

GLOBALIZATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has been conceptualized in the Western world-view. It impacts seriously on the social system. This essay discusses basic manifestations of globalization; likely goals of globalization; and considers its salient implications for the social system. With regards to likely goals of globalization, it seems the establishment of a world government at some later date is one of the likely targets of globalization. Global inequality and global social conflict scenario are the two basic issues of globalization. Social systems worldwide face serious challenges of globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘globalization’ is fairly new (Toffler, 1981: 490-91), but the process toward global interdependence started centuries ago. In the contemporary context the word ‘globalization’ is used to indicate the global nature of capital, the emergence of a single global economy, and tremendous speed of exchange across vast distances. The globalization process in vogue greatly impacts on ideological, intellectual, economic, political and above all social spheres.

Globalization is conceptualized and moulded in the Western world-view. Different approaches in conceptualization of globalization also exist. The parliament of the World’s Religions, based in Chicago, in their meeting at Cape Town between Dec. 1 and Dec. 8,

1999, discussed about religious globalization (Steinfels, 1999: 10). Abrahamic religions view religious globalization in the light of sovereignty of God, the creator of the universe. The Arabic word 'alam' stands for the word 'universe' or 'world'. Thus, the Quranic term Rabb al 'alamin signifies new meanings to the concept of globalization. It shows new horizon that spreads across the vast range of beings and their domains of existence in creation (Nyang, 1998: 129-132).

This short essay aims to discuss briefly the basic manifestations of globalization; mention likely goals of globalization; and considers its salient implications for the social system.

BASIC MANIFESTATIONS OF GLOBALIZATION

Empire, religion, economy and technology have been the main engines of globalization across time. Currently, however, economy and technology act in unison to power the geopolitics of ongoing world-system. Considerable evidence is at hand to show the effects of dumping of toxics, multiple harms caused by biotechnology, global media, and export of harmful pesticides by some unscrupulous agencies (Mander and Goldsmith, 1996: 344-359). Globalization manifests itself in numerous important ways. The focus of present discussion remains on hegemonization, homogenization and the stratification in the world-system caused by globalization. These aspects impact directly on social system worldwide.

Hegemonization

According to Abbercromtic (1988: 107), A. Gramsci used the term 'hegemony' to describe how the domination of one class over others is achieved by a combination of political and ideological means. The hegemon is ethnocentric in approach, and thus makes judgments about another race and culture using the standards of her own ethnocentric assumptions. It counts itself advanced, creative, rational, democratic and peaceful. It sees others as backward, imitative, irrational, undemocratic and warlike. The egocentric

nature of the hegemon and its possession and display of power accounts for long periods of colonialism and now neocolonialism in the world (Bell, 1981: 193)

Half-century of hegemony from 1945 to the present offers a vivid scene of world affairs. Professor John Agnew (1993: 207-238) wrote on 'the United States and American hegemony' and recorded: "This does not mean that the United States is not successor to previous hegemonic powers such as Britain in the nineteenth century, or that the United States was not challenged by the Soviet Union with its alternative vision of world order. It was to suggest that the United States has been *more* hegemonic than Britain ever was, and that it has been so in a distinctive *American* way." Later in the article, under 'globalization' he wrote: "If British hegemony in the nineteenth century made trade more free and interdependent, American hegemony has gone a step further in promoting the transnational movement of all the factors of production: capital, labor and technology."

The development of contemporary global dynamics has been managed through the regulations of finance capital. The Bretton Woods agreements in 1944, lead to the establishment of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); and later the Trilateral commission of the 1960s and 1970, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Uruguay Round of GATT of this decade have promoted the aims of global capitalism in a fairly deliberate manner. The rules of WTO are binding on all members. It has the potential to overrule state and local powers in regulating environment, produce, and food safety. In his analysis of global economy, Professor Martin Khor (1981: 47) observed: "The new trade rules leave Third World countries with little ability to resist or protect themselves, or to seek alternative economic strategies." According to Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1993: 24) "Yet, the 'globalization' of business and finance required by the advancing Third Wave economies punctures the national 'sovereignty' the new nationalists hold so dear." Third Wave economies point to the

economies of developed countries, and how it impacts on the nation-state.

