THE GLOBAL AGE:
AN APPLICATION TO SOCIETAL CHANGE IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES

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Abstract

As a way of life, Islām outlines comprehensive guidelines for Muslims to follow if they are to achieve *falāḥ,* that is to say, success in this world and in the Hereafter. In addition to the material dimension, Islām embraces spirituality as an important component of man's conscious behavior in fulfilling the divine principles laid down by the teachings of the Qur'ān. Therefore, societal change in Islām must involve all these elements if man is ever to achieve happiness.

In the Islamic worldview, cultural diversity and group differences are preserved to strengthen human understanding and increase communication. Cultural freedom encourages people to correspond with one another without having their choices and values compromised. Societal change will not be fully realized without human participation as reflected in their choices, aspirations and traditional values. In this age of globalization, this "need is threatened by both global pressure and global neglect."[1]

The main purpose of this paper is to shed some light on the processes of globalization, which are currently at work by outlining some of its impact on Muslim societies. Being connected to the global system, Muslims are becoming vulnerable to changes in exogenous forces beyond their control. Societal changes in Muslim countries are a combination of divine

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[1] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Our Creative Diversity* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1995), 15.

and worldly processes of seeking man's happiness by increasing his material and spiritual gains. Globalization, on the other hand, seems to enforce modernity imposing the Western approach to societal changes.

The Meaning of Globalization

In recent years, such terms as global village, global neighborhood, global babble, global talk, late capitalism, global environmental change and globalization have begun to circulate widely in various literary quarters, reflecting the diminishing of sociocultural boundaries among various groups and nations. The current debate about globalization embraces large spectrums of people driven by the potential impact which globalization may have on world societies. One may assume that the effect is to be felt in every sector of the society encompassing the social, the economic, the financial, the political, the cultural and traditional systems.

The term globalization is used to express the multiplicity of interconnections among societies in which activities of particular group or nation may spill over, affecting life styles, ideas, decision making and value systems of other societies. As explained by Anthony Giddens globalization is "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanciated relations that shape them."[2] John Tomlinson, on the other hand, describes globalization as a "process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals worldwide. It is a social process which involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distances through a dramatic reduction in the time

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[2] A. Giddens, *The Consequence of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 64, hereafter cited as *Modernity*.