



Globalization and the Underdevelopment of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Industry in Kogi State, Nigeria 1979-2013

By

Godwin A. Vaaseh, PhD

Abstract

Globalization is an age-long historical phenomenon that is contemporaneously defining the pace and pendulum of the economic, political and socio-cultural trajectories of nation-states worldwide. In most third world countries especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, this capitalist process has been most pervasive and devastating particularly in Nigeria's drive toward rapid industrialization. Thus, the Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex that was built by the Federal government of Nigeria in 1979 as a panacea to the multi-variegated crisis of underdevelopment in Kogi State and Nigeria generally has lamentably become a sort of failed project, a steel rust and a permanent foreign exchange guzzler heightening the development woes of the country that it was meant to address. This paper argues, from the caboose of history, that the forces of globalization have been largely the *raison d'être* for the many problems facing the industry. It situates analysis within the gamut of international transnational corporations and the mercantile global democratic institutions as agents of underdevelopment in Nigeria perpetrated through their suffocating African economies and their role in engendering capital flight, policy summersaults, transnational cannibalism, unbridled bribery and corruption and unemployment. Using both primary and secondary sources of historical research, this paper recommends feasible strategies that will lead to the development of a viable Iron and Steel Industry in Ajaokuta for a sustainable industrialization of North-Central Nigeria in the 21st century.

Keywords: Globalization, Underdevelopment, Iron and Steel Industry, Ajaokuta, Nigeria

Introduction

Globalization is no doubt one of the defining forces shaping the pace, pattern and dynamics of development trajectories world-wide. It is an imperialist process that has negatively affected the industrial development of African countries through the integration of world economies into a unified entity.¹ As a process, it involves the ‘opening up’ and integration of the world into a unified socio-economic, political and cultural entity. It connotes the de-territORIZATION of the world made possible by the revolution in information and communication technology intertwined with the rise of global mercantile capitalist ideology that reached its apogee in the twentieth century as a result of the fall of communism. Globalization ideologies in Africa and other third world countries had been and are still championed through the activities of international multi-national and transnational corporations in collaboration with Britton Woods institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund(IMF) and the World Trade Organization(WTO) whose policies and programs are anchored upon neo-liberalization, deregulation, commercialization and privatizations of government enterprise²

In the midst of these globalization variables, the challenges of industrialization for Nigeria and other developing nations are daunting. The forces of globalization in the global system continue to manifest and even overwhelming. This paper from political economy perspective, discusses how and why the forces of globalization have contributed to the underdevelopment of the Ajaokuta iron and steel industry through the nefarious activities of the various transnational companies that purchased the company under the guise of privatization. The paper further argues that contrary to the lofty promises usually made by foreign investors to the Federal government of Nigeria on developing the complex for overall national development after acquisition, their activities and attitudes usually worsen the comatose state of the iron complex and recommends alternative ways of transforming the industry. The paper is divided into four sections namely; introduction, conceptual and theoretical framework, origin of Ajaokuta Steel complex, and a nexus between globalization and underdevelopment of the industry and a conclusion.

Conceptual Issues

The terms globalization, development and underdevelopment have recently acquired octupoidal status in modern academic parlance, thus making them not amenable to straight jacket definitions. The dichotomy in usage or conceptualization of these terms among scholars is primarily because of their multi-variegated implications in human society and modern nation-states as well these terms mean different things to different people, depending on their perspectives and academic leanings.³ However, an attempt shall be made to appraise its various conceptualizations and theoretical framework.

