence behaviors that are regenerative of local cultural deep structure and its basis for African patterns of social interaction. In this context, globalization (as was colonialism before it) becomes a revived process that divests the local of its model for human development, and thus legitimates iconoclastic social behaviors.

The world has become infinitesimally small. National boundaries and the endemically societies they circumscribe have become increasingly porous. Non-western societies since the 1970s have entered into intensive neo-colonial efforts to incorporate their localized subsistence patterns into an ever reorganizing global economy which at its core is fundamentally changed and functionally unstable. Thus, a *weltanschauung* of international economic reorganization subordinates national independence and sovereignty for the greater neocolonial good as it moves to integrate what is perceived as socially disruptive and marginal. And second, prescriptive stabilizing policies and structural adjustments strategies order equilibrating contributions to a new global economy, displacing non-market indigenous social institutions with "free market" mechanisms and supporting institutional practices that reproduce non-local patterns of economic agency.

This article considers the global displacement of an axiological set indigenous to traditional African societies as a divestiture of a cultural deep structure that undermines local subsistence modalities. This global process of cultural divestiture is argued to disengage a highly intricate local axiological set from subsistence behaviors that are regenerative to local cultural deep structure and its support of uniquely African patterns of social interaction. In this context, globalization (as was colonialism before it) appears to be a process that divests the local of its model for human development, and thus encourages iconoclastic social praxis.

### **Cultural Deep Structure**

Despite its conceptual promiscuity within popular and academic discourse, culture boasts a logistical arrangement of interpretative axioms of existence grounded in the cosmological and ontological orientations of "*deep structure*". Hence, deep structure organizes the scope and nature of the surface level of culture, which consists of a vast array of manifest behaviors and practices, including symbols, language and customs. These deep structural axioms superintend society's functional organization and reproduction of praxis conditions that cultivate balanced human development as the basis of cultural deep structure, cosmology and ontology conflate to hew out its distinctive axiological framework. Thus, philosophical conceptualizations of the origin, structure and mechanics of the universe buttress collective self-conceptualizations that confer purpose and direction to human existence; and through this conflation of perceived environmental relations emerges a set of behavioral parameters that are simultaneously prescriptive and evaluative of moral conduct.

Constructively, behavior or conduct becomes moral to the extent that it is cosmologically and ontologically consistent and social institutions as habitual behavioral patterns actualize the cultural model by transforming its cosmogony and ontological axioms into ordered societal praxis that communicate, reinforce and propagate interpretations of physical and metaphysical realities. Socialization, then, would involve participatory processes of enculturation that entrench and sustain societal initiatives through human development. Culture, then, models an idiosyncratic horizontal and vertical progression of human development in existential purpose and thus functions across layers of perceived reality.<sup>1</sup>

## Global Axiological Set

Grounded in neoclassical economics, globalization equates human subsistence with material accumulation, and has implicit in its behavioral assumptions about (1) the ontological belief that subsistence concerns itself with the provision of material goods that satisfy unlimited biological and social wants; and (2) the cosmological belief that the insatiability for human material want to impose scarcity in a resource-poor natural environment.

Central to the neoclassical globalization paradigm are the concepts of "economy" and "economizing" wherein economy is an adaptive behavior to: ecological constraints that shape the direction of socio-cultural organization; and a mode of subsistence amid scarcity imposed by expanding human want. Continuing, the neoclassical paradigm treats economy as a total life environment superintended by divine market forces, i.e., interactions of disaggregated, specialized subsistence behaviors tempered by their relevant axiological norms, and thus seemingly a "*divine*" integration of market complementarities<sup>2</sup> presumably legitimates of capitalism as the most evolved system of human cultivation and continuation which ascribes to capitalism catholicity deducible from its implicit cosmological belief in the sovereign ubiquity of environmental scarcity with an ontological belief in individual salvation liberated from the innate iniquities of the social aggregate, and a unit of self-preservation through material accumulation.

In a definitional context, "Economizing" refers to allocate problems of *rationaly choosing* among competing alternatives which inherent necessary and sufficient conditions of infinite want, scarcity and uncertainty. Globally, "economizing" involves organized human aggregates *rationaly choosing* subsistence behaviors subject to resource availability (opportunity costs) and well-specified axiological norms which socialization accords each economic agent. Hence, the nature of *rational* choice as a specific way to pursue a market-based pattern of subsistence, and of "economizing" as a catholic human pursuit distinguishes modality from behavior, as well as pattern of subsistence and objective motives to set a clear dysteleology between "economizing" and other institutionalized social behaviors conditions based on the inevitability of societal divisiveness rooted in the caprice of differentiated human wants within a capitalist economy via a requisite need for order through social control.<sup>3</sup>

