RELIGION AND GLOBALISATION: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. *Presently, religions have found a fertile ground and a paved road to flourish and extend their scope globally. Thanks to globalisation, religions, particularly Islam, like cultural patterns, have been able to extent tremendously beyond their original birthplaces. However, while religion gets its strength from globalisation, it does challenge the latter's continuous hybridising upshots. In the light of the aforementioned, the present article shows that religion, taking Islam as a case, which has gained a considerable significance as a result of globalisation, defies the hybridising effects brought about by the latter. It shows that globalisation-related technologies fortify religion which, in turn, challenges globalisation in the sense that it does not cope with such globalisation values as liberalism, consumerism, rationalism, etc.*

Keywords: *Religion, Islam, globalisation, hybridity, de-hybridisation.*

Religion and globalisation engage in a persistently flexible relationship in which the former relies on the latter for its thriving and flourishing while at the same time challenges its (globalisation's) hybridising effects.

Globalisation, due to the advent of communication and transportation technology and the roles played by the media, has contributed to the deterritorialisation and the blurring of geographical spaces and boundaries. This has resulted apparently in making the world a small village where people, cultures, and identities come in a daily face-to-face contact with each other.

Undoubtedly, religion is not immune from these changes and their burgeoning effects brought about by globalisation. Though religions still have their respective homes in specific territorial spaces where they originally appeared and where their respective shrines exist, their inner nature and general purpose to be embraced and practised by people all over the world prompt them to spread throughout all the world's geographical spaces.

In order to emerge and spread, therefore, religions make good use of the technologies of globalisation. Having geographical boundaries and frontiers blurred and dissolved, religions find it easy to spread and reach every part of the world.

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Nevertheless, since globalisation, according to many scholars, is aimed at the hybridisation of the world cultures around the pattern of the Western or American culture and since it entails liberal values and norms, religion (particularly Islam) constitutes a challenge to it since its (Islam's) norms and values are incompatible with the liberal ones of globalisation. This section, therefore, sheds light on the revival and the resurgence of religion as a result of globalisation and the way this religion constitutes a challenge to the effects of globalisation. The religion that is concentrated on mostly in this thesis is Islam. Its norms and values which contradict and challenge globalisation, thus, lead apparently to clashes and therefore to the erosion of hybridity.

Globalisation has played a tremendous role in providing a context for the current considerable revival and resurgence of religion. Today, most religions are not relegated to the few countries where their roots began.

Religions have, in fact, spread and scattered on a global scale. Thanks to globalisation, religions have found a fertile milieu to spread and thrive. As Jan Aart Scholte makes clear, "accelerated globalization of recent times has enabled co-religionists across the planet to have greater direct contact with one another. Global communications, global organizations, global finance and the like have allowed ideas of the transworld *Umma* of Muslims and the universal Christian church to be given concrete shape as never before"[1].

Information technologies, transportation means and media are deemed important means on which religionists rely in the dissemination of their religious ideas. For instance, countless websites providing information about religions are created. This makes pieces of information and explanations about different religions become at the disposal of any person regardless of his or her geographical location. In addition, the internet allows people to contact each other worldwide and therefore hold forums and debates that allow religious ideas to spread.

Furthermore, media play the same important role in the dissemination of religious ideas. In this respect, a lot of T.V channels, radio stations and print media are founded solely for advocating religions respectively. Taking Islam as an example, we find such T.V channels as *Iqrae*, *Ennass*, *Majd*, *El Houda*, *Erahma,* etc. purely religious channels created for the strengthening and the fortification of Islam. Transportation means, as a technology of globalisation as well, have contributed considerably to the emergence, revivalism and fortification of religion.

In this respect, S. Bryan Turner states that the "Islamic revivalism in Asia is related to the improvement in transportation that has allowed many Muslims to travel to Mecca, and return with reformist ideas"[2]. Globalisation technologies, therefore, have helped religions of different forms i.e., fundamentalist, moderate, etc. to cross geographical boundaries and be present everywhere.

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[1] Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 245.
[2] Bryan S. Turner, "Globalization, Religion and Empire in Asia", in *Religion, Globalization and Culture*, ed. Beyer P. and Beaman L., Leiden: Koninklijke rill NV, 2007, p. 163.

Thanks to globalisation, religion or faith has gained considerable significance and importance as a non-territorial touchstone of identity[3].

Being a source of identity and pride, religion is being always promoted by its practitioners to reach the level of globality and be embraced by as many people as possible. Muslims, for instance, aspire to establish the Islamic *Umma*, a community of believers.

Having paved the way for religions to come in contact with each other and provided a context for their flourishing and thriving, globalisation has brought such religions to a circle of competition and conflicts. As Turner, S. Bryan puts forward, "globalization transforms the generic 'religion' into a world-system of competing and conflicting religions. This process of institutional specialization has transformed local, diverse and fragmented cultural practices into recognizable systems of religion. Globalization has therefore had the paradoxical effect of making religions (via their religious leaders and clites) more self-conscious of themselves as being world religions"[4].

Such conflicts among the world religions exhibit a solid proof confirming the erosion and the failure of hybridity. Globalisation, as stated in the above excerpt, makes religions more conscious of themselves as being "world religions" reinforcing their respective specific identities.

