

IS GLOBALIZATION CIVILIZING AFRICA?

Excerpt from keynote speech by Emeagwali [emeagwali.com] delivered on September 18, 2004, at the Pan-African Conference on Globalization, Washington DC USA

The entire **transcript** is posted at <http://emeagwali.com/speeches/globalization/the-truth-about-globalization/index.html>

Excerpt

Globalization - or the ability of many people, ideas and technology to move from country to country - is not new. In Africa, it was initiated by the slave trade and given impetus by colonialism and Christian missionaries.

The early missionaries saw African culture and religion as a deadly adversary and as an evil that had to be eliminated.

In 1876, a 27-year-old missionary named Mary Slessor emigrated from Scotland to spend the rest of her life in Nigeria.

For her efforts in trying to convert the people of Nigeria, Mary Slessor's photograph appears on Scotland's ten pound note, and her name can be found on schools, hospitals and roads in Nigeria.

The introduction to Mary Slessor's biography titled: "White Queen of the Cannibals" is revealing:

"On the west coast of Africa is the country of Nigeria. The chief city is Calabar," said Mother Slessor. "It is a dark country because the light of the Gospel is not shining brightly there. Black people live there. Many of these are cannibals who eat other people."

"They're bad people, aren't they, Mother?" asked little Susan.

"Yes, they are bad, because no one has told them about Jesus, the Saviour from sin, or showed them what is right and what is wrong."

These opening words clearly show that Mary Slessor came to Africa on a mission to indoctrinate us with Christian theology.

She told us we worshipped an inferior god and that we belonged to an inferior race.

She worked to expel what she described as "savagism" from our culture and heritage and to encourage European "civilization" to take root in Africa.

We accepted the mission schools which were established to enlighten us, without questioning the unforeseen costs of our so-called education.

These mission schools plundered our children's self-esteem by teaching them

that, as Africans they were inherently "bad people."

Our children grew up not wanting to be citizens of Africa. Instead, their education fostered the colonial ideal that they would be better off becoming citizens of the colonizing nations.

I speak of the price Africans have paid for their education and "enlightenment" from personal experience.

I was born "Chukwurah," but my missionary schoolteachers insisted I drop my "heathen" name. The prefix "Chukwu" in my name is the Igbo word for "God." Yet, somehow, the missionaries insisted that "Chukwurah" was a name befitting a godless pagan.

The Catholic Church renamed me "Philip," and Saint Philip became my patron and protector, replacing God, after whom I was named.

I have to argue that something more than a name has been lost. Something central to my heritage has been stripped away.

This denial of our past is the very antithesis of a good education.

Our names represent not only our heritage, but connect us to our parents and past.

As parents, the names we choose for our children reflect our dreams for their future and our perceptions of the treasures they represent to us.

BIO:

Emeagwali helped give birth to the *supercomputer* - the technology that spawned the *Internet*. He won the 1989 Gordon Bell Prize, which has been dubbed the "Nobel Prize of Supercomputing."

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