

# A Break in Globalization: The Impacts of Coronavirus on Globalization

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**Abstract:** *The recent outbreak of Coronavirus [commonly called COVID-19] has no doubt engendered great, undeniable fear, hullabaloo and hubbubs in every nook and cranny of the world. But before the outbreak, a particular obvious phenomenon tagged 'globalization' has been. Nevertheless, with the happenings all around us presently one who is conversant with the phenomenon of globalization and who claims to know recent facts about the virus would be tempted to ask these questions or something similar: Is globalization still in motion or it's observing a sudden break? Has Coronavirus any impacts on globalization? To attempt to answer these questions, several articles and recent newspaper and organizational reports on COVID-19 as well as on globalization would be utilized.*

**Keywords:** Break, Impacts, Globalization, Coronavirus

## Introduction

The world is presently facing another epidemic, or better still, pandemic in the form of COVID-19. By the phrase 'another pandemic' it simply means the world has in the time past witnessed such awful incidences. Prominent among them were Encephalitis Lethargica (between 1915 and 1926) which claimed about 1.5 million lives, and the famous Influenza (which occurred towards the end of the First World War in 1918) with a death rate of about 100 million.

Other known pandemics are Smallpox (claiming about 500 million lives), HIV/AIDS (32 million deaths), Ebola Virus (11,300 deaths between 2013-2016 alone), and Black Death or Plague or 'Pestilence in the Air' which killed approximately one-third (20 to 30 million precisely) of Europe's population, 12 million people in China and/or an estimated death of 100 million throughout the Mediterranean basin.<sup>1</sup>

However, there are two peculiar things about Coronavirus which are: the rapidity or speed with which it is spreading all around the world, and the adverse, colossal effect it is having on the occupants of the earth, on nations and in fact on globalization. Concerning the speed, Chennaite V. Pavithra, a Ph.D. holder from Arizona State University, U.S. whose research focuses on Coronaviruses said in an interview that the speed at which the virus (COVID-19) is spreading is shocking!<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) on the other hand notes that as at 19 March 2020, there have been 200,000 confirmed cases of the virus across the global. But to confirm the rapidity with which the virus spreads, WHO notes that 'it took more than three months to reach the first 100,000 confirmed cases, but only 12 days to reach the next 100,000', thus a sign that the speed of transmission is increasing unprecedentedly.<sup>3</sup>

As it concerns globalization, Harold James, a Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University, U.S. in his recent article titled *Could Coronavirus Bring About the 'Waning of Globalization?'* tried to explain the effects of the virus on globalization by wording the following: people are becoming both more suspicious and more credulous. Above all, they are becoming less willing to engage with anything that seems foreign or strange.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See C.S. Melissa, "Plague [Black Death]". MedicineNet, 2019. Accessed in March, 2020; "Plague". MedicineNet, 2008. Accessed in March 2020 @ <https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=141316>; and "List of Epidemics". Wikipedia. Accessed in March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Chennaite V. Pavithra, "COVID-19: Speed at which Virus is Spreading is Shocking, Says Researcher". The Hindu, 27 March 2020

<sup>3</sup> K. Whiting, "Two Experts Explain What Other Viruses can teach Us about COVID-19 – and what they can't". World Economic Forum, 20 March 2020

<sup>4</sup> Harold James, "Could Coronavirus bring about the Waning of Globalization?" World Economic Forum, 04 March 2020

In any case, we can hardly digest the topic of the impacts of Coronavirus on globalization without first understanding what globalization itself stands for and the nature of Coronavirus.

### What is Globalization?

Many individuals around the world have at one time or the other tried to give meaning to the term *globalization*. Yet it still defies a single universally acceptable definition.

According to Holm and Srensen, globalization primarily concerns itself with “the intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural relations across borders”.<sup>5</sup>

In one of the lectures delivered by Stanley Fischer [a renowned economist of Hebrew descent, and a Professor of Economics in both the University of Chicago and Massachusetts Institute of Technology] on globalization, he said that globalization, which is more economic in nature, has to do with a process of greater economic interdependence among countries, which primarily reflected in the increasing amount of cross-border trade in goods and services, the increasing volume of international financial flows, and increasing flow of labour.<sup>6</sup>

Another dual scholars – Farhad Irani and Mohammad Noruzi stated clearly in the introductory part of one of their articles that globalization simply refers to the following phenomena: the economic liberalization or the pursuit of classical liberal (or “free market”) policies in the world economy, the growing dominance of western or American forms of political, economic, and cultural life – Westernization or Americanization, the proliferation of new information technologies – the Internet Revolution, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless to spare the readers other bulky academic definitions, and to attempt to facilitate quicker understanding of the concept of globalization, we shall take it to be a process by which human societies seek, consciously and unconsciously, to get highly interconnected for the main purpose of easy exchange of information and ideas, and for free [or semi-free] movement of humans and goods across national borders.

