Globalization and Religion

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1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

The objective of this paper is to discuss and to primarily define the term globalization. Secondly, it will discuss the relationship between globalization and religion, through critically studying the positive and negative interactions and repercussions upon each other. Finally, the paper will conclude by discussing the relationship between both from the perspective of Religion, specifically Islam also proposes recommendations that are crucial for bringing about equality within the process of Globalization.

1.2 Definitions and Aspects of Globalisation

Globalization is an umbrella term that refers to increasing global connectivity, integration and interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural, political, and ecological spheres. It is a unitary process inclusive of many such sub-processes, perhaps as best underststood as enhanced economic interdependence, increased cultural influence, rapid advances of information technology, and novel governance and geopolitical challenges (Wikipidia)

The Encyclopedia Britannica says that globalization is the "process by which the experience of everyday life ... is becoming standardized around the world."

Other scholars have specifically stated that 'globalization is defined as a process through which an increasing proportion of economic, social and cultural transactions take place directly or indirectly between parties in different countries' (Radice, 3). One of the most prominent arguments against globalization has been that states held to exercise sovereignty have lost control of these processes, and therefore consequential outcomes (Evans, 201). State Sovereignty is defined in the pillars of state autonomy in the Westphalia international system. They are 'low levels of economic interdependence that do not require strong international collaborations, low information flows that limit the growth in economic interdependence, a predominance of authoritarian or non-democratic governments that limit the flow of information and people and are not morally constraint to use force against other states, and lastly, a maintenance of high degree of cultural, political, and economic heterogeneity among states that makes the coordination of policies difficult because the differences sustain a nationalist commitment to autonomy, promote varied interests and hinder communication' (Zacher, 62). The core Westphalian norm of sovereignty is no longer operative; nor can it be retrieved in the present globalizing world.

There is nothing about the phenomenon of globalization that is new. One can argue that globalization has always existed; the trade between empires and their colonies could be perceived as globalization. And one can state that was the origins of its process and that today we live in an undoubted advanced stage of globalization with demolished of the bipolar world. Marxist would say that without an alternative system to challenge capitalism, capitalism is the intrinsic nature that has led to globalization. Capitalalism is a key ingredient in the dialectical process that leads to Marxism and then Communism. But with the failure of Communism in Soviet Union, we can no longer evaluate the next stage of the application of Communism. Therefore, would it be too far fetched to imply that globalization is the next natural state in the dialectical process? With no alternative system to oppose it, globalization has risen and taken a substantive stand after the collapse of USSR and no matter how we may try to distinguish ourselves from it we are part of this process.

Globalization is a process whereby few institutions of our daily lives are effected. Perhaps the most notable example of globalization would be from the point of economic and industrial globalization. There is industrial globalization, which entails the mergence of worldwide production markets and broader access to a range of goods for consumers and companies. The natural outcome of the latter would be the financial aspect of globalization experienced through the emergence of worldwide financial markets and better access to external financing for corporate, national and sub national borrowers. Therefore, this creates a global economy, whereby there is a realization of a global common market, based the freedom of exchange of goods and capital. Surrounding these economic achievements and beneficiaries of a global economy, are the political structuring of wealthy nations to create a world government, which regulates the relationships among nations and guarantees the rights arising from social and economic globalization.

With free trade and an evolving multinational economy, a natural discourse of cultural and social growth takes precedence. There has been an advent of new categories of consciousness and identities such as *Globalism*, which in essence, embodies cultural diffusion, the desire to consume and enjoy foreign products and ideas, adopt new technology and practices, and participate in a "world culture". Consequently, the movement of people creates transnational borders and increased immigration and multiculturalism. Although many argue that this gives birth to cultural diversity and therefore, further assimilation and acceptance of differences, others argue that this infringes on the cultural values and practices of any given culture and society.

