

Is Deglobalization Real? And What Can We Do About It?

In 2009 *The Economist* noted that, contrary to the accepted dogma that globalization was irreversible, “the integration of the world economy is in retreat on almost every front.”¹ Is our world entering a phase of deglobalization after experiencing decades of globalization, and should we welcome the change? As globalization has furthered the spread of “Western” liberal and consumerist culture and knowledge across the world, would deglobalization create genuine room for a renewal, restore the wisdom of ancient cultures, and enable us to solve the problems of spiritual nihilism, inequality, oppression, and ecocide? Or, would it be merely a superficial change, combining the worst aspects of modern hedonisms and traditional oppressions? If the rise and consolidation of autocratic capitalism and ethno-nationalism in the contemporary world are any intimations, the portents of deglobalization are ominous. Is deglobalization good, bad, or simply inevitable? What might be done about it? Adjusting to the new world order may be a matter of life and death for many peoples, ways of life, cultures, ideas, and institutions. Several bodies of scholarship—including that by historians, social scientists, political philosophers, economists, and most of all, a rejuvenated scholarship of Islam—will need to be engaged in order to answer this question.

No foresight is possible without hindsight. We have no view of the future without a view of the past. After nearly half a century of the fierce storm of globalization that caught the Muslim umma unawares and unprepared, the winds are beginning to change. Divided into the petty states the colonizers had carved out to better control and exploit it at the end of the Second World War, the Muslim world became a petri dish for various secular nationalist ideologies and chess board for superpower proxy wars over the following quarter of a century. Despite notable early efforts by the leaders of the fledgling states, like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (est. 1969), without a strong center, leadership, and shared vision the Muslim world found itself like a rudderless ship as Cold War politics gave way to neoliberal politics. The new unipolar world order, which came to be known in the 1990s as globalization, may be coming to a close, leaving the world with a different set of winners and losers than the one it then found. Apart from multinational corporations and economic and political elites in the global North, its “winners” included elites and even sections of the middle classes in certain previously impoverished post-colonial nations,

such as China and India, where deep moral and social rot has accompanied economic modernization. Their relative success in exploiting the fruits of globalization was enabled by a few shared characteristics: these were large economies that had already developed stable and strong (but not necessarily just or good) political institutions. Although Muslim countries by and large have not fared well in any respect, globalization nevertheless has been a blessing in disguise for Muslim populations (as any calamity necessarily must be for the believers!). It interconnected different parts of the Muslim world as well as enabled the emergence of sizeable Muslim communities throughout the global North. State-controlled national media gave way to satellite and social media, facilitating deep recognition of the shared values and suffering among the Muslim masses—as well as the development of global Muslim discourses and debates. The economic and political forces that facilitated these globalizing changes are now giving way to an emerging multipolar world order which is all but certain to reverse many key aspects of globalization. Will this change bring relief and honor to the community of the Blessed Prophet, or will it further impoverish it, reversing the meager gains made thus far and aggravating the inequity and oppression? The Muslim ulama, intellectuals, and social scientists would do well to recognize the threats and opportunities offered by the coming epoch, the better to furnish visions and roadmaps for a collective future for the Umma.

Let us first consider the phenomenon of *globalization*, the challenges of defining which reflect on the difficulty of defining and detecting *deglobalization*. Introductory literature on globalization identifies it as a historical phenomenon that has occurred in variously interrupted phases. The last two phases of globalization, namely the long nineteenth century ending in the 1930s and the more immediate phase starting in the 1980s, both had deeply disruptive implications for much of the world. The former augured if not comprised Western Europe's colonial grasp and the latter the American world order expressed in the form of global capitalism centered in the US. The concept of globalization remained deeply contested even when nearly everyone agreed that it was underway; scholars widely disagree about whether it is a single process or a name for multiple processes, and about what those processes are. One core set of definitions converged on globalization as an intensification of worldwide social relations and the world market, often at the expense of weakening local and national connectedness.² The term globalization was coined in the 1960s, but it took the world by storm in the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the wake of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union stepped