After the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the President of the United States became more vocal in his pronouncements with regard to 'The New World Order' in the world. Many writers have expressed their views on 'The New World Order' and how it affects social system worldwide under American hegemony (Robertson, 1999).

Homogenization

Homogenization implies increasing similarity. An intrinsic part of the process of economic globalization combined with the role of technology the rapid homogenization of global culture. There has developed some similarity between and among different societies. At the close of the twentieth century more likeness in dress all over the world was visible than it was at the end of the nineteenth century. The internet has provided ready access to information and mutual communication across vast distances. An incident in any part of the world can cause reaction around the entire globe. The omnipresent technology carries new skills and new values. A new moral calculus seems to be evolving on the world scene (Mazrui, 1998: 1-3).

Electronic networks can strengthen or weaken world communities and protect or undermine their cultural diversity. Barnet and Cavanagh (1996: 71-77) reported that Western transnational corporations are given full access to all other countries of the world. The cultural transmissions conveyed in Western television, film, fashion, and music go with them, overpowering local media. Satellites, cable and other modern entertainment conglomerates homogenize global culture. It is often complained that TV could do better if the 'contents' were improved. It may be realized that TV was developed and marketed by commercial interests. The real content of TV is the commercials. TV, perforce, had to become a wasteland of drivel, violence, sexploitation, sensationalism, and

advertising because of who provided the sets, infrastructure, and programming (Miller, 1996).

Global entertainment companies are pinning their hopes on the two-fifth of the world's population who are under the age of twenty. Children are subjected to a mind numbing barrage of advertising – some of it posing as educational material. Even libraries and schools do not provide sanctuary from commercialism. Advances in intrusive technologies, privatization, deregulation, and commercialization of electronic media are making it increasingly difficult for families and teachers to compete with the global media for the attention of the next generation. It may be seen that the social system world over is in a difficult situation.

Stratification in the World-System

All nations are connected to each other in a world-system. A world – system is an international social set-up of normative, cultural, economic, political, and military relations organized around the exchange of goods and services. The relationship, however, is highly stratified. The countries are classified as core nations, peripheral nations and the semi peripheral nations. The core nations, like the United States, Britain, Germany, and Japan are wealthy. The production in these countries is based on technology. Human labour is relatively skilled and highly paid. In peripheral nation, production is based on cheap human labour. The developing countries are generally counted in the peripheral group. Such countries are typically quite poor. Semi peripheral nations, like Mexico and South Africa, utilize a mixture of intermediate levels of machinery and human labour for production. In the international division of labour, peripheral and semi peripheral nations provide the raw materials needed for production and manufacture, more and more consumer goods required by the core nations. The position of core nations remains dominant in the prevailing world system. Everyone living in peripheral nations feels affected by the existing world-system (Neubeck and Glasberg, 1996: 41-49)

The disparity between the core and peripheral nations is visible. The domination of world marketplace by a few nations is attributed to the legacy of colonialism and the advent of multinational corporations. Poor nations have been expressing their discontent with regard to 'Free Markets' for quite sometime. Professor Jan Tinbergen a Nobel Laureate in economics (1976: 15-16) wrote: "In the period following World War II, the poor nations discovered that political liberation does not necessarily bring economic liberation and that the two are inseparable; that without political independence it is impossible to achieve economic independence; and without economic power, a nation's political independence is incomplete and insecure... The poor nations have been forced to question to basic premises of an international system which leads to ever widening disparities between the richest and poorest nations and to a persistent denial of equality of opportunity. They contend that the 'free market' is in fact not 'free' but works to the advantage of the industrialized nations, who have used it to construct a protective wall around their affluence and life-styles. And even if it were 'free', it would still work to the advantage of the industrialized nations because of their enormous political and economic strength."

LIKELY GOALS OF GLOBALIZATION

A glance at the basic manifestations of globalization, outlined above, raise the question of 'Likely Goals of Globalization' and the possible means of realizing these goals.

