One of the consequences of the post-11 September war on terrorism has been the appearance of numerous attempts, both in academia and in the press, to explain 'Muslim rage', 'why they hate us', and 'what we can do about it'. Much of the reporting has correctly focused on Western culture as a source of antagonism in the Muslim world. However, few analyses have focused on the role of globalization – and the new matrices of cultural, economic and political interaction it has produced – in perpetuating and even exacerbating the hostility between segments of Muslim and Western societies.

Muslim Responses to Globalization

MARK LEVINE

In contrast to the general absence of such discussions in the West, the Muslim majority world has witnessed intense debates over the meaning and consequences of (particularly cultural) globalization for the relationship between 'Islam' and the 'West', even as its economic markers such as rapid growth in trade, the use of information technologies to reorganize production, and the integration of financial markets, have had limited impact. There exists a multitude of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, French, German and Italian language literature on the subject. Examined together, they reveal great ambivalence towards possibilities and dangers that globalization implies: that is, a general fear that globalization has brought an 'invasion' of American culture to Muslim societies that will 'hollow us out from the inside and domesticate our […] identity'; yet at the same

Al-'Awlama
(Globalization),
by Galal Amin.
Cover image
by Manal Badran.

D A R A L - M A A R E F, C A I R O.

time an awareness that globalization is a 'natural' process – 'neither Hell nor Heaven' – from which the Arab/Muslim world cannot opt out.

Muslim experiences of globalization can be interpreted as a 'post-modern culturalism', one that is intimately connected to what is arguably the culturalization of politics and economies as a defining moment of contemporary globalization. In this discourse, many Arab and Muslim writers demand 'the right to be different' as the basis for the democracy necessary to negotiate past the Scylla and Charybdis of assimilation into or exile from the emerging global order. This focus on the right to cultural difference is crucial, because globalization is understood to be premised on the development of a forced difference that leads to the deepening of poverty and inequalities both inside and between countries.

The consensus seems to be that globalization marks a continuation of the basic dynamic of Western domination and hegemony dating back hundreds of years, in which today America is utilizing globalization to overthrow existing political, economic, and cultural norms. In this context, globalization's cultural/ideological foundations provide it with the 'fine power' to realize its imperialist aims without causing classic revolutionary reactions to it, as did Western imperialism before it.

Building on two centuries of Muslim critiques of capitalism and materialism (from Al-Jabarti to Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati) contemporary writers see globalization as sabotaging the 'Islamic Personality' and 'infect[ing] the people', causing a 'planned exchange' with true Muslims through the introduction of materialist culture. As the cover of a recent popular book on the issue depicts it (in the fashion of an old dimestore novel), the American cowboy is lassoing the world. Culture is considered central to the power of contemporary globalization because globalized culture leads people to withdraw loyalty from their 'cultural national identity', leaving only equally powerful discourses such as Islamism able to stand against it.

Moreover, equally important to the perceived threat to democracy and autonomous development posed by American-sponsored globalization is the fear that the consumer/materialist culture at its heart will tear down the borders erected and maintained by the nation-state. Yet at the same time the fear for the future of the nation-state raises the question of how central the nation-state, and the 'human nationalism' counterposed by one writer to an 'inhuman globalism', serves its purpose in the 'global' era, and in a situation where tens of millions of Muslims now live in the heart of the West, where the *dar al-harb* (i.e. non-Muslim countries) is gradually becoming *dar al-Islam*.

Muslims in Europe

Indeed, these ambivalent sentiments toward globalization are shared not just by Middle Eastern Muslims, but by Muslims living in Europe as well, although the latter generally have a more sanguine perspective. Over the course of four decades of Muslim (im)migration to Europe a diverse community, some 10 million strong, has become 'implanted' on European soil. The emerging European Islam is situated in a triangular relation with the wider European host societies and Muslim majority countries of origin. Together these vectors produce two opposing tendencies: a Euro-Islam that sees itself as a permanent presence in the space of Europe, and a 'ghetto' Islam that mirrors the continued rejection of Islam by the white/Christian majority cultures.

The latter tendency is fuelled by the same processes of economic marginalization suffered by most developing countries that have undergone structural adjustment. This dislocation has fuelled the 'Islamization of identity' of many younger European Muslims in the same manner that globalization has 'ideologized' Islam across the Muslim world. Thus may Muslim leaders in Europe remain hostile to 'Western'/European culture; indeed, if anti-IMF violence in Egypt and Algeria heralded the arrival of globalization in the MENA region in the late 1980s, in 1990 an 'intifada of the cities' in France broke out, waged largely by poor Muslim immigrants; while in 1993 the Union of French Islamic Organizations issued a manifesto which, in a language that resonates with the critiques hailing from the Muslim majority world, preached the need of 'freeing [people] from the yoke of ungodly capitalism […] fac[ing] the colonialist unbeliever, the eternal enemy'.