into the vacuum left by the British and French colonial empires, with the US as the new hegemon, the United Nations as the diplomatic arm of the new Pax Americana, and the US dollar as the new standard of exchange. The Cold War was widely understood as an ideological conflict between two versions of modernity: Atlantic modernity (alternatively, the early developers' modernity) that championed capitalism; and the ultramodern reaction to that modernity, which arose in continental Europe and came to power in the form of the Soviet Union. The Cold War was the era of politics over economics. The nation-state form consolidated throughout the world primarily because the victors of the Second World War judged underdevelopment and ideological rebellions to be the foremost threats to this order; they created global institutions to support states to implement development programs. This economic model of state-managed capitalism, also known as developmentalism, had been proposed by John Menard Keynes in the wake of the disasters caused by an earlier phase of unbridled capitalism that had led to the Great Depression in 1930s. The reaction to Keynesian economics by big business in the 1970s led to the master plan that gave birth to another phase of globalization, namely when in the 1980s the two most powerful economies in the world (the UK under Thatcher and the US under Reagan) campaigned against a government role in economics. This economic model inspired by neoclassical economics or neoliberalism, also known as the Washington Consensus, demanded optimal environment for capital investments including deregulation, elimination of tariffs and public services, privatization, and stern property rights. It saw its heyday in the 1990s and 2000s until the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

A new multipolar era is reluctantly on the rise.³ In liberal democracies of the Global North, ultranationalist politics has embraced the anti-globalist agenda for both economic and cultural reasons and scored remarkable electoral victories whose effects are unlikely to be reversed. The alignment of white supremacy, economic nationalism, anti-immigration, and Islamophobia has created a tsunami of right-wing anti-globalism, which has overtaken the strong leftist anti-globalism that long produced deep economic, social, and ecological critiques of the phenomena unleashed by globalization.

Profoundly damaged by globalization, Muslim states stand on the brink of political collapse. On the one hand, repressive autocracies in the Muslim world show unprecedented and open disregard for the interests of their own populations and Muslims globally; on the other hand, Muslim minorities elsewhere face increasing and unprecedented persecution.

Renowned Israeli journalist and scholar Elizabeth Tsurkov summed up eloquently in a tweet in June 2020, “25 years after Srebrenica, Muslim lives have never been as devalued as they are now: genocide in China, ethnic cleansing in Burma, repeated chemical attacks & extermination by torture in Syria. In 25 years, we will probably reflect on this era of unchecked impunity with horror.”

How we got here is an open secret. The stage was set during the Cold War, when the two superpowers treated these nascent states as a geopolitical chessboard. In consequence, Muslim countries were especially unprepared for the onslaught of global corporations looking for cheap labor and new markets. As local businesses were decimated, the windfall of profits from global business fell into the hands of the easily corruptible elite constrained by weak or nearly non-existent national institutions. As big money consumed politics in most of the developed world, in the developing countries global capitalism far more easily destroyed any semblance of political self-determination and fanned endless crony capitalism, exacerbating inequalities and igniting all kinds of old and new tribal conflicts. The key power of politics (be it democratic or autocratic)—that is, to redistribute resources and constrain global and local forces—diminished everywhere.

Among the unintended but world-transforming effects of this phase of globalization, which happened to coincide with the rise of the internet, was the mobility of labor, knowledge, and most of all, sensibilities and desires. As people moved for work, global corporations established themselves in underdeveloped but politically stable countries for cheap labor; the internet wired the world; and satellite TV penetrated community and family structures with the religious and cultural ideas of late modern liberal-capitalist consumerism (the most anti-community, individualistic culture on the planet). It seemed the world was becoming a village (albeit one defined by the mores of Hollywood).⁴