Lastly, globalization has allowed the free flow of information between geographically remote locations. With easily advanced technology, the flow of information is more rapid than in the past. Perhaps this is one of the aspects most crucial to the globalization of markets, economies and industries.

1.3 Theme of this report

Given these stated definitions of globalization and a general description of what the process is comprised of, very little has been written or said about the correlation between Religion and Globalization. Given the fact most people of the world believe in a religion and/or a higher spiritual being, it is surprising that the phenomenon of globalization and its influence on Religion and vice-versa has not been further evaluated. Therefore, it is the initiative of this paper is to discuss and clarify the effects of globalization, both positive and negative, upon Religion, its belief system and practices.

2. Globalisation of Religion

As all major religions of the world derive from the same root source, it is importance to realize the significance of mutual respect that has been advocated in all religions. Furthermore, with globalization of free flow of information via high technology and the movement of peoples cross borders can only positively help religious tolerance to increase. This religious unity is mentioned in all religious doctrines but unfortunately, the events of history up until the present day has unfolded with the emphasis on differences than that of similarities. But if we are to revert to that which has been stated in all the following Holy verses, perhaps we can shift from religious harmony as a conception and materialize it into a reality.

The Holy Quran states:
'O Mankind, we have created you male and female, and have made you races and tribes, that you may know each other' (Al Quran 49:13).

In Judaism, it is states:
"Seek peace and pursue it…. Seek it where you are and pursue it in other places as well." (Psalm 34: 15)

In the Old Testament, it states:
"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)

"May God…grant you to be of the same mind with one another" (Romans 15: 5-6)

In Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda states:
"Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension are the substance of my faith"

1.1 History of Globalization and Religion

In discussing the issue of Globalization and its relations to religion, very little remains outside these two very significant realms of society. Religion is an institution that has existed since the emergence of the first man and humanity. On the other hand, globalization, as we perceive it today, has been an undergoing process for centuries. Although the term 'globalization' emerged as a buzzword in the 1990's after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of globalization had been taking place long before. In the article *Globalization since the Fourteenth Century*, globalization has been defined as "The physical expansion of the geographical domain of the global—that is, the increase in the scale and volume of global flows—and the increasing impact of global forces of all kinds on local life. Moments and forces of expansion mark the major turning points and landmarks in the history of globalization".

This article then states all the factual events of history, whereby, globalization evolved when since Alexander the Great in 325 B.C., when Chandragupta Maurya becomes a Buddhist and combines the expansive powers of a world religion, trade economy, and imperial armies for the first time. Alexander the Great sues for peace with Chandragupta in 325 B.C. at Gerosia, marking the eastward link among overland routes between the Mediterranean, Persia, India ad central Asia. Following this, in the first century, the expansion of Buddhism in Asia makes its first appearance in China and consolidates cultural links across the Eurasian Steppe into India, thus, establishing the foundations of the Silk Route.

From the period of 650-850 A.D, there was a vast expansion of Islam from the Western Mediterranean to India; thus, this not only saw to the adoption of the religion of Islam, but all the cultural, social, and educational aspects brought about by the Islamic Civilization. An example of this would be the Ottoman Empire in 1300 AD, which spanned from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East; this created the great imperial arch of integration that spawned a huge expansion of trade with Europe.

Finally, we come to what many scholars see as the birth of Globalization; the discovery of the Americas and the travels of East and West by Columbus and De Gama. This not only inaguregated the age of European seaborne empires, but it also pioneered the exponential expansion of Christianity in these conquered regions. With the development of the slave trade in 1650, marked as a dramatic factor which sustained the expansion of Atlantic Economy, giving birth to integrated economic/industrial systems across the Ocean—with profits accumulating in Europe during the days of mercantilism and the Enlightment.

The 'integration' of religions and its cultures took about a natural discourse with the merging of civilizations and their evolving trade routes, which ultimately led to the colonization of the Asia, Africa, Central and South America. Thus, here marks the pivotal point where religion becomes an integral part of globalization and vice-versa.

