

WHY IS GLOBALIZATION A THREAT TO AFRICA? A STUDY OF THE THOUGHT OF CLAUDE AKE ON AFRICAN MIGRATION TO THE CITY AND SOME OF ITS CONSEQUENCES

Krzysztof Trzeciński

Preliminary remarks

Globalization is seen positively by those to whose societies it brings measurable benefits. Claude Ake,¹ one of the most outstanding African thinkers of the second half of the 20th century and a great advocate for constructing democracy in Africa, primarily viewed the progress of globalization in terms of its numerous dangers.² In Ake's opinion, globalization negatively affects the condition of contemporary societies, whose members place increasing importance on market values and principles. He thought that when consumer identity finally triumphs over civic identity, the culture of democracy will be at an end. Democracy, after all, is connected with the common good and consumption with particularism and egoism. Consumerism kills the sense of civic duty and political engagement. Even though the members of poorer societies, including African ones, are not significant consumers, the global consumer culture has an effect on their lives as well, destroying traditional ties of solidarity and transforming local cultures. In many such societies, this state of affairs produces a rise in frustration and stress, and often a desire to return to the society's origins and a strengthening of antipathy towards outsiders or 'others'.

Although Ake's works contain finely-wrought arguments, his theories raise important questions and are very debatable in their trend. In this article, I consider the main underlying assumptions of Ake's ideas and analyze selected aspects.

¹ Claude Ake (1939–1996) was Nigerian; a professor of political science, he lectured at universities in Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and the United States. He was head of the centre for African studies, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Dakar. He was a founder and director of the Center for Advanced Social Science (CASS) in Port Harcourt in Nigeria. He published numerous works in which he analyzed issues of African democratization and development. The problems with which he dealt are still topical. On the subject of Ake's writings see further: Kelly Harris (2005: 73–88) and Claude Ake, Walusako Mwalilino (2000: 1–17).

² The basis of this article is Claude Ake's work entitled „Dangerous Liaisons: The Interface of Globalization and Democracy” (1997). On the subject of the dangers related to globalization see also his work *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa* (2000), especially p. 26–29. This was Ake's last work and was published four years after his death.

The basic questions raised by Ake

Ake defines globalization as ‘the stretch of processes, practices, and structures across space, especially the national space to globality’ (Ake, 1997: 285) By rendering democracy inadequate, globalization constitutes, in his opinion, the most serious threat to democracy that has yet arisen. In „Dangerous Liaisons: The Interface of Globalization and Democracy” Ake begins his deliberations on the subject with generalities. He links the spread of democracy in the post-Cold War world to its becoming so superficial that the power elites can enjoy democratic legitimacy while simultaneously avoiding the ‘the notorious inconveniences of practicing democracy’ (Ibidem: 282). In consequence, democracy is often associated, particularly in Africa, with no more than the organization of multi-party elections, which allow various autocrats to stay in power. Such a quasi-democracy, or procedural democracy, is possibly more a failure than a triumph of the idea of democracy. Ake mentions that contemporary representative democracy differs considerably from its Athenian model, in which the people – and thus the collective – truly ruled. Current liberal democracy, on the other hand, concentrates on the significance of the individual. The sovereignty of the people is replaced by the sovereignty of law. In Ake’s opinion, liberal democracy rejects in general the principle of rule by the people, because it concentrates on the rationalization of private interests.

Along with the redefinition or falsification of democracy – or the designation of a system as ‘a democracy’ when it is not one – the most recent threat to democracy appears to be the development of globalization. It is difficult to foresee today the entirety of its effects. In Ake’s opinion, the role of nation-states will certainly undergo serious reduction in the age of globalization. And this will lead to the decreasing adequacy of democracy, which ‘is ideally articulated in the context of a national organization of politics and power’ (Ibidem: 286). As Ake writes, ‘there is no freedom in powerlessness and no point in democratic arrangements when power resources do not exist’ (Ibidem). Globalization will depreciate the significance of the state authorities, since various important decisions, affecting the lives of people in a given country, will often be made anonymously and in some distant locality³. We are not currently in a position to understand the mechanisms of such supra-national forces and decision-making entities. Ake considers that they are not subject to practically any democratic control.