Globalization according to Adejoh, is essentially the geographical dimension of the phenomenon of imperialism that began over 500 years ago, particularly with the voyages of Vasco Da Gama and Christopher Columbus that initiated the processes that paved way for the European domination, conquest and exploitation of African, Asian and Latin American nations' resources by European countries. He further avers that the concept of globalization entails three issues, namely; the emergence of transnational capital, the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalist ideology and the emergence of a global 'historic bloc'. He also observed that the process of globalization started several years ago and has been transforming itself from the phase of primitive-communalism to slave trade, to feudal and now mercantile capitalist system that reached its zenith in the 20th century with the disintegration of the USSR.⁴

Khor observes that globalization is not a new process, that it has been in existence for five centuries and that it was through this process that advanced countries of the world extended their hegemonic influence through trade, finance and investment to other parts of the world. He observed that:

The most important aspects of economic globalization are the breaking down of national economic barriers; the international spread of trade, financial and production activities, and the growing power of transnational corporations and international financial institutions in this process, with increased trade and investment being focused in a few countries.⁵

The consequences of the process of globalization is that it stimulates irreversible and non-negotiation integration of the whole world irrespective of location, race or religion. Okpeh

aptly captures the concept of globalization when he asserted that globalization reflects widespread perception that the world is rapidly being molded into a shared social space by economic and technological forces and that developments in one region of the world have propound consequences for individuals or communities on the other side of the globe.⁶ Okpeh's view further suggests that globalization entails the growth of greater (unequal) co-operation among various peoples of the world in economic, social, cultural and political spheres.⁷

Victor T. Jike corroborated Okpeh's assertion when he poignantly identified economic, political and social globalizations as the three distinct dimensions of globalization that is defining the pace and character of contemporary world development. It advocates for the total entrenchment of neo-liberalist ideologies of liberalization, deregulation and privatizations.⁸ These policies have negatively retarded development in Africa particularly in Nigeria where the political elites with vaunting ambitions for global recognition hurriedly initiated these policies. The negative impact of neo-liberal ideologies in Nigeria is that it allows only a small proportion of firms (usually foreign) that operate at the frontier to gain from competitive pressures while the vast majority risks being wiped out.

Lending their voice to the concept of globalization Hoavelmo and Baran maintained that:

Globalization entails the struggle for the share of limited resources, the exploitation and the prevention of others from the pursuit of their developmental paths and objectives. This is done deliberately to prevent the spread of scientific and technological knowledge which is facilitated by the deliberate refusal of the developed economics to assist others meaningfully to produce goods and services given the productive capabilities that are available to facilitate the nationalization of the worlds output that maybe advantageous to all. All these hamper the development that is needed to foster transnational coalitions of interests as they aggravate underdevelopment in the least developing economies while promoting tremendous growth and development in the industrialized economics.⁹

From the foregoing conceptualization, it is crystal clear that globalization is a process that portends greater danger for developing countries and unless pragmatic concerted efforts are taken by the political class from the global South, the rapacious pillaging and plundering that started several centuries ago may worsen the already blighted hopes of millions of people in Nigeria while the industrial sector continues to remain moribund as a result of the forces of globalization.

Underdevelopment is a cognomen for de-industrialization, poverty or absence of appreciable development,¹⁰ and means the absence of appreciable indices of development such as increased Gross National Product (GNP) manifest in higher income per capital, longevity, increased access to education, reduction in infant mortality, unemployment and hunger.¹¹ It connotes stagnated industrialization and widespread the absence of basic infrastructural facilities that promote human well-being.¹² Underdevelopment could also mean a comparative concept mostly used in political-economy to compare and contrast the levels of development among countries especially between advanced economies of the United States of America (USA), Europe, and Asia (especially China, Japan) and less developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Global North and Global South are two common terms that have earned contemporary currency and recognition among scholars in discussing issues of development and underdevelopment among nation-states. The Global North refers to the technologically advanced economies of USA, Europe and Japan while the Global South captures the fate of underdeveloped African, Asian and Latin American economies.¹³

Some basic features of underdevelopment include; high prevalence of human poverty, infrastructural decay, high prevalence of the activities and presence of multinational/transnational corporations, high rate of dependency on imported goods, corruption and bribery, insecurity, environmental degradation, human trafficking and its corollaries such as baby farming among others. In this paper, underdevelopment is viewed from economic and industrial perspectives and specifically the inability of the Ajaokuta steel complex to transform the techno-industrial fortunes of Nigeria. However, its manifestation on the people is gleaned from different facets.