### Coronavirus

According to WHO, “Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)”.<sup>8</sup>

The Department of Health and Human Services, U.S.A. described the virus as a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The people that have high risk of getting infected, according to the Department, are mainly healthcare workers who normally come in contact with the victims or household members of the victims. Apart from these set of individuals, other people that face similar risk are people who live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of the virus.<sup>9</sup>

Among the known symptoms of the virus are fever, cough and difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath. Concerning how it emerged, it emerged from an animal source; however it spreads presently from person to person. Being a contagious illness, people contract it through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes (especially when they are about 6 feet close to the victim), and/or by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and afterward touching their own mouth, nose or eyes with the hands unwashed/un-sanitized.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Arie M. Kacowicz, “Regionalization, Globalization, and Nationalism: Convergent, Divergent, or Overlapping?” (*Kellogg Institute*, 1998), para. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Fischer, “Globalization and its Challenges”. Peterson Institute, 2000. Accessed on 01 April 2020

<sup>7</sup> Farhad Irani and Mohammad Noruzi, “Globalization and Challenges; What are the Globalization’s Issues?” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (2011).

<sup>8</sup> “What is a Coronavirus?” World Health Organization, Sri Lanka.

<sup>9</sup> “What you need to know about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)”. Department of Health & Human Services, U.S.A. (Cdc.gov/COVID-19), 03 March 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, & “Novel Coronavirus”. Public Health, Seattle & King Country, 19, February 2020

Concerning the ‘birthplace’ of coronavirus, China is regarded as such. In December 2019, cases of the virus came up in Wuhan City in Hube province, China. [As at 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020, China recorded an approximate total of 75, 465 COVID-19 cases.<sup>11</sup>] Thus from China, COVID-19 started spreading to other countries within and outside of the continent of Asia.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1: Some Countries other than China with Reported Laboratory-Confirmed COVID-19 Cases and Deaths as at 12 March 2020**

Country	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Deaths	Transmission Classification
Japan	620	15	Local transmission
Italy	12,462	827	Local transmission
France	2269	48	Local transmission
Spain	2140	48	Local transmission
Germany	1567	3	Local transmission
India	73	0	Local transmission
Sri Lanka	2	0	Imported cases only
USA	987	29	Local transmission
Brazil	52	0	Local transmission
South Africa	13	0	Imported cases only

(Source: WHO: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 52)

### Major Impacts of COVID-19 on Globalization

In one of my articles with the title: Globalization: A Blessing and an Unerasable Curse [published in 2018 in my book *Paramount Illuminator*] I tried to explain that humanity has witnessed phenomenal, unprecedented changes especially in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as a result of globalization. At the same time, I tried to argue, using the facts on ground then, that globalization has come to stay and that it is unvanquishable.<sup>13</sup>

But looking at the situation on ground presently I began to nurse some doubt in my mind concerning the perpetuity, the unassailable nature or the *unvanquishability* of the same phenomenon. In fact with the outbreak of COVID-19 and considering the dilemma the world has been thrown into and/or the present happenings in the world as a result of the virus I end up asking myself, just like we have in the abstract section of this article: Is Coronavirus humiliating globalization? Is it displacing the once-perceived un-displaceable phenomenon?

Be that as it may, I fear that COVID-19 is affecting globalization greatly adversely. First, the goal of globalization [which I argued about in that article of mine] is to create a border-less world for both goods and humans. But the actions of states and non-state actors presently seem to be making the argument *baseless*.

On the 16 March 2020, BBC News reported that the European Commission proposed a temporary ban on non-essential travel to the European Union as a result of COVID-19 – an action which is anti-globalization. At the same time, Germany shut down its borders with France, Austria and Switzerland [except for commercial traffic]. The German Chancellor herself – Angela Merkel said that all domestic and foreign holiday travel should be cancelled by all.

In Spain the government imposed a partial lockdown, which prevents the people from leaving their homes [except for buying essential commodities/medicines]. In other European countries like Georgia, Greece, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, etc. similar actions were taken by the government. In Georgia and Greece precisely, their governments respectively banned all foreigners from entering the country, and shut all shops, bar, supermarkets, chemists, petrol stations as well as putting all arrivals from abroad into quarantine for 14 days.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “Report of the WHO – China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). WHO, February 2020.