However, even more negative than its impact on the state authorities, is the impact of globalization on contemporary society, which becomes in itself a market; that is, it increasingly acts on the basis of market values and principles. People become consumers above all else. The individual’s identity as a consumer slowly overlays his identity as a citizen⁴, and even his identity as a human being. Thus in the contemporary world, an increasingly important role is played by how

³ Cf. the very inspiring views of Zygmunt Bauman (1998a: 55–76).

⁴ See further Benjamin R. Barber (2007).

much an individual consumes. People are valued on the basis of their purchasing power. Those whose powers of consumption are marginal or non-existent, as they consume at the level of subsistence, cease to count in the collective consciousness⁵. The level of consumption determines the value of the individual and of the entire group.

Ake believes, therefore, that consumption leads, as he puts it, to the de-socialization of society and he writes in this context that 'in a world of increasing proximity and technologically-induced competitive efficiency, there is a growing sense of insecurity about keeping what one has which has led to more aggressive acquisitiveness' (Ake, 1991: 327). Acquisitiveness goes hand in hand with egoism, and thus constitutes the reverse of a sense of citizenship. Ake emphasizes that the phenomenal progress in communication technology also has its effect on the de-socialization of society and the disappearance of democratic participation. In truth, this technology does connect individuals and makes their lives easier, but on the other hand, it isolates them socially. The existence of the computer means that people more and more often are educated or experience events (for instance, cultural ones) in isolation. Furthermore, technology has such fascination for people that it not infrequently replaces any participation in the public sphere.

In Ake's opinion, in this new situation, the struggle for democracy ceases to make sense. The passivity and increasing isolation of individuals, the anonymity and fluidity of supra-national decision-making centres, the lack of institutional mechanisms for their control – all this makes political mobilization (for instance, of Africans against their oppressors, that is, the undemocratic powers-that-be) practically impossible. Even if political mobilization were to occur, Ake asks, 'how would the struggle be focused? At what power centers, and with what power resources?' (Ake, 1997: 292).

In Ake's opinion, frustrations arise amongst persons in marginalized societies, who suffer privation, who have no influence on political decisions, and for whom the authorities are impersonal entities. Africans too, although they are not major consumers, have been encompassed by the march of globalization. As Ake writes, 'every player, even the most marginal, is in its vortex' since globalization 'is bringing everyone into close proximity, shrinking everything into one small intimate space which has to be fought over incessantly. Globalization has created a highly charged competitive economic environment' (Ibidem). The growing economic competition resulting from globalization creates stress for people, if only because of the enormity of the changes thus introduced. In the wider aspect, for many people globalization produces uncertainty about the future and a vitiation of the traditional bonds of solidarity. Many people feel that they have lost control of their own affairs.

⁵ Cf. Zygmunt Bauman (2007: 126), where the author presents the question thus: 'The poor of the society of consumers are totally useless. Decent and normal members of society – bona fide consumers – want nothing from them and expect nothing.' See further on this subject (*ibidem*: 117–150) and his *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998: 36–41, 86–91).

The most important consequence of globalization – visible amongst many Africans as well – is the growth of the consumer approach to life. Even amongst consumers of small means, increasing materialism and the technocratic culture intensify the desire to participate in the consumer race. Ake writes that the consumer identity is linked with great stress, because:

‘identity is about collectivization, about sharing and solidarity but consumption is about appropriation, privatization, and self-gratification. In a world of ubiquitous change and an uncertain future, in which considerable anomie and disorientation is already problem enough, the aggressive incursion of the materialistic technocratic culture appears to have driven many to desperation and hostility’ (Ibidem: 293).

The stress of which Ake writes causes people to take on a ‘new’ identity, that is, to return to their primary identity, such as an ethnic, national, racial, religious, or communal identity.