Presumably, each culture configures differently the range of rationality and the scope of human want. Cultural variation also differentiates societal distributions of technology and capital, and societal divisions of labor differentiation along an evolutionary scale. Ecological scarcity does commonly constrain the organization of local subsistence by defining the scope of satiable human want and thereby limiting the rationality of human development. Yet scarcity transcends cultural differentiation as a strictly quantitative occlude that obtains only in those societies that greatly value material accumulation relative to more non-material human needs and objectives. Thus, values of "modern" economic growth cannot sustain local societies that permit such objectives. Accordingly, not only can a locality be assessed a comparative degree of evolutionary sophistication<sup>4</sup>, but its material and normative capacity for integration, as it<sup>5</sup> situates in a global structure.

If humankind satisfies their unlimited material wants and desires, and employs neoclassical perceptions of human behavior to do so, then material acquisition must be a socially determined value to which the social structure impels society to adhere. Thus should it acknowledge "bio-social existence", a subsistence modality must explain its organizational requirements, rights and obligations that both integrate and preferentially order its ecological resources and social behaviors for the continuous provisioning of human sustenance, this collection of normative behavioral criteria more precisely distinguishes an economy from other social institutions that address different aggregate needs.

Therefore, an axiological set of six preference values, formally called "axioms of choice"<sup>6</sup> serves as the organizational requirements, rights and obligations that preferentially order ecological resources and social behaviors globally with its specific criteria of non-satiation and convexity institutionalize Western ontological notions about the scope and nature of human being. Because the availability of goods and services is conditioned by natural scarcity, thus one must accumulate utility in the form of material goods and thereby stockpile "happiness" to feed his constant esuriency. As a consequence, wealth becomes an objective end grounded in the cosmological belief in environmental scarcity, and an ontological belief in insatiability. Economic socialization renders this axiological set consensual as moral evaluative criteria that function to normalize and reproduce a particularized arrangement of social interactions and their role/status relationships. Because socialization endows culture with the quality of consensus, hence these axioms of choice become a restricted, or "closed" axiological set of deep structural valuations both quantitatively (i.e., mathematically) and, most importantly, qualitatively (i.e., culturally).

## **Local Axiological Set**

Central to African cosmology is the belief in a universal oneness which defines human continuity with all natural phenomena, which is neither dead nor without life. This oneness, conceived as a vital aspect or life force, permeates and infuses all that exists in the Creation. African perceptions of this life force range from its nature and functioning with the individual to its functional integration of action and circumstance. The life force empowers life, and is continually transformed through interaction and praxis. Social organization maintains the life force through codes of morality - i.e., basic axioms of self-integration and social interaction (Akbar, 1976). Spiritual life becomes fused with human life as it is similarly fused with physical, corporate life. Symbol and ritual socially recognize this fusion and reinforce the associative nexus between the individual and society, continually renew and reaffirm these moral axioms, and further support the conscious maintenance of the life force. Accordingly, the natural environment -- as an analog of the life force -- acquires its vital dynamism and substantiates society by rendering it a systematic arrangement of human relations that replicate macrocosmic conditions and processes at the microcosm.

In addition to being a corporate vessel for the life force, humankind is also conceived of as perfectible. That is, humankind strives in his/her totality to become a perfect reflection of the life force both in thought and action (Akbar, 1976). Thus, this notion of perfectibility lies contradict the finite Western conceptualization of humankind as predisposed to corrupting base instincts and thereby prone to error and fallibility. Perfectibility characterizes as an innate drive toward changes consistent with spiritual maturity, increased competency and equilibrium (King, 1976). To become spiritually and organically consistent with natural and social environments, and thereby fully actualize human potential, is the impetus for exploration, transformation, mastery and competency of the "self".<sup>7</sup> Humans are continuously driven and motivated to action and creation. Thus, social behavior is more than a mere expression of impulse or desire; it is an enactment of being -- an expression that utilizes sensitivity both to affect the phenomenal world and to harmonize with it.

The self, then, is an interdependent entity shared with all members of the social group, and the very idea of seclusion and separateness is synonymous with clinically defined insanity (Akbar, 1976). Accordingly, the relationship and interconnection between people which places high significance on spirituality, unity and group participation, becomes a key emphasis of African ontological principles.

Inasmuch as African cosmology and ontology, and the existence and functioning of the life force structure command deep structural configurations at the local level, the traditional society similarly acquires the generalized characterization of being deeply religious. That is, local social organization exhibits both propensity and property for organized, systematic reconnections of the individual to God (from before birth to beyond the end of physical life, religion is a spiritual journey that can be neither propagated nor securing of converts). And since it must be lived, it becomes a societal possession (Mbiti, 1970). Thus, to be a member of society is to be religious, and to be socially alienated is to cease to exist.