Another instance of the unintended consequences of globalization was the phenomenon of Al Jazeera, which spawned many competitors. This first semi-independent news channel based in the small, fossil-fuel-rich Gulf emirate of Qatar, which hired former CNN and BBC journalists to revolutionize news in the Arab world, offered a global and relatively balanced coverage from a liberal, globalist perspective served with a side of open dialogue and debate, along with critiques of regional autocracies and cultural conflicts. Among other factors, the possibility of political criticism by citizens and oft-silenced voices reconfigured the political agency of ordinary people. A number of these globalizing trends, along with the

out-of-control inequities and humiliations compounded for decades by neoliberalism, culminated in the Arab uprisings of 2011. Their aftermath, unsurprising, produced an equally powerful autocratic counter-revolution backed by the American and Israeli right wing.

The End of the Nation State

Returning to the global stage, let us ask how the world has been transformed by globalization. Many scholars see globalization as having eroded or fundamentally transformed the nation-state, the political system that is conventionally thought to have originated with the Westphalian treaty of 1648. It empowered Europe to advance far beyond the old power centers of the world, and spread to the non-Western world through colonialism and anticolonialism. The erosion of the nation-state, then, is to be classified as an epochal change, not as one of the garden-variety upheavals and revolutions that occur every few years and decades.

Among the many who consider the rise of globalization, internationalism, and neoliberalism as tantamount to the end of the nation-state as we knew it, one is the French scholar (and head of UN peacekeeping missions 2000-2008) Jean-Marie Guehenno, who presciently argued soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in a book that came out in 1993—the same year that European Union was established—that something fundamental had begun to change about the West: “1989 marks the close of an era that began not in 1945 or 1917, but that was institutionalized thanks to the French Revolution, in 1789. It brings an end to the age of the nation-states.”⁵ What is more, he contended, there can be no democracy without a nation. Just as the Roman empire succeeded the Roman republic, so our new age is an empire whose citizens “constitute less and less of an entity capable of expressing a collective sovereignty; they are mere juridical subjects, holders of rights and subjected to obligations, in an abstract space whose territorial boundaries have become increasingly vague.”⁶ His words, which might have been seen as alarmist at the time, are worth reproducing at length:

This revolution of the laws of power first occurred in the world of business: the end of the cold war now permits it to expand into the political sphere; the whole industrialized world, from Washington to Tokyo, passing through Brussels, is discovering that the rules of power are changing. We believed that it was enough to replace nations with supernations, as a large enterprise absorbs a smaller one. We are beginning to realize that, as it changes in scale, power changes its nature. ... The political

organization that the Enlightenment bequeathed to us is only one episode in human history, the means that we found, at a certain stage in our development, to establish freedom in a political order. This definition of freedom will not survive the particular conditions that presided over the birth and the flourishing of the nation-states. We must, then, understand the rules of this new age, not in order to fight against it—that would be a wasted effort—but to save what can and must be the idea of freedom.⁷

A nation, he contends, was a distinctly European idea; it is not a social group, nor a religious group, nor racial or ethnic; it is “the product of a unique combination of historical factors, and can never be reduced to a single dimension ... it brings people together not for what they are but for the memory of what they have been.” In fact, “A nation has no other definition but historical.” Yet, it is not a tribe; “a nation, in the European definition of the word, is first of all a place; that is to say, a territory defined by precise frontiers.”⁸ Given this, it is no wonder that the idea of nation is an ephemeral one. “Products of a European mold,” writes Guehenno, addressing his fellow Europeans but the observation applies equally to colonized minds everywhere, “we are used to considering the nation as a political form that is self-evident, a kind of natural culmination of all societies. It is time to realize that the idea of the nation that Europe gave to the world is perhaps only an ephemeral form, a European exception, a precarious transition between the age of kings and the ‘neo-imperial’ age.” Globalization—although he didn’t quite use the word—would endanger the idea of local solidarity that is the basic condition of politics and democracy.