The gravitation of the members of many societies towards their primary identities could also be explained, in Ake’s opinion, by global changes causing far-reaching transformations in their native cultures. This threat, as he writes, ‘demands nothing less than the crystallization of the self holistically, which is precisely what primary identities do’ (Ibidem). Ake concentrates on ethnic identity, which acquires, he thinks, an auto-reflexive form, negating and antagonistic to competing identities. In such circumstances, the reaction to ethnic interpellations could be claims of an all-encompassing nature. As Ake states, one quality of ethnic identity is that it ‘presumes to articulate all signifying practices and to encapsulate the members’ whole way of life’ (Ibidem).

Under the transformations of growing globalization, including the development of unmet consumer needs, ethnic groups begin to direct their growing dissatisfaction towards the wrong enemy. They do not unload their collective frustration on some anonymous and impersonal entity, but, on the contrary, on a false opponent, one easy to locate. This is the enemy-neighbour, and combat with the enemy-neighbour is imagined to be defence of one’s own way of life against everything associated with cultural change coming from outside. Such a collective enemy could be the members of another ethnic group, as in Rwanda or Burundi, for instance; or the followers of a different religion; or the members of a different race, as in Sudan; or even, within the same culture, those who have different political views, as in the case of Algeria. Ake considers that it should come as no surprise that the vision of a ‘clash of civilizations’ emerged as a consequence of the multiplying conflicts of the first half of the 1990s.⁶ But in reality, no such struggle is occurring. In Ake’s opinion, at the base of conflicts with ‘others’ lies ‘overweening materialistic technocratic culture’ (Ake, 1997: 294). All that is explained as being a clash of civilizations is actually the improperly directed resistance of disoriented people against this new

⁶ This is an obvious reference to the famous theory of Samuel P. Huntington. See his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996: 183–298).

culture which is attempting to subjugate them while giving them no palpable advantages.

In Ake's opinion, the cruel conflicts emerging from the activation of primary identities, such as the wars in Somalia, Sudan, or Rwanda, are attempted defences of human dignity, manifestations of life, and affirmations of humanity. In fighting, the African feels that he is living and that he still has dignity. These wars take place divorced from politics and certainly do not further the development of democracy. As Ake writes, 'the identities which the threat elicits are static identities that are not really conducive to framing a serious political project' (Ibidem).

Ake caps his considerations by proposing greater activity on the part of Africans and other inhabitants of the world on behalf of building and strengthening democracy⁷. Democracy, in spite of globalization, would appear to be the only remedy against the spread of materialism and the fetish of technology. People should, therefore, oppose the existing threat, become more engaged in democratization, and not agree to let their lives be ruled by the culture of consumerism.

Polemic with some of Ake's views

A critical analysis of Ake's views should begin with the question of democracy, which, in Ake's opinion, has been altered, distorted, or derailed by progressing globalization. Currently, indeed, the term 'democracy' is used to describe various states of affairs that do not have much in common with democracy. In particular, emerging African democracies are still very much in the nature of facades. Ake correctly condemns the situation in which various African authorities of autocratic provenance – so they must be viewed – remain in power by using procedural mechanisms such as elections (their electoral fraud combined with a clever manipulation of the electorate gives them continuity in government).

Ake would appear to be saying that if elections could change anything in Africa, they would certainly be eliminated. After all, the groups in power wish to hold onto power, regardless how. It would seem that, at least in relation to Africa, this is the key issue of Ake's entire critique of the procedural manifestation of liberal democracy⁸.

⁷ See further, Claude Ake (1991: 34-36).

⁸ Ake evokes Athenian democracy as an ideal of political participation. He does not deal, however, with such aspects of Athenian statehood in the democratic era as the limitations to full citizenship for women and metics, or the existence of slavery, which made it easier for full-fledged citizens to take part in the public affairs of the *polis* (see, for example, Krzysztof Trzcinski (2006: 21-38). Ake sees in ancient democracy only what is necessary for his critique of contemporary, quasi-democratic mechanisms of governing. Because the works under discussion here concentrate primarily on the question of consumerism, I will only refer briefly to the economic aspects of the Athenian model. (Still, the subject of consumerism is very closely