### **Local Subsistence Modality**

Bio-social need is not mutually exclusive under local social organization as it becomes identical and equally satiable through its requisite socio-religious networks and interaction to presents itself as something to be materially resolved, then quickly abandoned once the exigency of need is redressed should evil as a condition supports human vanities that are permitted. Thus, need bears an additional exigency beyond its material satiation to which its psychological characteristic alludes; one that is rooted in a normal "want" within human life and relationships since individual existence, group existence and the presence of the life force are identical and mutually reinforcing. It is this non-material dimension of need that is responded to through the action of reciprocity and redistribution identified as the salient mode of rational response to subsistence within a non-Western cosmogony and ontology.<sup>8,9</sup> Hence, in a socio-religious society, the satiation of bio-social need through continuous material accumulation as a consumptive modality amounts to little more than individual self-centeredness that breaches the morality of indivisibility and collective responsibility that ultimately reproduces and sustains the function and logic of the macrocosmic life force in microcosmic social organization.<sup>10</sup>

And in understanding this happening, we also know that evil is a condition of breaking moral and ethical codes: an offense of the corporate social body against the life force<sup>11</sup>. And rather than an intrinsic characteristic of humankind or the environment, evil is an offense, self-aborting behavior of the corporate social body against the life force, and its very nature threatens the balanced integration of social relations and spiritual relations (life force). And juxtaposition, nature cannot exhibit scarcity, being an instrument of the life force to contribute to the living phenomenal world.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, scarcity occludes the cosmological functions of the life force by definition, and rather than demonstrate an attribute of parsimony, the natural environment is capable of sustaining manifest changes in the form or expression of the life force without altering its essential pith, thus such changes in form or expression are in consistent with known physical law (e.g.,  $E=mc^2$ ), and serve to equilibrate, renew, and/or correct the unity between humankind and nature.

Also, in this context, varied manifestations of the life force are "ways of being" that define diverse cognitive styles and methods used to develop and organize consciousness and transform reality (King, 1976). And thus nature and man are extensions of one another because the life force uniformly permeates each, as well as their mutually interdependent existence, whereas scarcity in nature reflects a human imbalance that the life force moves to equilibrate through phenomenal transformations, inasmuch as it is not characterized by the physical impermanence to which European cosmology subscribes, the natural environment's ability to provision as a function of its relationship to humankind and the capacity for change as endowed by the life force.

Building therein, an ontological disdain for the self as a separate and isolated entity is nourished by the very nature of the life force, by unity as interdependent complementarily, and by social participation as a mutual expression of both, with the indivisibility between man and nature renders human being a process of becoming the socio-religious community and seeking its reproduction, not its destruction.<sup>13</sup> Differentiated only in their surface-level expression, cultural elements shared across African societies enables the formulation of a generalized typology of deep structural constructs<sup>14</sup> from a simplified, closed axiological set containing two value-based norms is deducible, hence a (1) consumption balance of individual and society (i.e., individuals must only consume social goods/products having socio-religious utility); and (2) production balances of individual and society wherein individuals must only produce social goods/products to satisfy socio-religious utility. Thus, this axiological set by definition organizes and superintends economic agency within a local subsistence modality to equilibrate material and non-material exchanges of the life force presently construed as a socio-religious impetus to sustain the life force through subsistence patterns.

## **Meta-Axiological Dilemma**

Resting within our discourse, we can now ask: can a strictly Western axiological set support non-Western socio-religious behavioral modalities that sustain an idiosyncratic perception of the social significance of a life force (a religious phenomenon)? Thus, for non-Western community, the local subsistence modality reinforces an obligatory integrity between cultural cosmology and ontology so that unproductive economic agency necessarily evidences an instrument of alien axiology that subverts if not displaces socio-religious based praxis. And often is secret, beneath their democratization and structural adjustment policies lie an antipodal cultural model of social reality that prescribes *material* want-satiation and *material* accumulation as moral - evaluative criteria for behaviors whose rationality obtains only in Western social organization, with culture perceived as materially determined<sup>15</sup>, policies for local economic agency to supply subsistence behaviors appearing capable of satisfying only the most basic bio-social needs. Thus their utilitarian root divests local behavior of its socio-religious axiological set, thereby misdirecting its balanced satiation of three-dimensional bio-social need to privilege only the *material* wherein Hedonism supplants deep structural spiritual impetus for moral conduct.<sup>16</sup> Hence the use of rational choice criteria to support and reproduce a socio-religious foundation for local society generates a meta-axiological dilemma over appropriate micro-level behaviors and their contribution to societal needs,<sup>17</sup> creating a dilemma encouraging underdevelopment as local economic agency acquires new attitudes, social behaviors and moral obligations, but no adequate resources to satisfy their material ends.