Goals and Possible Means

Numerous research studies (Chomsky, 1995; Korten, 1995) and the course of current world events suggest that contemporary globalization process has been duly planned by its architects. In this context, Dr. Robertson, Chairman of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and President of United States Media Corporation, made some interesting revelations in his research study. In explication of the concept of new world order he said: "There has to be some other power at work which has succeeded in moulding and shaping United States public policy toward one clear goal__ world

government __ from generation to successive generation. Some authors and researchers have pointed to the influence of the eighteenth-century elite group, the Illuminati. Others have pointed to the demonic 'ascended masters' of the New Age religion __ and still others have pointed to the world designs of a well-known but secret fraternal order. Some point to the greed of international banks, multinational corporations, and the vested aristocracy, of the old and new world. There are many suspects, but little consensus. Whichever is correct, it is my firm belief that the events of public policy are not the accidents and coincidences we are generally led to believe. They are planned" (Robertson, 1991: 9). In the same study, Robertson cited Tal Brooke who quoting Brock Chisolm, Director of United Nations World Health Organization, remarked: "To achieve world government, it is necessary to remove from the minds of men their individualism, loyalty to family traditions, national patriotism, and religious dogma" (Robertson, 1991: 7).

Some half a century back, Professor Toynbee wrote about the attempt by Western man to "Westernize" the world, and the encounter between modern West and the Islamic world. He said: "It will be seen that this (encounter) is part of a still larger and more ambitious movement, in which the Western civilization is aiming at nothing less than the incorporation of all mankind in a single great society, and the control of everything on the earth, air, and sea which mankind can turn to account by means of modern Western technique. What the West is doing now to Islam, it is doing simultaneously to the other surviving civilizations __ the orthodox Christians, the Hindus, and the Far Eastern world __ and to the surviving primitive societies, which are now at bay even in their last strongholds in tropical Africa" (Toynbee 1953: 186-187). His ideas when seen in the light of what Huntington's book (1996) "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", and Fukuyama's book (1992) "The End of History and the Last Man" have to say, take serious tone and demand organized study with regard to likely goals of globalization and their implications for the non-Western world.

The issues of “Globalization and World Society” have been discussed in a number of research studies (Spybey, 1996; World Society Research Group, 1996: 17-41). The process of global society-formation has its own contradictions. Despite the fact that a certain amount of homogenization exists, and despite the fact that non-state actors are at hand to promote the goals of the hegemonic powers, there is considerable opposition and hidden potential for violence in this process. The development of a world society is closely related to the world-view of different cultures in the world today. West alone, in spite of its power, is not in a position to dictate the future course and destiny for mankind. Many Western scholars (Chomsky, 1995) have written on the overt and covert techniques of the West to maintain their dominant hold on the world. Alvin Toffler (1990) and other futurists have predicted the resurrection of religion, and emergence of new-style global organizations in the twentieth-first century. Knowledge, wealth, and violence are likely to be prominent in future. It is in this context that social implications of globalization call for a meaningful research study.

SALIENT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

Globalization impacts sociologically on all societies. It has myriad implications for the social system. A brief reference, however, is made to: the general frustration against globalization worldwide; global inequality; and the emerging global sociological chaos and basic social institutions.

General Frustration against Globalization

Social scientists seem unanimous in the view that in spite of overall betterment in human conditions the basic social ill of exploitation of man by man persists in the world. Authors like Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith (1996) express strong opposition to globalization. Wolman and Colamosca (1997: 23-24) wrote: “In the new global economy, developed world capital globe-trots in a freewheeling way that was never before possible. Those who earn their living from work stay at home, sullen, confused, fending off

ongoing assaults to their job and their quality of life.” The situation is no better for workers in the peripheral nations. Violent protests and chaos in the streets of Seattle during WTO conference in December 1999, showed the anger of people against the economic model of globalization. Dr. Kissinger (Dec, 1999) termed it the “the Seattle fiasco”. He said: “Globalization has encouraged an explosion of wealth and technology never approximated in any historical epoch. Such rapid change inevitably challenges prevailing social and cultural patterns.” True, but the question arises “exploitation of wealth” for whom? — Obviously for those who own big capital. In World Bank and OECD conferences in Paris in the first week of July 2000 some cosmetic steps were declared to soften economic policies, but socio-cultural implications of contemporary globalization are likely to remain in place.