What, however, is the correlation between the contemporary problems of democracy and globalization? In Ake's opinion, democracy is guaranteed by nation-states, and he thinks that globalization will have a destructive effect on them. Ake's logic posits three state-related levels of organization: the supra-state (global) level, the state level (identified with the state authorities) and the sub-state level (groups inside the state). In the era of globalization, the state level is disappearing, as the state authorities lose their significance. The first and third levels are therefore playing increasingly important roles. Ake thus belongs to one of the leading fields of contemporary discourse over changes in statehood. The weakening of state authority or loss of part of state sovereignty is a visible phenomenon which has more than once been judged to be a negative factor⁹. The discourse on this subject chiefly concentrates on the dimension of various state functions being appropriated by international bodies – which are continually increasing in number, and in which it is often uncertain where final decisions are made or who is responsible for them. All of which need not mean, however, that the nation-state is disappearing. It is impossible to accept Ake's theories uncritically. Ake, in announcing the declining significance of state authority, says not a word about the fact that states still remain the principal actors in international relations. It is they that shape world politics; they that create international organizations; and, by the activities of their representatives, they that agree to regulation, thanks to which multinationals and international courts are gaining in importance.

For Ake, the supposed disappearance of the nation-state in the era of globalization constitutes a great threat to the future of democracy. His train of thought would appear to be consistent: since the nation-state, which is supposed to be the bearer and protector of democracy, is disappearing, this must have a negative influence on the state of democracy itself. But his reasoning is in opposition to that of other thinkers, who show that globalization is accompanied by the growth of democracy in the world¹⁰. Perhaps, however, it is that at certain levels globalization strengthens democracy and at others, weakens it. Globalization could help spread the idea of democracy, but at the same time it could limit the role of the state authorities, and this could threaten democracy's development. Perhaps where democracy is strong, globalization may help it

connected with economic issues. See also Ake's earlier works (1978, 1979, 1981, 1985), which are strongly economic in nature. While Ake more than once uses such terms as 'exploitation', 'abuse', and 'oppression', he uses them exclusively to describe the phenomena occurring in our period of globalization and the expanding culture of materialism. In Ake's analysis there is not a word about the economic relations reigning in ancient Athens. It might be imagined that in the ancient city-state economic questions did not have a significant connection with its political-legal system. But in fact, quite the contrary is true. Such economic categories as Ake condemns existed in Athens as well and under the conditions of citizens' rule that he glorifies.

⁹ Among African thinkers, George Carew writes on this subject in his „Economic Globalism, Deliberative Democracy, and the State in Africa” (2004: 460–471).

¹⁰ Cf., for example, Francis Fukuyama (1992).

along (or at least not injure it), and where democracy is weak, it could be harmed. It is not possible, obviously, to resolve this question here.

Ake would appear, however, to warn that globalization's impact on democracy is solely harmful; it weakens and counters it in practically every aspect. He gives globalization no chance. Using the simple logic of black and white, he does not take into account that globalization could potentially lead, for instance, to a rethinking of liberal democracy. And yet Ake is a proponent of democracy of a more participatory and social nature¹¹.

The state authorities remain, for him, the sole resort capable of guaranteeing the existence of democracy. In other words, there can be no democracy without a strong state authority¹². But to what degree would a state have to lose its decision-making capacity in order for that fact to have a negative impact on the condition of democracy? What state functions would have to be taken over by international actors for the existence of democracy in the state to be threatened? Ake does not say.

Ake claims, on the other hand, that globalization is currently leading straight to the de-socialization of societies. He is thinking of the slow dissolution, interruption, or disappearance of social ties that results during the progress of globalization as people turn their attention chiefly towards consumption. Furthermore, globalization creates, or requires, a world-wide culture of materialism. Ake believes that what counts today is above all how much money people are able to earmark for consumption and how much people are able to purchase; this is the criterion by which people are categorized. Perhaps this is sometimes the case, but much depends on who makes such a categorization, and for what purpose. After all, from the dawn of time people have been categorized by economic (material) criteria. Perhaps it could even be said that it is precisely today that the economic status of the individual is – at least in Western societies – less significant than previously.

Nevertheless, Ake emphasizes, there are those who can afford to be consumers and those who can afford consumption only at subsistence level. The latter are increasingly pushed to the margins of social life, as is particularly obvious in Third World conditions. The average African, after all, is neither a citizen nor a consumer. Citizens are persons equal in rights and obligations,

¹¹ See further Claude Ake (2000: 160–192) and his *Democracy and Development in Africa* (1996: 129–139).