International-Dependency Theory

The international-dependency theory views the underdevelopment of third world/global south countries to be a result of their age-long dependence and dominance relationship with rich countries. Scholars mostly from Latin America and Africa constitute the major proponents of this theory. Some of them include; Theotonio Dos Santos, Claude Ake, Walter-Rodney and Samir Amin. Basically, three strands of thought underscore this theory; the neocolonial dependence model, the false paradigm theory and the dualistic thesis.¹⁴

First, the neocolonial dependence model sees the continuous underdevelopment of third world countries “to the historic evolution of a highly unequal international capitalist system that has created an unjust system of rich country-poor country relationships” Todaro further avers that:

the co-existence of rich and poor nations in an international system dominated by such unequal power relationships between the center (the developed countries), and the periphery renders attempts by poor nations to be self-reliant and independent difficult and sometimes even impossible...certain groups in the developing countries (including entrepreneurs, military, rulers, trade union leaders, merchants, public officials) who enjoy high income states whose principal interest...Knowing or not, is the perpetration of the international capitalist system of inequality, and conformity by which they are reworded....by special-interest power groups including multi-national corporations, national bilateral aid-agencies, and multilateral assistance organizations like the world bank or the international monetary fund (IMF), which are tied by allegiance to the wealthy capitalist countries.¹⁵

Retrospectively, this strand of thought holds that the underdevelopment of Nigeria particularly her iron and steel industry is as a result of the unequal neo-colonial apparatuses that have held Nigerian economy to perpetual dependence relationships, by creating a situation whereby the technologically advanced countries (Global North) will be producing and selling capital goods (heavy iron products or machines) to Nigeria while Nigeria will remain a viable source of raw material, and a ready market to the Global North. This unequal relationship started several centuries ago and has reached its apogee with the current onslaught of globalization.¹⁶

The false-paradigm thesis on the other hand attributes third world underdevelopment to faulty and inappropriate advice provided by well-meaning but often uninformed, biased, and ethnocentric international “experts” and advisers from Global North countries and its multinational donor-agencies. These advices often with a promising and elegant exterior but with a decaying and inappropriate and hollow interior usually worsen the economic trajectories of third world countries. For instance, the advice of World Bank and the international monetary fund (IMF) to the former Nigerian military head of state, General Ibrahim B. Babangida to initiate neo-liberal policies under the guise of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in the 1980’s worsened the economy of Nigeria and contributed greatly to the underdevelopment of steel sector and Nigeria in general. SAP was an externally packaged wrong economic strategy for Nigeria which the western countries imposed on Nigeria.¹⁷ Todaro, acknowledges the role of

leading university intellectuals, trade unionists, future high-level government economists, and top civil servants who after studying in developed countries' higher institutions are served high doses of unhealthy alien concepts and elegant but inapplicable theoretical models, thereby denying them the mental fiber needed to address and fight the real developmental challenges of their countries.¹⁸ Drawing parallels from the Dualist model, Todaro sees underdevelopment to be caused by the competitive and mutual existence of rich and poor nations together, and a concept that represents the existence and persistence of increasing divergence between the rich and poor nations and poor people on various levels. Todaro summarized dualism as connoting four things which include:

Different sets of conditions, of which some are “superior” and others “inferior” can co-exist in a given space.. this existence is chronic and not merely transitional....not only do the degrees of superiority or inferiority fail to show signs of diminishing, but even have an inherent tendency to increase....the interrelations between the superior and inferior elements are such that the existence of the superior elements does little or not to pull up the inferior element, let alone “trickle down” to it. In fact, it....serve to push it down-to develop its underdevelopment¹⁹

From the foregoing appraisal of the theory of international-dependency, it is crystal clear that its basic tenets best capture the unsavory scenario in the comatose Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Industrial complex which was given fecundity by the phenomenon of globalization. Thus, the appraisal in this paper shall be anchored within the paradigm of the above theory, however passive remarks on other interrelated theories of underdevelopment shall be made where necessary.