Less than three decades later, after an avalanche of scholarly requirements for the best days of American democracy or democracy itself, we are none the wiser about the deep paradoxes of globalization. What we are sure about is that the new generation that has grown up everywhere is more profoundly disillusioned by the world than any in recent memory. Thanks to the imminent ecological collapse and crushing inequalities that can be strongly linked to global capitalist activity, the grounds for disillusionment have rarely been this strong.

Moral and existential worries about globalization notwithstanding, we must also attend to scholarship attempting to theorize it. One of the prevailing interpretations of globalization has been that “today’s emerging overlapping jurisdictions of national states, supranational institutions, and novel private global regimes” resemble the pre-nation-state (European) world, “the multifaceted political geography of the feudal order.”⁹

Dutch-American sociologist Saskia Sassen sees globalization as a “foundational change” in the complex system of nation-states, one characterized by states’ “growing interdependence and the formation of global systems.” This change, she argues, is occurring in the enormously complex and powerful structures of the nation-state, “the unit that has absorbed all major building blocks of society over several centuries.”¹⁰ In other words, the nation-state is too big to fail, to simply vanish—in the developed world anyway. It is rather transforming, becoming the locus of and broker for the transformations that are occurring. The “denationalizing” processes that are identified as globalization coexist and compete with older processes. As we think about deglobalization, Sassen’s insight should prompt us to think of it not as the rebirth or restoration of the centrality of the nation-state, but as a complex and open-ended set of numerous processes and negotiations whose outcome is uncertain and up for grabs. The scholarship suggests that whereas the post-globalization world is not likely to return to the pre-globalization world of nation-states, what it will look like and who the winners and losers will be is not predetermined. It will depend on how the battles are fought, city by city and region by region.

Deglobalization: Engines and Apprehensions

One body of literature concerned with deglobalization equates it to the decline of worldwide US hegemony and the transition from a unipolar world to a multipolar world in economic, political, and even cultural realms. In a 2012 report, the National Intelligence Council, Washington’s top intelligence agency, concluded, “By 2030, no country ... will be a hegemonic power ... largely reversing the historic rise of the West since 1750. Asia will have surpassed North America and Europe combined in terms of global power, based on GDP, population size, military spending, and technological investment. China alone will probably have the largest economy, surpassing that of the United States a few years before 2030.”¹¹ Historian Alfred McCoy argued in his 2019 article, titled “The End of Our World Order is Imminent,” that “At least 200 empires have risen and fallen over the course of history, and the United States will be no exception.” The reasons that McCoy offers include, apart from so-called irrepressible forces of history, more specific developments such as the rise of China (which McCoy believes is likely to be ominous for anyone concerned with human rights and the rule of law), and, greatest of all, climate change.

Another body of scholarship is focused on technology and its economic and military impact. German economist and founder of the World

Economic Forum Klaus Schwab speaks of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution.” The first in this series of fundamental social transformations was the 18th-century industrial revolution driven by steam power, the second by electricity in the late 19th century, and the third the digital revolution of the late 20th century. The fourth such transformation, Schwab contends, will be even greater. US military strategist and historian T.X. Hammes argues that one major outcome of the fourth Industrial Revolution will be deglobalization.¹² As labor cost advantages and technological differences in manufacturing decline, energy production will become local rather than dependent on oil, and every region now will be able to produce locally, leading “to major declines in the global movement of trade, services, and investments—in short, deglobalization.” Economic growth will now be “focused in regional markets as opposed to interregional or global trade.” Applying the highly influential idea proposed in the 1990s by Harvard Business School’s Michael E. Porter, which hinges the competitive advantage of nations on clusters of interconnected firms, supplies, related industries, and institutions (rather than, say, raw materials, political system, or military muscle), Hammes portends that “business will make more money by producing and selling both goods and services regionally and even locally than globally.”¹³ Militarily, Hammes argues, US interventionism and policing will have to be dramatically reversed as relatively small actors will be able to reproduce offensive warfare technologies and alter the military posture of great powers.