Yet on the other hand, many Muslim leaders in Europe, such as Rachid al-Ghannouchi or Tariq Ramadan, see countries such as France assuming the status of *dar al-Islam*, that is, a 'Muslim' country. Islam *in* France is becoming an Islam *of* France, a transformation that was crucial to the way in which Muslims in Europe and around the world perceive and relate to Europe. Indeed, the question that is raised vis-à-vis these more extreme Islamist imaginations of European Islam is how France can be 'expelled […] from the minds of the colonized' when the (former) colonized are now living *in* France. This is the European problematic generated by the radical political reassertion of Islam in Algeria, and in the southern Mediterranean more generally.

It is clear, then, that Islamism in Western Europe is nurtured by the same systematic processes which are found at the global level. In a more positive sense, this situation reveals the power of Islam as a transnational identity which allows, for example, networks to be formed by small businesses and associations in Germany and Turkey that allow Turkish immigrants to benefit from being political and social actors in both countries. One could argue that the success of these networks is an important reason why, in contrast to the generally negative (or at least suspicious) appraisal of globalization in the Arab world, the Turkish debate is more evenly divided between those who support and those who criticize the dominant neo-liberal, consumerist model of globalization.

At the same time, it reveals the importance of class/economic position in determining religious expression of European Muslims, in fostering and supporting a Muslim élite capable of acquiring legitimacy in both Europe and their country of origin, and more broadly, in shaping the space of Europe and the Euro-Med region into a 'terre de mediation' between Europe and the Muslim world. More specifically, there is a large and growing Muslim middle class, supported through communities such as Fetulleh Gulen that have developed a 'neo-liberal Islamism' that challenges the hegemonic Saudi (Wahhabi) Islam that has sought to establish the kind of religious and cultural homogenization in the Muslim world that many critics decry as a damaging element of the globalization discourses emanating from the West/America.

Whatever their motivations, it is clear that many Arabs and Muslims are developing their own cultural responses to globalization through the introduction of a politicized Islam into the modern arenas of social life. Such cultural politics is generating 'new

Muslim lifestyles and subjectivities' in the global era – the most deleterious of which are on display nightly on the TV news, the more positive of which are harder to spot in the media. Indeed, Muslim thinkers are not shying from the issue of 'why the hatred of America', as a recent *Al-Hayat* opinion piece described it. For many, such 'repugnance' and 'antipathy' towards the US are comparable to the feelings of George Washington toward the British; or at least an understandable response to 30% unemployment, increasing poverty, and myriad other problems which most critics of globalization see as the inevitable outcome of neo-liberal economic globalization.

Strong opposition to American power and 'tyranny' is seen as a sentiment in common with many European citizens, whose increasing opposition to US policies is noted by many authors. This reaching out to Europeans demonstrates the potential to bring Muslims and Arabs into the grassroots worldwide conversation on globalization as an important avenue to address many of the problems that stifle its growth. Such a move would expand the focus to include issues of culture and identity that are the foundation for shaping any alternative worldwide con-

versation by enlarging the conversation beyond its secular, left-wing base to include both 'religious' and 'Other' perspectives.

Cultures of resistance

In the context of the post-11 September war on terrorism, the current heightened violence between Palestinians and Israel has exacerbated Muslim sentiments against the United States and opened new space for communication with European opponents of American-sponsored globalization. In fact, Israel has long been singled out, based on the vision of leaders such as Shimon Peres, as the 'engine' of globalization, and thus a threat to Muslims regardless of the status of the peace process with Palestinians and its Arab neighbours.

The daily displays of unchallenged US and Israeli power are strengthening the belief that in the global era there can be no alternative for the Arab world except unity and loyalty to its original culture. But how to remain loyal? A 'cultural revival' that can unify, rather than divide, humanity is called for, one built on a 'firmly rooted infrastructure' – that is, Islam. Indeed, scholars and activists around the world consider such 'revival' and 'protection' to be the foundation for suc-

cessful 'cultures of resistance' against the negative effects of globalization. Yet more broadly, a new 'universalism' is advocated, one which would 'open up to the world', enriching rather than diluting or even erasing local identities. In this vein, Islamist thinkers and activists are developing specifically Muslim models for a multicultural society which need to be situated vis-à-vis the construction of alternative modernities in other cultures in the global era.

Thus Tariq Ramadan seeks to decentre globalization from the West and deploy the 'effervescence of thinking and mobilizations in the Muslim world' to make possible a 'South-North synergy'[1]; but to build on such forward thinking the Muslim world must 'realize that there exist cleavages and resistances that traverse national and cultural frontiers and even the larger symbolic frontiers between civilizations'. But to achieve this, as Hassan Hanafi observes, a 'reconstruction of the mass culture' in the Muslim world is necessary, one that can reduce the power of the main stream in favour of heretofore marginalized voices that favour human initiative and freedom.

To quote Muhammed Arkoun: 'The circulation of various Islamist discourses will

have much to do with how this turns out',[2] that is, with the success of the growing attempts by Muslim and Western intellectuals and culture producers alike to establish a successful dialogue between their respective civilizations. Much research remains to be done before we can assess the prospects for this important enterprise.

Notes

1. Tariq Ramadan, *Muslim in France: The Way towards Coexistence* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999).

2. Mohamed Arkoun, 'Islam et laïcité: un dialogue-conflit en évolution?', in Robert Bistolfi and François Zabbal, *Islams D'Europe: Intégrationou insertion communautaire* (Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 1995), 72–76.

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