Origin of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex

The idea toward the establishment of iron and steel complex in Nigeria predates her independence.²⁰ The reason for this was because of the perceived benefits that the colonial government attached to industrialization. It was their belief that a viable iron and steel company will be germane to the Nigerian state particularly in the provision of employment opportunities, revenue generation to government via foreign exchange earnings, provision of iron tools and steel materials needed for the infrastructural development of Nigeria. It was in this perspective that in 1958, the Federal Executive Council mooted the idea for the establishment of a steel complex by contracting the feasibility study to foreign European firms. According to O.N Njoku, Western European firms were contracted in 1958 to do a feasibility study of prospects of a viable

steel industry in Nigeria. However, they returned a negative verdict. One reason for this negative verdict was the poor quality of Nigerian coal and iron ore deposit.²¹

Thus, propelled by the desire to expand Nigeria's industrialization base, the Nigerian government under Tafawa Balewa initiated another move toward establishing an iron and steel company despite the initial discouraging reports. As a result of this, in 1967, a Russian firm was contracted to do another feasibility study in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) team.²² Besides, the firm and its team was to advise the government appropriately and ascertain a suitable location for the establishment of an iron and steel company. After a series of feasibility studies, the team recommended the conventional blast furnace and basic oxygen furnace route for the country. As M.S. Audu noted, in 1970, a Russian Company, Techno Export foreign Trade Association (TPE) signed an agreement with the Federal Government of Nigeria to design, initiate policies, train personnel and further study the quality of coal and iron ore suitable for steel plant. The first legislative step toward the establishment of Ajuokuta steel company was the enactment of decree 19 of April 14th 1971 which set-up the Nigerian Steel Development Authority (NSDA).²³ The NSDA was saddled with the responsibility of establishing a steel mill in Nigeria. In addition, in 1979, the Federal Government of Nigeria had promulgated decree No. 60 which concomitantly dissolved the National Steel Development Authority (NSDA) and established National Steel Council (NSC). As scholars have argued in their respective studies,²⁴ the new decree and the agency it subsequently gave birth to sowed the seed that germinated to the establishment of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex and other steel mills that sprang up during this epoch. The euphoria that characterized the establishment of AJSC was best captured by Njoku, when he noted thus:

In 1979, General Obasanjo laid the foundation of Data Steel Complex, Aladja, (DSCA) near warri. The Aladja mill was described as Africa's most modern steel complex. Two years after (1981), President Shagari laid the foundation of the giant Ajaokuta Steel Company (ASC) with a price tag of more than \$ 5 million. ASC occupies 8,800 hectares of land and is five times more ambitious and more costly than Aladja (₦ 1.26 billion) consisting of a pellet plant, a direct reduction plant, a continuous casting plant, a rolling mill and an oxygen plant....At full capacity, the complex was expected to produce around 5.2 million metric tons of structural steel per annum.²⁵

Globalization and the Underdevelopment of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex: Some Historical Reflections

The forces of globalization have no doubt impacted negatively on the industrialization of Nigeria particularly in her iron and steel sector.²⁶ It has eroded independent industrial policy making capacity of Nigeria by subjecting her to the whims and caprices of international multinational corporations of Europe, Asia and America. The activities of Multinational Corporations have helped to under develop Nigeria's iron and steel sector through the promotion of corruption and bribery, policy summersaults, capital flight, dumping and other illicit trade acts which renders the steel complex and others within the country incapacitated.²⁷