The Case for Deglobalization

Before there was Occupy Wall Street (protesting growing inequality) and Black Lives Matter (protesting police brutality and systemic racism) to shake up the heartland of global capitalism, there was the Battle of Seattle in 1999, when over 40,000 protestors gathered to protest globalization. “The organizers,” writes finance scholar Noah Smith, “were a hodgepodge of groups—unions worried about competition from cheap foreign labor, environmentalists worried about the outsourcing of polluting activities, consumer protection groups worried about unsafe imports, labor rights groups worried about bad working conditions in other countries, and leftists of various stripes simply venting their anger at capitalism.”¹⁴ The debate between globalists and antiglobalists has raged for the last few decades, and neither side has won a decisive victory. Globalization has doubtless increased the total wealth manifold, but if its moral justification was lifting the poor out of poverty, its record is dismal. As Berkeley economist Pranab

Bardhan concluded in his article authored just before the Great Recession of 2007, “Does Globalization Help or Hurt the World’s Poor?,” its actual effect on poverty elimination is unimpressive. True, many have been lifted out of poverty in China (70 to 27%), India (63 to 42%), and Indonesia (55 to 11%) in the last few decades, but the majority of that change had occurred prior to the acceleration of globalization in 1980s: out of 400 million in China who presumably crossed the poverty line, 300 million had already achieved that by 1987 as a result of state reforms and expansion of infrastructure. Similarly, in India and Indonesia, the change can be attributed to other factors such as the Green Revolution.¹⁵

Understood as the global expansion of capitalism, globalization has not in itself helped the poor. It has, instead, produced enormous inequalities with a few colossal winners and many, many losers. However, the further consequences (beyond economics) are far greater and far more complex. They have been felt in cultural, social, political, and ecological spheres. The last of these is perhaps the only domain in which the impact can be scientifically and precisely measured. The destruction of the planet’s environment is also the longest lasting and, by all imaginable standards, the most decisive factor in both evaluating globalization’s performance and judging its future. The paradox is that whereas global capitalism has single-handedly aggravated the problem of global warming and other ecological degradations, global cooperation and scientific cooperation appear to be indispensable in mitigating some of its effects.

Politically, global capitalism seems to have undermined democracy, accountability of elites, and the power of politics everywhere, even if the effects of other aspects of globalization (such as enhanced movement of people, ideas, and information) are less clear. Leading philosophers expressed worry—if not horror—at what globalized capitalism seems to have done to democracy and decent life. Not long after Guehenno’s book, British philosopher John Gray authored *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, one of the most compelling critiques of the globalized version of free market capitalism, which defended Keynesian economics as being necessary to a social democracy within the nation-state. Free market or “invisible hand” economics, Gray contended, is a dangerous ideology proven false over and over. It is always engineered by coercive power, and engenders enormous human suffering. “The truth is that free markets are creatures of state power, and persist only so long as the state is able to prevent human needs for security and the control of economic risk from finding political

expression.”¹⁶ Ironically, then, “Encumbered markets are the norm in every society, whereas free markets are a product of artifice, design and political coercion.” If free market is a coercive process within the nation-state—a community of shared history, interests, and destiny—what kind of hell must be fired up in order to make the world a free market?

The 2020 report of UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) warns, “Rising inequality had created discontent, deepened political divides and can lead to violent conflict.”¹⁷ The report also notes the dangerous rise of populism or ethno-cultural nationalism in large democratic economies. Scholars remain split on whether the rise of nativism is caused by economic or cultural factors.¹⁸ The number of migrants worldwide grew from 36 million in 1991 to 191 million in 2005, rising to 272 million in 2020.¹⁹ In both the US and the UK, “the most consistent single predictor of how people voted were educational levels” rather than income, which suggests a cultural explanation. Globally, confidence in the United Nations and in international actors and cooperation at the global level is declining (the percentage of those ‘not confident’ rose from 40 to 48 between 2000 and 2010).²⁰ To conclude, while important, economics cannot alone explain the major shift toward antiglobalism in the countries of the Global North.²¹