While the manifestations of globalization and likely goals of hegemonic powers may be argued, it is certain that the process of globalization is irreversible. Its local effects are serious, and impinge on the social system. On the plus side of globalization is the general awareness that electronic media has created among the people on the minus side, global inequality and global attempts to curb the development of social capital in peripheral nations are considered detrimental to the social system.

Radio and other communication technologies have exposed people living even in the far-flung corners of the globe to new ideas and influences. Global news, economic, political and social matters are now debated in markets and tea houses by ordinary men and women belonging to different levels of society. The exact topics naturally vary from country to country. In Muslim countries, there is a strong feeling that Western media is biased against Muslims. It is asked by UNO acted in haste to establish Christian state in Ache, but ignores UNO resolutions on plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir for the last half a century? Why UNO and the West is silent on wholesale slaughter of innocent Muslims in Chechnya? Why Muslim countries have remained poor in spite of rich natural resources? Why the wealth of Muslim countries is being allowed to be plundered? The Muslim anger being expressed at the level of

bazaar points to a grave and complex situation. Famous scholar, Professor Annemarie Schimmel (2000: 223-230), was very right in her interview when she declared: “We Have to Take Islam as Seriously as it Deserves.”

Internet and other technologies equip Muslim scholars, reflective and dedicated statesmen and stateswomen, and Islamic movements to spread the message of Islam vigorously and counteract false news and propaganda against Islam. According to Azzi (1999: 103-117) presence of Muslims on the Internet needs to be enhanced further. This is likely to represent their case and abject conditions better. Muslims inhabit all parts of the globe. Today the world of Islam is larger in population – and growing faster than the world of liberal democracy. John Weeks (1988: 5) in a demographic study of Islamic nations said: “At current rates of growth, the 1988 estimated populations of some 980 million Moslems could nearly double to 1.9 billion before the year 2020, accounting then for 23 percent of the world’s total.” Some have stated that high birth rates in the developing world could pose danger to ‘Western Values’. Lawrence Freedman and John Saunders (1991) have prepared a study related to “Population Change and European Security” and discussed aspects of social and economic competition along with military concerns. In spite of large numbers, however, Muslims continue to be ignored and even insulted.

Global Inequality

The concept of world-system, mentioned earlier, recognizes inequality among nations. The people in some areas of the world are affluent and live well than in other areas. There is very close connection between economy and social conditions. The data of the United States show that the share of the country’s aggregate income received by the top 20% of households increased from 40.5% to 46.9% between 1968 and 1994. Between 1975 and 1990, the richest 1% of the population increased its share of benefits from 20% to 36%. A similar pattern may be discerned at the international level. United Nations data indicate that thirty years ago the richest 20% of the World’s population received 30 times

more income than the poorest 20%. Today, the gap has increased to 61 times more income. A commonly repeated view among most scholars is that over the past three decades the rich have become richer and the poor gotten poorer (Martinez, 1998: 601-613).