First, as common with other third world countries that experience heavy dependency on import of capital goods and the emasculation of home industries by foreign multinationals, the story of Ajaokuta steel complex has been worrisome from the feasibility studies down to contractual agreements of AJSC. This was all initiated by Russian firms whose ideas were faulty and did not support the integration of indigenous technological skills that abound in Nigeria into industrial plans which they submitted to the Federal government of Nigeria.²⁸ Tenuche rightly observes that the western capitalist countries and the leading international finance institutions have not been favorably disposed to the idea of establishing viable steel industries in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.²⁹ The reasons for this unfavorable attitude are not hard to find; firstly, developing a functional steel complex like Ajaokuta steel, would reduce Nigeria's trade dependence on Western Industrial Steel products which inversely will lead to a reduction in volumes of trade imports to Nigeria especially as liberation has created a means for free cross-border trade.³⁰ Secondly, a properly developed steel industry in Ajaokuta will negatively affect the steel industries in Europe, America and Asia.(Tenuche, 2005, 2011) It was in this perspective that all the expatriate consortium firms from Europe had ill-advised the Nigerian government and their often ill-conceived technical/export advice have been responsible for the lamentable state of the industry.

Besides, by 1980's the waves of globalization in Nigeria manifested its ugly head in the Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Company. This was primarily through the introduction of the structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in July, 1986.³¹ Mike Obadan, a distinguished Nigerian Professor of Economics observed thus on the consequences of the adjustment program:

SAP was an international monetary fund, IMF-World Bank supported policy package aimed at restructuring and diversifying of the productive base on the economy in order to curtail dependence on the oil sector, and enhance non-export base and bring the economy bulk to non-inflationary growth....the major strategies for achieving the objectives of SAP emphasized market-oriented development strategy with focus on private sector led development, small government, efficient resource allocation and determined prices including interest and exchange rates. The specific measures implemented included exchange rate or Naira devaluation, liberalization of the economy, and export trade, abolition of agricultural commodity marketing boards, cut-back in extra-budgetary spending and adoption of tight fiscal policy, reduction in subsidies privatization and commercialization of public enterprises ³²

The implementation of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) policy options by the government of Nigeria under former president Ibrahim B. Babangida regime in 1986 created further problems for the Ajaokuta iron and steel industry and the entire steel industries in Nigeria. These problems, Tenuche poignantly examines, include; low capacity utilization in manufacturing industries due to insufficient foreign exchange to purchase raw materials and spare parts, the exorbitant rate of foreign currency to the Naira which led to increase in cost of imports, since the steel industry depends on the importation of most of its critical raw materials, the situation tremendously increased the funding requirements of the industry which the then Nigerian government was not capable of bearing due to its already burgeoning external debt burden. ³³

Globalization has also culminated to the underdevelopment of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex through the manifestations of negative consequences of the policies of privatization and commercialization within the Nigeria government particularly since the 1980s.³⁴ Regrettably, the series of privatization efforts by different governments in Nigeria have negatively affected this gargantuan industry. For instance, following the outright sale and later, its revocation and leasing to foreign investors, majority of its staff were sacked without adequate financial settlements thereby worsening the unemployment crises in Nigeria. The nefarious activities of Global Infrastructures Holdings Limited (GIHL) will help to further buttress this point.

Global Infrastructure Holding Limited (GIHL), an Indian company, took over the affairs of AJSC in January, 2005, on a 10 year concession agreement with the Nigerian government. Immediately after the lease, the GIHL brought some Indian technicians who did not know

enough about the equipment in Ajaokuta, and the activities of these Indian technicians led to a lot of damage to the equipment.³⁵ For instance, Momoh Jimoh lamented thus on the implications of this:

In this wire rod mill, the 150 mm mill was originally designed to roll 100 by 100 by 1200 mm billets but was modified to roll 120 by 120 billets ...with this modification...the reheating could no longer be charged to the maximum. This led to the refractory bricks in the furnace falling down due to heavy pressure...the same re-modification took place in the light section mill (LSM), the mill was originally designed by the Russians to roll billets of 100 by 100 by 120 mm but it was redesigned by Indian investors to roll out 120 by 120 by 120 mm like the wire rod mill...This unwarranted re-modification created more problems for the company³⁶