¹² The truth in such an approach can be seen by an analogy to human rights, which have been adopted into a universal system of protection, but which in practice mean little if not accompanied by individual countries' civil rights, guaranteed by the state authorities and state institutions. Cf. the views of Raymond Aron (1974: 652) who writes: 'Whoever has experienced the loss of his political collectivity has suffered, albeit temporarily, the full existential anguish of solitude: for in times of crisis, when the individual can no longer claim membership in any political collectivity, what rights are left him besides his human rights? The Jews of my generation cannot forget how fragile these human rights become when they no longer correspond with citizenship rights.' See also Ralf Dahrendorf's commentary on Aron's ideas (1988: 199).

creating their own authorities and capable of actively influencing their own lots. Just as not many people living in Africa can unhesitatingly be called citizens, not many can be called consumers of importance in the race for material goods. Of course, Ake is speaking in general about globalization and in this context he does not divide the world into Africa and the rest. But it is unclear why the two identities could not exist side by side – rub against each other – but must be mutually exclusive. Ake does not explain why, if someone is a consumer, he cannot be a citizen. Can consumption not be seen as a civic attitude?¹³ Does growing consumption not provide employment for more people? Is consumption devoid of any good aspect and does it solely constitute a goal in itself? Even if, as Ake writes, ‘as we consume so we are’ (Ake, 1997: 287), must consumption lead to the disappearance of the individual’s identity as a human being? Such a point of view would seem to be too great a simplification.

Ake also claims that the development of technology also results in the de-socialization of contemporary societies and in the decline of democratic participation. Following Ake’s train of thought, it can be admitted that through the transfer of technology, the public sphere has become a little abstract: everyone belongs to it, but in increasing isolation, separation. The abstract quality of the public sphere does not evoke or strengthen people’s sense of participating in its creation, and this is also a threat to the future of democracy. At present, in the age of the mobile phone, electronic mail and the internet, this objection could be even more apt¹⁴. It could be imagined that people will spend ever more hours in front of the computer, and thus have less time for family or social contacts, and even less time for interest in public affairs. But there is the other side of the coin – technological progress facilitates the making of contacts and mobilizes people socially and politically.

What Ake is writing about in regard to technology becomes a problem when a person becomes dependent on technology like on a narcotic, but not when the computer keyboard takes the place of the typewriter, the mobile phone the place of the stationary phone, or reading the internet version of several newspapers takes the place of reading one paper copy. The development of communication technology, by giving broader access to information, could even in large measure contribute to making man into a *politikon zoon*¹⁵. Perhaps Ake, as an African, feels the threat associated with the development of technology more acutely than does the average Westerner, because this development could lead to the dilution or disappearance of community ties of solidarity and thus to the transformation of the traditional values on which African identity is based. But these values will

¹³ Cf. Aldona Jawłowska (2005: 53–72).

¹⁴ Ake died in 1996, and thus before the changes that have been brought by the massive spread of the mobile phone and internet communication.

¹⁵ Cf. the role of the internet, electronic mail, and mobile phones in mobilizing followers of the opposition in Iran in 2009 after the authorities’ falsification of the election results during the presidential election.

in any case undergo change in the unavoidable processes of urbanization¹⁶ and modernization¹⁷, which are currently taking place on the African continent, as everywhere else, even if at a different tempo.

Another no less curious trend of Ake's thought is his analysis of the source of the horrible conflicts that occurred in the 1990s (some of which have lasted till the present moment). In Ake's opinion, their genesis should be linked to globalization. In explaining the essence of these regional conflicts, a major role is played by the return of the participants to their primary identities. This phenomenon, in Ake's opinion, is a consequence of the global expansion of the arrogant materialist culture of consumption and technology.