These identities get strengthened by globalisation and cannot in any way intermingle or hybridise. Since religions' distinct internal structures, their connections to different cultures and their inclusion of different worshipping ways and practices, as the case with Islam and Christianity, contradict and are mostly incompatible with each other, such religions cannot become hybridised or homogenised, as it is claimed, though they always come in contact. Such religions tend, as a result, to be more inclined towards clashes and competition.

Since globalisation is said to bring the world cultures, identities, and religions in direct contacts with each other and make everything hybrid, the competition and conflicts of religions that it gives rise to constitute a challenge to it and its hybridising effects.

Though religion is strengthened and fortified by globalisation, it represents a challenge to its (globalisation's) hybridising effects. Religion seeks to assert its identity in the light of globalisation. As a result, different religious identities come to the fore and assert themselves. Such assertions of religious identities constitute a defensive reaction to globalisation. Scholte, in this respect, maintains

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[3] According to Jeffrey Haynes, many people cling to and promote their identities by rejecting globalisation altogether instead of making use of it. In this respect, he states that modernisation, an inseparable quality of globalisation, has undermined traditional value systems and led to highly unequal opportunities. As he makes clear, "This can lead people to feel both disorientated and troubled and, as a result, can induce some at least to (re)turn to religion as source of solace and comfort. In doing so, the aim is to achieve a new or renewed sense of identity, something to give their lives greater meaning and purpose". As opposed to the commonly held idea that globalisation has led to the religious resurgence, Haynes maintains that this religious resurgence can be the result of rejecting globalisation. (Jeffrey Haynes, "Review: Religion and International Relations in the 21st Century: Conflict or Co-operation?" Third World Quarterly, Vol. 27, No. 3, (2006), p. 538).

[4] Bryan S. Turner, "Globalization, Religion and Empire in Asia", in Religion, Globalization and Culture, ed. Beyer P. and Beaman L., Leiden: Koninklijke rill NV, 2007, p. 146.

that "at the same time as being pursued through global channels, assertions of religious identity have, like nationalist strivings, often also been partly a defensive reaction to globalization. In these cases religious revitalization has waxed into a kind of nonterritorial cultural protectionism, particularly for those who have associated globalization with oppressions of westernization and Americanization"[5].

Globalisation is associated, as an American or a Western project, with westernisation and Americanisation. The dominance and hegemony exerted by these two processes, particularly on the Third World countries, make religions-related cultures and identities take defensive measures to protect themselves.

In this respect, Islam takes cautions and resists the encroachment of globalisation forces on its cultures and livelihoods in many ways. Islam cannot contribute to the hybridising consequences of globalisation not only because it is always resistant to and defiant of globalisation but also because the Islamic culture and identity in general are incompatible with the norms and the values that are related to globalisation and to other distinct religions (such as Christianity, Judaism, etc).

It has been difficult for religion to cope with such globalisation values as liberalism, consumerism, rationalism, etc. Such phenomena advocate scientism and secularism. In this respect, Scholte speaks of the anti-rationalist faiths. Since he equates rationalism with globalisation and considers religion anti-rationalist, it can be said that, by implication, religion is anti-globalisation. To quote Scholte, "transplanetary relations have helped to stimulate and sustain some renewals of anti-rationalist faith, but global networks have more usually promoted activities involving rationalist knowledge. Contemporary revivalist movements have largely replayed a long-term tendency — one that well predates contemporary accelerated globalization — whereby certain religious circles have from time to time revolted against modern secularism and scientism"[6].

It can be said that the anti-rationalist qualities ascribed to religion can be the characteristics of fundamentalist and extremist forms of religion.

We cannot consider religion as anti-rationalist since many religious people reconcile reason and faith and make moderate trends within their religions.

Nevertheless, globalisation's strict rationalism manifested in such phenomena as liberalism and secularism can be incompatible with the norms and the values of certain religions such as Islam.

Islamic norms and values contradict those advocated by globalisation.

As Anoushiravan Ehteshami points out, "globalization is not only seen as a rival of Islamic ways, but also as an alien force divorced from Muslim realities. Stressing the negative impact of the loose morals of Western life is a daily feature of airwaves in the Middle East"[7].

For Muslims, globalisation is a source of the Western loose morals, as the writer argues. The imperialist aspirations of globalisation and its incompatibility with Islam make the former completely alien to the Muslim realities.

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[5] Scholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction,* p. 245.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 261.
[7] Ehteshami Anoushiravan, *Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 130.

In this respect, the leading Islamic scholar, Salim Al-Awwa, maintains, as paraphrased by Ehteshami, that globalisation is an invasion. Since it is a cultural construct at its heart and its meaning is the Western discourse, Al-Awwa adds, promoting and engaging with it on the part of Muslims is like accepting and promoting Western cultural values and their dominance[8].

Al-Awwa's conception derives from his fear of the challenge that is exceedingly exerted by globalisation on religion. This conception seems, in fact, short-sighted since religious identities have to be pursued through globalisation technologies for their assertions and fortification.

The challenges of globalisation to religion link automatically to the challenges of religion to globalisation.

To put it in other words, while religion takes cautions against the norms and the values related to globalisation, it challenges the latter since it (religion) does not approve its hybridising effects. The idea of de-hybridising effects of religion is approved also by Samuel Huntington *Clash Theory* which maintains that such de-hybridising upshots spring also from the religious partitioning and clashes[9].

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[8] *Ibid*., p. 131.

[9] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*, London: The Free Press, 1996.