In fact, between 2004 and 2008, when the then late Nigerian president, Musa Yaradua terminated the agreement, the expatriate consortium from India had striped Ajaokuta bare of its major equipment and most precious raw materials. Major expensive equipments were cannibalized through naked bribery of top government officials at the Federal Ministry of Iron and Steel, Abuja who acted in collusion with GIHL. Uffot further describes this cannibalization thus:

..On May 18, 2005, one unit of Lubrication system was removed from the plant and taken to Delta Steel Company, Aladja. Three days later, 20 metric tons of chrome magnetite were also dispatched to an unknown destination, on march 1, 2006, valuable equipment were carted in 11 trucks apparently to Aladja which GIHL also acquired in 2005. The equipment was refractory mass communicators and transmitters. Between march 7- June 31st, 2007, properties of Ajaokuta Steel that were carted away include: generators, electronic motor and wheels of three cranes from the billet stack yard, electric motor, others are converter working living, converter safety lining, flocon stride gate mechanism, comprising mounting plate, connecting rodend and a cylinder supported by thermodynamic element...Also removed were 83 metric tons of ferrous manganese, on important element for steel production, 43 metric tons of aluminum castile, 78-31 tones of ferrous silicon and a 400KV electric motor meant for the permanent water intake pup hose³⁷

More worrisome is that this company and Nigerian citizens which this company was established to serve had failed to uplift the industrial base and material well-being of Nigerians but instead, has entrenched underdevelopment and poverty to the Nigerian state.³⁸ What is more, the equipment of Ajaokuta Steel Complex which was taken to Lagos and Europe by the India consortium company under the guise of “maintenance or repair” was never returned to the

country. Apart from the 50,000 metric tons of iron pigment and flacon 6300 slide gauge system that were moved out of the company in 15 trailers from the medium size steel unit, other more valuable assets of the steel complex had be vandalized intentionally and sold in form of scraps to foreign companies within and outside Nigeria.³⁹ According to report over 80% of the metal scraps stock piled for future use by TPE of Russia, that built the company have been carted away by Indian concessionaire. Uffot observes thus: “A list showing scraps dispatched from the steel making shop and scrap workshop of AJSCL showed that from January 3,2006 to July, 12,2006, 555 gate passes were given to trailers taking out the scraps. With the quantity of scraps taken away, by GIHL, ASCL would need to source for scraps elsewhere when production begins”⁴⁰

Generally, the unscrupulous activities of Multinational Corporations in developing countries of Africa and Nigeria in particular remains major impediments to the transformation of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Industry and by extension other steel industries in Nigeria. In fact, the liberalization process which usually culminates to privatizations and preponderance of foreign investors with a drive towards profit maximization is the bane of development of this industry since the 1980s.

Conclusion

Globalization is no doubt, one of the major forces that have negatively impacted on the industrialization drive in Nigeria. Within the gamut of iron and steel industry, the manifestation of this process of integration and opening up of the economy and the iron sector of Nigeria has persistently remained a clog in the wheel of progress of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Industry since its establishment over three decades ago. It is our conclusion that the forces of globalization intertwined with international conspiracy by industrialized countries have helped to stagnate the development of this industry through the neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation and concessionary policies of the Nigerian government since the 1980s. The paper therefore , recommends that the government must realize the fact that for the Ajaokuta steel industry to develop, efforts must be made through training of indigenous technicians and scientists who will help manage this sector. This is because developed industrialized countries cannot transfer their technology and therefore, the idea of privatizing to foreigners cannot transform the fortunes of Ajaokuta Steel Complex, instead it will help under-develop the industry the more. The copious

instances of industrial cannibalization and barefaced robbery of the industry by some foreign concessionaires are pointers to this.

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