Ake's thoughts on the matter may be summarized as follows. He believes that global society is currently, above all, a consumer society. In this materialistic world, all that remains for the average African, as someone of complete unimportance, is to return to his primary, safe, identity. Lack of participation in mass consumption oppresses him and increases his frustration. The impoverished consumer feels that he has no influence over anything, that he lives in an abstract world. In defence, he seeks what is real, that is, what was original, his own. Perhaps he also notices that his native culture has been changed by forces he in no way controls. Since even culture is being taken from him – he who has nothing – he naturally rises in defence of this last holdout of his dignity. He has no funds with which to be an active consumer, but he can be an active participant in, for instance, a religious, national, or ethnic community (with all the good and bad sides of that situation).

It is hard, however, to be convinced by this argument. Ake speaks of the identity to which the unfulfilled consumer is supposed to return, but he does not explain from whence this return is to occur. It can be assumed that the point is an individual's return to his primary identity from the level of civic identity. Such an order of events could take place in a state in which there are citizens, but in Africa, the idea of civic identity can be associated only with a small group of the members of most states. In Western societies, where it is certainly possible to speak of the existence of civic identity, no awakening of primary identity is occurring, but rather, if at all, a turn to consumer identity. Therefore, perhaps in the case of the impoverished consumer as well, Ake means a return to a primary identity from the level of consumer identity. But when was this latter identity supposed to have been formed, since the majority of the inhabitants in the poverty-stricken countries mentioned by Ake never were consumers of any significance?

Let's assume, however, that Africans are returning to their origins from the world of consumption, which they have experienced only to some minimal degree,

¹⁶ In 1960 around 15% of the inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa lived in cities, in 2005 – around 35%. According to United Nations' predictions, in 2050 around 60% of Africans in Sub-Saharan Africa will live in an urban environment. Source: *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision* and *World Urbanization Prospects* (2006, 2007).

¹⁷ See the very important work on this subject of Daniel Etounga-Manguelle (2000: 65–77).

but whose temptations they have still managed to perceive. To translate this situation into a language understandable to people in the West, it is rather as if someone were to buy a beautiful flat on credit, but be unable to make the payments and thus have to relinquish it to the bank. The dwelling is gone, but frustrations and a sense of injury remain. Now let's return to the case of the unfulfilled African consumer. In accordance with traditional African thought, for any human distress, someone is always guilty. Therefore, for instance, when an African is injured, he visits a magician to discover the perpetrator of the misfortune. Finding the guilty party and taking revenge (or sometimes offering forgiveness) can bring relief and help the victim cope with his unhappiness. We could be tempted to extrapolate this situation to that described by Ake. Those who return to their primary identity see the nearest 'others' as guilty of causing their misfortune. In fact, according to Ake, many of the misfortunes of people in poor countries are caused by globalization (including by the spreading culture of materialism) but firstly, the average African doesn't necessarily know that, and secondly, the global enemy is out of reach. Thus the would-be consumer might want to unload his anger on some traditional opponent next door, who can be located and objectified.

Was the influence of globalization in Africa, in the age of the conflicts to which Ake refers – that is, at the beginning and middle of the 1990s – really so important? Perhaps Ake had in mind the effect of globalization in the sense of access to information about how people live in other, richer and more developed, parts of the world. The fact of their possessions must, after all, have reached even the world's poorer countries. Of course, the majority of Africans could not afford such things. They might see on television or in shops in cities in Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Ethiopia or Burundi (the African countries mentioned by Ake) those objects of which they could only dream. Before the development of globalization perhaps they did not know that such goods even existed. In the case of many Africans, the longing for a better life and the desire to possess various objects led to their migration to the city. The cost of living there was generally too high, however, to bring the prospect of becoming a consumer any closer¹⁸. Frustration and a sense of injury might grow particularly large among the impoverished consumers of those city centres where a large degree of social inequality has developed. Some of the inhabitants have become real consumers and are enjoying life. It would seem that in such circumstances primary instincts might regenerate. It is rather like the situation in which a hungry person becomes angry.