1.2 Present Era of Globalization

Although a brief summary of the history between the relationship of religion and globalization has been presented, the term globalization became a topic of much discussion after the collapse of the bi-polar world and Communism. Nonetheless, with recent political climax of the past several years and especially in light of the events of President Bush's war against terror and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, religion has been once again been evaluated from a political standpoint, whereby it has often been correlated with the effects of globalization upon it. Therefore, it is crucial to discuss and bring forth the impact of one another in a time where the two can no longer be seen as separate entities, but rather, the strong effects of globalization on religion and vice versa.

1.2 Negative Aspects of Globalization on Religion and Religious Ethics

Given the previous stated definitions of globalization by various scholars, it can be noted that the global dominance of globalization has affected religious and cultural values, whereby its process is seen as a threat to these traditions. For reasons such as diversity and its threat to the religious traditional values, globalization is seen as a polarization factor within these defined religious identity and its practice. The *Economic and Political Weekly* on March 27, 2004 stated the following arguments on the major interface between religion and globalization in India: (1) the major consequences of globalization have been the transmogrification of traditional religions and belief systems and (2) the beginning of the disintegration of the traditional social fabrics and shared norms by the invasion of consumerism, cyber culture, newfangled religions, social fads, and changing work ethics and work rhythms, (3) allowing people to fall back on religion for moral and social support, attributing to religion the creation and acceleration of extremist, fundamentalist, and terrorist tendencies in the third world countries, which are intended to destabilize them, and strike at the root of their civilization, and multicultural and pluralistic nature.

The paper further makes an argument that globalization is the first truly world revolution. And "all revolutions disrupt the traditions and customs of a people. Indeed, they threaten a people's very security, safety, and even identity. The world revolution that is globalization in some measure threatens the security of every people on the globe". For example, with the infringement of these religious and traditional cultural values by Western Capitalists, values such as the attainment of wealth often contradicts what Islam allows as a means of wealth accumulation. This paper reiterates that globalization is designed to hide and obfuscate; the form taken by imperialism in the current, increasingly worldwide capitalist system for organizing economic production and society.

The inevitability of globalization and adjustment or submission of peoples all over the world to free market capitalism depends on the capacity of the dominant and ruling classes to bend people to their will and convince people that their interests are the people's interests, make them see the capitalist as their own. It also depends on the capacity of these dominant classes and their ideologues to undermine the growing resistance to the model of free market (*Economic and Political Weekly, 2004*).

As the political scientist Samuel Huntington stated "money becomes evil not when it is used to buy power… economic inequalities become evil when they are translated into political inequalities." This misuse of power acquired though economic dominance has been a pattern that has increased with globalization. The monopoly of Multi-National Companies and Foreign Direct Investment of first world nations in third world nations has given them a substantial level of authority which extends from economic control to shaping political policies. This can be clearly observed in the example of the Middle East and its ongoing conflicts. The political turmoil in the whole Middle Eastern region is as much as an issue of capitalizing on the global oil market as is the issue of political and religious dispute. Although the issues of the Middle East has been primarily portrayed as one that is religious and territorial, one cannot ignore that these disputes may have been solved long ago if the policies of that region were not shaped and affected by nations who control the oil cartel, which is so crucial to the survival of many first world nations. So as argued before, globalization and religion cannot be seen as separate entities, but rather, they are intertwined in a way that influences the course of political and economic discourse.

Using examples from Bangladesh, even though statistics show that Bangladesh is underdeveloped, there are sufficient features in the developments works both in public and private sectors which will expose that the rich are reaping the benefits whilst the under privileged remain at the bottom of the socio-economic stratum. The consumer market economy does not in any way indicate any concern for welfare of the poor in particular. On the contrary, the economy assumes that the poor will get their share of development and benefits along the normal course of development. This is a true exposition of a laissez- faire economy, where profit making gets priority over welfare and ethics. This is where there is a direct contradiction between Islam and capitalism/consumerism. Even though a country such as Bangladesh does gain from the process of globalization, when compared to wealthier nations, there lies a stark contrast.