<sup>12</sup> W. McKibbin and R. Fernando, “The Global Macroeconomic Impacts of COVID-19: Seven Scenarios”. Center for Applied Macroeconomic Analysis (CAMA Working Paper 19/2020 February 2020)

<sup>13</sup> Obiwuru C. Rex, *Paramount Illuminator* (Onitsha: IdaChris & Associates, 2018)

<sup>14</sup> “Coronavirus: Germany Latest Country to Close Borders”. BBC News, 16 March 2020.

In the U.S., the Department of State advised the citizens to avoid all international travel “due to the global impact of COVID-19”. While in Africa, Nigeria, the most populous nation in the continent, restricted, following the order of the federal government on 19 March, entry into the country for travelers from countries with high incidence of COVID-19. The countries include: China, Italy, South Korea, Spain, Japan, USA, UK, etc.<sup>15</sup>

The Nigerian government also announced, still as a result of the virus, that three of its airports – Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano; Akanu Ibiam International Airport, Enugu; and the Port Harcourt International Airport, Omagwa have been closed to all international flights.<sup>16</sup> The states within the country also shut down their respective borders to restrict the movement of people as well as of certain goods into their territories.

Economically, globalization is conceding series of hot blows from COVID-19. Many nations, firms, politicians, industrialists and even ordinary citizens all around the world are grumbling about the effects of COVID-19 on global economy. Apple – the manufacturer of iPhone has complained bitterly that the demand for its products within China has been affected, and that their stores in China and many of their partners’ have been closed.<sup>17</sup>

The country of Indonesia is also in grief. It has once aimed to attract 10 million Chinese tourists per year. But it is presently poised to lose about \$4 billion in tourism related revenue due to COVID-19.<sup>18</sup>

In the US following the government’s stay-at-home orders, the total unemployment insurance claims have hit almost 3.3 million as at March 21. This is considered the highest figure in its history.<sup>19</sup> In Nigeria, the governments of most states have ordered that all markets be closed down because of the virus. Presently, people stay at home except ‘market women’ that deal in food stuffs. In respect to all these, the IMF forecasts a global recession in 2020 while the UN estimates that COVID-19 could cause up to \$2 trillion shortfall in global income.<sup>20</sup>

Also considering the economic effects of the virus, one German Minister of Finance, Thomas Schaefer – being over-worried about the economic implications of the virus on German economy, deliberately committed suicide.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, China’s President Ki Jinping said concerning the economic fallouts of the virus: *it is unavoidable that the novel coronavirus epidemic will have a considerable impact of the economy and society*. The Japanese Finance Minister – Taro Aso said on February 24, 2020 in Saudi Arabia that: *the spread of the new coronavirus is a public health crisis that could pose serious risk to the macro economy through the halt in production activities, interruptions of people’s movement and cut-off of supply chains*.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly, educational as well as social activities have come to a halt presently. Most [if not all] schools and academic institutions in Europe, Asia, in the Americas and in Africa have been closed. WAEC examination in Nigeria precisely has been suspended till further notice by the federal government. Globally, football, wrestling and other sports have likewise been suspended – all as a result of COVID-19.

## Conclusion

One of the major objectives of globalization, as we’ve seen above, is dissemination of knowledge/information. Another is socialization. But the media through which these are done are in shambles as a result of COVID-19. No doubt, schools help in the dissemination of knowledge while sports facilitate socialization. However [for emphasis sake], COVID-19 has caused a temporary closure of schools and sports, hence, man is becoming less sociable and less gregarious [as a result of present social distancing

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<sup>15</sup> “COVID-19 Information”. U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Nigeria”. Accessed on 02 April 2020.

<sup>16</sup> “COVID-19: Nigeria slowly goes on Lockdown”. The Guardian, 21 March 2020

<sup>17</sup> “Investor Update on Quarterly Guidance”. Newsroom, 17 February 2020 @

<https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2020/02/investor-update-on-quarterly-guidance/>

<sup>18</sup> John Letzing, “The Economic Toll of the Coronavirus – from iPhone to Solar Panels to Tourism”. World Economic Forum, 21 February 2020

<sup>19</sup> Jenna Ross, “COVID-19 Clash: How China’s Economy may offer a Glimpse of the Future”. China, 26 March 2020

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> “German State Minister Kills Himself as Coronavirus hits Economy”. Aljazeera, 29 March 2020

<sup>22</sup> “Trade and Development Report Update: Global Trade Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Epidemic”. United Nations, UNCTAD. Accessed in April 2020

policy of states]. Put differently, the world is no longer globalizing, for globalization itself is currently observing a sudden break forcefully brought on it by coronavirus.