This type of correlation between the genesis of conflicts and globalization is easy to imagine. But it is easier to explain the growth of crime in large African cities in this manner, than the outbreak of wars in which the ethnic factor is exploited. There have always been wars in Africa, after all. Many different factors

¹⁸ The Nigerian writer, Ben Okri, describes the subject excellently in *The Famished Road* (1991, *passim*).

lie and have lain behind them¹⁹. It is therefore difficult to believe in a direct link between the growth of a global materialist culture and the outbreak of wars. Such an attempt to explain Africa's conflicts seems too simplistic. In addition, Ake does not explain why globalization has led to the outbreak of war in certain African countries and not in others.

Ake claims, furthermore, that the conflicts under way in, for instance, Sudan, Somalia or Rwanda, are really struggles for human dignity, being manifestations of life and affirmations of humanity. Ake thereby proposes an innovative diagnosis of massacres which, to the majority of Westerners, are quite incomprehensible. According to Ake, people who are in a state of frustration return to their origins. They might be on antagonistic terms with another group for years without this fact disturbing them unduly, but in the conditions of non-fulfilment in the world of consumption, old wounds could open anew. None of the injured is in a position to put his finger on the process of globalization, to locate the foreign financial or political forces responsible for his humiliations, but the old enemy, on whom vengeance can be taken, is just around the corner. And in the world of original antagonisms, the fight is on one's own terms. From conditions of abasement, it is battle that can restore lost dignity. Ake wishes to convince us that since in the world of consumption someone was no one, in the world of original force he will at last become someone²⁰.

But what manifestation of life can death be? Ake doubtless is not thinking of the life affirmation involved in killing, but rather of the motives of persons resorting to violence. A Westerner wants every action to have a purpose, but here the purpose is probably not the point. Ake seems rather to believe that for the protagonists of his theory, something still exists that allows them to be defined as human, even if that something is evil. After all, evil is also a part of the human condition²¹. That Ake calls horrifying conflicts 'affirmations of humanity' does not at all mean that he considers them to be some sort of norm. He recognizes the error of people turning their frustrations against the 'other' and he condemns conflict. In his considerations there is a clear axiological accent, for instance, when he states that the aggression of the frustrated is ill-directed and leads to horrible tragedies, where retribution is visited on the wrong opponents, those 'others' from next-door.

An African returning to his origins is capable, however, of creating a new, rational order of his own. As a warrior, he feels like someone of higher standing. He is no longer a wretch from the slums; he creates fear, he has his pride, he's a member of his own group, he feels stronger. The 'others' are afraid of him. Such a person lives, because he fights. In the world of consumption he was no one, now

¹⁹ See, for example, Krzysztof Trzciński (2005: 169–208).

²⁰ An analogy could be found in industrialized countries in the rebelliousness of youths, who, unable to keep up with the world, sometimes have recourse to violence or destructiveness.

²¹ See the very instructive work on this question, referring to African examples as well, of Robert B. Edgerton (2000: 126–140, particularly 131).

he has a machine gun or a machete and is the master of life and death. He has a certain power; he takes part in decisions; he can influence something. By fighting, he expresses his own judgment and revolt. Fighting is a manifestation of his free will. The affirmation of humanity involved is in his confirmation of the fact that he is someone, not an individual deprived of any influence on the surrounding world.

This is a very interesting view of human nature, but even if it only partially reflects reality it must make us very pessimistic about Ake's solutions for changing the situation in which globalization is supposedly making democracy inadequate. Ake sees the remedy for the entire evil he has diagnosed and explained in the regeneration or extension of engagement on behalf of democracy. The future lies, in his opinion, in participatory democracy and in a return to the ideal of the common good. Doubtless it is for these reasons too that he begins by referring to Athenian democracy. But how, amongst people who have reached for their lowest instincts, is civic identity to be born? How are they peacefully to express their free will, their non-agreement 'to be confined to a path of movement prescribed by technology and market opportunities'? (Ake, 1997: 294). How are they to rid themselves of the materialist pull and acquire a civic attitude? There can't be any simple shift. It can be imagined that since there is no way to reject the trend of globalization, it should be utilized consciously, not by making a fetish of money or technology, not by becoming intoxicated with consumption, but by returning to the realization of such ideals as solidarity and cooperation for the common good. But Ake has no simple prescription for the improvements to human nature necessary to achieve this state of affairs. His interesting and inspiring thoughts give rise to more questions than they answer.

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