Furthermore, with the advancement of technology and its means of media and the free flow of information, terror groups have used their political agendas by using religion as a tool to fulfill these political gains. Simultaneously, the same source of media and information has been successful to portray this global misconception of Islam or Muslims as extremists or terrorists. Perhaps the larger issue at hand is not religion per se, but the growing disparities of the rich and the poor, between classes and between developing and first world nations. These economic, political and cultural disparities that are the growing repercussions of globalization often are misconstrued as a fundamentalist religious cause.

1.3 Positive Aspects of Globalization on Religion

Thus far, the negative repercussions and complexities of globalization and its infringement on religion and culture and its attribution to class differences have been presented. That is not to say that globalization is all negative. It has also brought about a culture of pluralism, which is so prevalent in all religious teachings. With globalization, we have seen the emergence of global human rights and environmentalist groups that protect the interests of those often victimized by globalization. Furthermore, with the creation of Organizations such as the United Nation, World Health Organization and World Bank, etc., whether effective or not, has increased means of

transparency and security. In this regard, the creation of a peaceful 'global village' has allowed the issues of poverty, war, and environment to have a global consensus and participation. Thisintegration has allowed the erosion of cultural, ethnic and religious differences that often pertained as ideologies that divided in the past. Therefore, with the free movement of populations and the immigration, we have seen the development of multiculturalism and perhaps mutual understanding and respect.

The Holy Quran declares:

"We have sent three Inspiration to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Issac), Ya'qub (Jacob) and the Tribes, to Isa (Jesus), Ayyub (Job), Yunus (Jonah), Harun (Aaron) and Solaiman (Soloman), and to Dawud (David) we gave Psalms. Of some messengers we have already told thee the story......
(Surah Al Nisa 4: Verse 163-164).

Essentially, all religions teach these shared principles of love, patience, peace, justice and equality. The Unity of the Creator and mankind are the essence of all religions as sent trough the Holy Prophets and messengers of God; from the first Man and Prophet, Adam (AH), to successive Prophets such as Prophets Noah (AH), Abraham (AH), David (AH), Moses (AH), Jesus (AH), and Prophet Mohammad (SAW), (Peace Be Upon Them), there has been a call for human understanding and peace. They have all carried the messages of God to bring forth a perfect equilibrium towards our existence on earth. They have shown us the way to achieve this harmony in the institutions of Marriage, Society, Education, Politics, Justice System, Economics/Trade and all the other remaining spheres of our lives.

3. An Islamic View

Islam not only recognizes all the Messengers but also makes no discrimination between them. The Holy Quran says:

"*The Messenger Mohammad (SAW) believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. Each one believes in: (a) Allah, (b) His Angels, (c) His Books and (d) His Messengers. They say we make no distinction between one and another of His Messengers. We hear and obey, oh! Lord and seek your forgiveness*"
(Surah Baqara 2 vs.285).

Referring to the honorary status bestowed upon Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (AH) as a Friend of our Lord it is mentioned in the Holy Quran:

"And who can be better in religion than one who submits his face (Himself) to Allah; and he is a Muhsin (a Doer of good). And follows the religion of Abraham the Hanif (Monotheist). And Allah did take Abraham as a Khalil (an intimate friend)." **(Sura Al –Nisa: vs125).**

As the descendants of Prophet Ibrahim (AH), prophets of our Creator, Prophet Musa (AH), and Prophet Mohammad (SAW) share the religion and teachings of their ancestor, Prophet Ibrahim (AH). Given this fact, it is only appropriate all religions collectively seek inter religious cooperation through dialogue to further seek knowledge on the prayers that were asked by the holy Prophets. The Holy Quran repeatedly declares that the high status and dignity must be given to these Prophets as an essence of Islam, which reveals the acceptability of other Prophets.