In summation, we realize that globalization engenders an idiosyncratic market-based model of reality not commonly shared within human life-force conceptualizations. And the truth of this dint of millennial "progress" via globalization and its neoclassical paradigm actually oppressively disintegrates the teleology of local existence into meaningless cultural symbols and rituals ripe for commoditization, not progressive social, economic or political change set upon deep structural local cultural transformation.



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See Akbar, 1976, 1991; Ani, 1994; Benton, 1982; Mbiti, 1970; Nobles, 1991a, 1991b; Stansfield, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., the "invisible hand" of Adam Smith.

<sup>3</sup> This would appear contradict Marx's earlier analysis of social dichotomies within capitalist social organization inasmuch as it assumes some measure of incongruity between cultural deep structure and praxis that renders collective social objectives heterogeneous, however potential and unrealized they may be for labor.

<sup>4</sup> This degree of evolution has an ecological component wherein a society is ranked by quantity of resources available, and an axiological component wherein the outputs of society are compared against those of select Western societies to determine propinquity -- which evidences the degree to which behaviors are informed by Western values.

<sup>5</sup> This proves insightful for various delineations of global political relations (e.g., North-South, East-West) and global commercial arrangements and policies (e.g., IMF-IBRD, GATT, Nafta, MFN, SAP)

<sup>6</sup> Six axioms of choice hew out a hyperbolic association between ordinal utility and commodities presumed existentially independent satisfaction of human wants, yet quantitatively corresponsive some fixed magnitude of satisfaction. Projecting these nonlinear associations onto a two dimensional space yields contours commonly referred to as an indifference map. Thus, these axioms of reflexivity, completeness, transitivity, continuity, non-satiation and convexity facilitate a one-to-one mapping of bundles of commodities to utility.

<sup>7</sup> This is the spiritual impetus which underlay Louis Farrakhan's call for atonement at the 16 October 1995 Million Man March.

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, rationality as a characteristic of response is not an egocentric action that ignores the multidimensional, multifaceted levels of existence. Since rationality characterizes the consistency of the response to cosmologic stipulations, it cannot be anthropomorphic but rather anthropocentric. See Mbiti (1970:20).

<sup>9</sup> The concept of reciprocity represents the maintenance of human purpose within economic actions as manifested cosmologically (human-environment), ontologically (man-himself) and axiological (human-human). The satiation and balancing of this non-material dimension of need presents itself as a matter of relocating the pith of the life force -- now merely changed in form or expression -- within the man-nature and man-man relationships. Through this acknowledgment of the functional integrity of the life force within both relationships do codes of morality receive continually validation as prescriptive guidelines for balancing both relationships, and thereby strengthen man's pursuit of perfectibility in the context of these interconnections.

<sup>10</sup> This explains African conceptualizations of Lucifer-Devil-Iblis. Refer to classical exegeses of the Demiurge in Dogon tradition (Yurugu) or in the Egyptian tradition (Set).

<sup>11</sup> Mbiti, 1970:266-281.

<sup>12</sup> African cosmography cannot accommodate so spiritually vacuous a notion as environmental scarcity. It appears an immature rationalization of conscious tragedies of character, if not outright rebellion against spiritual pressures to self-integrate. Belief in a higher ordered, immutable "Logic" inherently demands a unifying trust (faith) in its revealed productive, consumptive and distributive modalities: a faith that dispels any visceral preoccupation with feelings of alienation or abandonment. Thus, scarcity is an irrational reaction rooted in a nonage of balanced spiritual development

<sup>13</sup> Nobles (1991) goes so far as to suggest a need to transcend a finite individual definition ascribed by one's society in order to extend oneself backward into the collective consciousness of the social group and thereby reaffirm unity and interdependence.

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<sup>14</sup> Refer to Akbar, 1976, 1991; Ani, 1994; Benton, 1982; Diop, 1974, 1978; Nobles, 1991a, 1991b; Stansfield, 1982. It must be pointed out that the distinctions made herein presume neither to explicate origin, historical development or genetic bases for worldview, nor to posit a linear evolution that intimates comparative worth. Treatment of norms regarding macro-level subsistence issues (e.g., money, cost functions, investment, etc.) is deferred to later work.

<sup>15</sup> Not in the sense of a philosophical orientation which suggests that material existence defines man's purpose and thereby informs culture. Rather, in the sense of a psychological belief that there exists physical objects readily available for individual possession.

<sup>16</sup> See Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, particularly chapters 1 - 5.

<sup>17</sup> See Ibn-Hyman, 1997.