It is being debated as to why has inequality increased. Some opine that cause lies in many countries cutting the tax rates for the rich, and for the corporations being operated by the rich. Others view that spending on social programmes has been reduced sharply which has resulted in inequality. Reduction approach is a part of debt management arrangement promoted by the global financial institutions. Inequality has increased mainly by the competitive environment at the global level. Burbach, et al. (1997) noted that economic restructuring and corporate re-engineering have displaced millions of workers across the globe, as has the expansion of capitalism itself. Workers have resorted to migration in search of employment. Many accidents have been reported related to illegal journey to such jobless workers. Dr. Chapra (1992; 130-131, 154, 260-67, 349 *passim*), economic Advisor to the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, has studied the problem of inequality from Islamic standpoint. He wrote that the inequalities generated by capitalism are intolerable, and speak of justice and misery perpetuated against human beings. Three centuries of secularism have not been able to improve human lot. The capitalist life-style, and capitalist institutions which play a dominant role in widening the gap between the rich and the poor have continued undisturbed. He cited sources and proved that the anti-equity tone in development literature goes back to 1955. In the mid-1960's, hardly any mention of the goals of reducing poverty and inequality was made in the economic development literature. Dr. Chapra advocated that greater social equality is possible by putting an end to race between rich and the middle classes for status symbols. This will promote brotherhood and social cohesion in society, beside greater savings. More equality, he thought, need not mean less growth. He claimed that Islamization would thus help Muslim countries humanize the operation of market forces and realize both efficiency and equity in the use of scarce resources.

The Emerging Global Sociological Chaos and Basic Social Institutions

Presently social norms are under immense stress, and social systems world over are in a condition of chaos. Social conflicts prevail within and across nations. Research studies suggest that basic social institutions __ state and the family __ are under visible assault. With regard to nation-state, Kenichi Ohmae (1995), business strategist, argued that under the emerging global economic pattern the nation-state was declining towards its end. Professor Paul Kennedy (1993: 131) while discussing the global changes and the future of nation-state noted: “these global changes also call in question the usefulness of the nations-state itself.” The nation-states of Third World countries are considered at an unenviable status in the comity of nations. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Former National Security Advisor to the President of United States (1993: 217) wrote: “the West considers itself to be inherently superior, not only on the level of economic development but in political maturity. Much of the West’s political rhetoric about the world reflects that attitude: the less developed countries are viewed politically primitive, economically backward, and religiously fanatic... Inherent in that attitude is the assumption that historical development is unilinear, and that imitation of the West is the only positive option open to others. The West’s contempt for religion is also part and parcel of this mind-set. Though it focuses most overtly on Islam, it is more generalized.”

In the context of the institution of family, Dr. Fukuyama (1999:15) mentioned that the West has sought to free individuals from the constraints of many traditional social norms and moral rules. The sexual revolution, the women’s liberation and feminist movements, and the movements in favor of gay and lesbian rights have exploded throughout the Western world. “No Limits” was the slogan of these movements. He wrote: “The same society that wants ‘no limits’ to its technological innovation also sees ‘no limits’ to many forms of personal behavior, and the consequent growth of crime, broken families, parents failing to fulfill obligations to children, neighbors

not looking out for each other, and citizens opting out of public life.”

A.P Thomas (1994: 233-235), Assistant Attorney General for the State of Arizona, in his research wrote: “Although Americans are often comfortably ignorant of things demanding a global perspective, one fact that has not generally not escaped our attention is that the United States is a uniquely crime-troubled society...When it comes to crime, America is simply in a class by itself. Violent crime is four to nine times more common in the United States than in, for instance, Europe...When the U.S. crime rate is compared to those of non-Western countries such as Egypt, the Philippines and Thailand, the U.S. rate towers even more over its international competitors.” He later proposed (p. 292) that religion is essential to avert the existing “terminal stages of decay” of society.

The role of religion in stabilizing the social system, however, cannot be accepted outright in a society where the battle over separation of church and state continues (Bennett, 1994; 205-224). The culture of capitalism strives to marginalize religion. Michael Medved (1993: 35-91) a practicing Jew reported that ‘Hollywood’ is engaged in attack on religion. The films are aimed to present clergy as ‘clowns’, and the believers are ignored. Thus, there is a state of declared war on religion. The attempts to marginalize religions reduce the chances of sociological role of religion in strengthening social order and social systems.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing sections highlight that the process of globalization is, by its very nature, irreversible. However, its control by the Western hegemony and the consumer culture of capitalism pose serious dangers to the social systems worldwide. It is, therefore, time to search ways to strengthen social systems. Institutions of state and family are under threat. Religious approach can possibly assist in stemming the disruption of family and weakening of state.

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