In the era in which the term globalization has been given concrete definitions by which most of the world and its diverse religions, cultures, languages are an integral part of its process, it is crucial that we look upon something that is more definite to unify us in a positive direction, By utilizing the free flow of communication easily available through advanced technology, religions should focus more on the humanitarian and pluralistic aspects of their teachings as a means to lessen the divide. Furthermore, religion understanding can be one of the most essential means by which foundations of peace and harmony can be achieved. By overlooking differences and uniting under the doctrines of our Creator, we can oversee that the functioning of global groups ad their strive towards humanitarian equality is not just rhetoric but a reality. Whereas the adoption of economic aspect of globalization overrules those of the spiritual needs of humanity, let religion be the principles by which we follow to fill the vacuum of inequality that is so often created by globalization of capitalist economies and free markets. The integrated economic, social, and political needs are subordinate to imperatives of faith and morality.

 Faith as a whole should be seen as a collective unity of all religions, so that they may emancipate themselves from the negative consequences of globalization. As stated in the Holy Quran and so eloquently practiced by Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in his roles as a spiritual guide, a head of state and leader of community, a supreme judge and arbitrator of dispute, a reformer of society; that we all descend from the religion of Prophet Abraham (AH) and we all look upon our Creator as the ultimate source of perfection and emancipation. The source of religion is not to divide but to unite to bring upon this justice and equality in this world, whatever the challenges and adversaries may be.

4. Proposed Recommendations

"When a society devotes resources to education and training, when it encourages individuals to believe that their life chances will be significantly related to their accomplishments, and when it provides an attractive array of choices, that is good reason to believe that individuals will be moved develop some portion of their innate capabilities. Thus, it may be argued, equality of opportunity is the principle of task allocation most conducive to the crucial element of human good". – *William Galston*

In order to foresee a world that gives precedence, respect and equal status to all religions, their ethics and practices, a more collaborative application of modified policies of States and Global Organizations must be taken. Furthermore, the repercussions of globalizations on these specific cultures can be minimized with alternative state and global strategies. The following are a number of suggested policies that should be adapted in order to lessen the disadvantages created by globalization on religion and religious groups.

(1)   All States of the world cannot politically discriminate any Religion. In the example of Bangladesh, its Government recognizes all religions and religious holidays. All States should comply with this policy.

(2)   Heads of States should prioritize their political agendas by reiterating the importance of religious unity in examples made in state functions' by quoting from different religions on the importance of religious understanding, mutual respect and emphasize on the unity of religion to bring about peace and justice.

(3)   Every Religion preaches Peace as the foremost importance; therefore, Religious groups and religious leaders must work to disseminate this.

(4)   All Economic and Regional Forums such as ASEAN, SAARC, EU etc. must strive to bring about an economic stability by taking initiatives to balance foreign exchange.

(5)   There should be a balance of trade, whereby smaller countries can benefit from subsidized rates given to them by more economically powerful nations.

(6)   The negative repercussions of political globalization can be prevented once more powerful nations cease to impose and interfere in the smaller nations' political discourse. Rather, powerful nations should aid to establish democratic systems. Additionally, neighbouring nations should facilitate these countries.

(7)   A worldwide theme of poverty elimination should be implemented. Examples of Dr. Yunus's micro-finance projects that have been successful in Bangladesh can be adapted.

(8)   Alternatively, and more importantly, from an Islamic point of view, the implementation of *Zakat* (charity) system in Islam, whereby, 2.5% of wealth be distributed to the poor or poor other poor countries is the key to alleviate the poverty.

(9)   Organizations such as the United Nations should increase transparency and accountability by eliminating the process of Veto Powers given to a few selected economically and politically powerful nations. This will give these nations less dominance on the global political and economic arena and its discourses and outcomes.