Scholars have long argued that the worst effects of globalization were not economic inequality and coercive institutions, but far deeper: the ubiquitous mistrust of all by all in a world where misery is designed by none but felt by most, the degradation of social life, the degeneration of democracy into an empty promise, and the rise of angry groups looking for scapegoats to blame. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman wrote, “An integral part of the globalizing processes is progressive spatial segregation, separation and exclusion.” An instance of what he meant can be witnessed in any city in the developing world where the rich few live in gated communities that reproduce the Global North’s most decadent neighborhoods, whereas the urban poor as well as rural masses experience an earthly hell of pollution, disempowerment, and religious and spiritual dislocation. What is more, terrorism, ultra-nationalism, religious fanaticism, and other forms of tribalism were believed to be an integral product of globalization. “Neo-tribal and fundamentalist tendencies,” Bauman wrote, “which reflect and articulate the experience of people on the receiving end of globalization, are as much legitimate offspring of globalization as the widely acclaimed ‘hybridization’ of top culture—the culture at the globalized top.”²²

Among the most compelling and long-standing advocates of deglobalization is Filipino sociologist, environmentalist, and politician Walden Bello. The ultimate problem in Bello's view is capitalist-industrialist overproduction, which in turn was the result of a number of factors that coincided after World War Two, such as "post-war consumer demand, the reconstruction of Europe, US military spending, and rapid economic development in the decolonized world," the very same factors that created in the US "the golden age of capitalism."²³ This honeymoon ended in the twin crisis of stagnation and inflation which Keynesian economics could not anticipate or explain. To solve the problem of overproduction, the capitalist elite pursued three solutions: neoliberal restructuring, globalization, and financialization. To deal with overproduction and declining profits, semi-capitalist and non-capitalist areas such as China were brought into the global market to provide cheap labor, raw materials, and new markets. This only increased productive capacity and overproduction. Financialization, namely credit creation and speculation (a process known since antiquity in its essential form as usury) became more intensified, as Marx noted,

To the possessor of money capital, the process of production appears merely as an unavoidable intermediate link, as a necessary evil for the sake of money-making. All nations with a capitalist mode of production are therefore seized periodically by a feverish attempt to make money without the intervention of the process of production.²⁴

This led to the financial crisis and the Great Recession of 2007-2009, and reignited Keynesian economics in the Obama era—but more significantly, started the turn of the global elite toward deglobalization. Among the crucial factors contributing to the instability of globalization, Bello suggests, is dependence on foreign markets and overproduction. Globalized capitalist economy is fragile, prone to crises, and ultimately destructive because it is held together by long, thin threads rather than the short, thick ropes of regional economics.²⁵

The case for deglobalization in the form of economic nationalism or regionalism has been made from both the left and the right. The right has turned against economic globalization due to the loss of jobs and the rise of migrant workers, both skilled and unskilled, from the developing world, and the shipping of jobs to emerging, cheap markets and the consequent loss of jobs and status (granting the temporary windfall from the fortuitous golden age of capitalism mentioned above)—in addition to the ideology of American independence and exceptionalism. Meanwhile, the left is

concerned with ecological concerns, labor rights, and the erosion of democracy that Wolin has called the rise of inverted totalitarianism.

The Conservative Case: Deglobalize to Save True Free Market, Community, and/or National Character

Let us start with a sample of conservative critiques from the United States, the heart of capitalism. Political scientists divide the conservative opposition to globalization into a few categories. The critiques are numerous and some mutually exclusive. There are the libertarian free-market champions who point out, in agreement with leftist critics (and correctly), that global capitalism is not actually a free market but a rent-seeking deal between government and big business; the global access to cheap markets thus secured frees the latter from having to face free and fair competition from the market. Less radical conservatives, while supporting capitalism and growth, simply seek “to slow down the pace of change to mute adverse consequences on workers and communities supported by globally less-competitive markets.” Social conservatives who value community, family, and social mores view globalization with less complacency, as they fear the destruction of community, solidarity, and republican virtues when people are subjected to the impersonal forces of the global market. James Rogers sums up their concerns eloquently:

The cost of the market system in this view is the loss of solidarity among people. Different commentators emphasize different aspects of these social costs. One line emphasizes the idea that the commodification of labor destroys ties of solidarity between people in local communities. There is a direct version of this view, that the market, and the anonymity between producer and consumer, necessarily leads us to treat other people as means rather than as ends in themselves. Some also add that the market creates a semiotic environment that changes how we think of people whom we do see in daily life. Social life becomes depersonalized and exchange oriented as a result. Isolation and anomie results. Others draw attention to the spatial size of the global market: unlike pre-modern markets, the argument goes, the sheer size of today’s globalized economy makes producers and consumers strangers to one another. Only price serves as intermediary between one person and other. This prevents the ability to tailor economic transactions to serve the needs of specific individuals, as could be done in the face to face transactions in local markets. This change also then undermines the possibility of sustaining real

communities, even at the local level: local production is production for consumers who could be thousands of miles away. The intimate relational component of the local market is lost in the modern market system in this view.²⁶

More than harm to the local community and solidarity, economic nationalists (another type of conservatives) worry more about the deterioration of the national character through immigration and the increasing power of global institutions to determine policy and culture; this last tendency can be best captured in the nationalist worries evident in Brexit. The two types of worry are not mutually exclusive, but they are distinct, for American national capitalism prior to globalism had already decimated local community and family solidarity and ethical norms. It is already evident that libertarians, communitarians, and economic nationalists agree on little even when in agreement on their opposition to globalist ideology.

The Left-liberal Case: Deglobalize to Save the Environment, Democracy, and (Non-Western) Local Cultures and Economies

Over the last five hundred years, as the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein famously argued in his world-systems theory, the world has remained sharply divided between the capitalist *center* (the Atlantic world, sometimes called the Global North) and the global *periphery* (sometimes called the Global South). The impact of globalization has been inordinately greater on the latter, especially those nations that lack the institutional and political capacity to withstand the invasion and temptations of global capital and the ruinous swings of the market. To recapitulate the leftist case against deglobalization, let us first return to a view from the *periphery*, the Filipino sociologist Walden Bello, who popularized the term deglobalization in his 2004 monograph by that name where he offered a multifaceted case for deglobalization. In a 2008 essay he argued that “The dynamics of global capitalism are inherently ecologically disruptive.” In his more recent book *Capitalism’s Last Stand: Deglobalization in the Age of Austerity*, he develops his earlier arguments in light of the fateful events of the intervening years and contends that “deglobalized non-capitalist economic arrangements appear to be a key part of the solution to the challenge of climate change and other forms of environmental degradation.”²⁷ As global capitalists resist government-imposed measures such as imposing mandatory carbon caps, the elites in the emerging economies of the Global South show “little

willingness to depart from the high-growth high-consumption model inherited from the North.”

If Keynesianism envisioned managed capitalism constrained by democracy, leading American political philosopher Sheldon Wolin argued that the neoliberal world order envisions managed democracy constrained by the economic maximization of multinationals. To Wolin, globalization is not a leaderless, inevitable process, but the result of the global superpower’s slide into what he calls “inverted totalitarianism,” driven by the neo-conservative elite under whose influence the newly triumphant post-Cold War United States embraced an “imaginary of power” rather than one of constitutional principles and democracy and through the spectacle of total power projected globally through its one thousand military bases (projected virtually through the satellite media, as in the two Gulf Wars) and, finally, the interminable global War on Terror declared after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The global pursuit of superpower through these and other means undermined democracy and constitutional constraints at home:

Inverted totalitarianism marks a political moment when corporate power finally sheds its identification as a purely economic phenomenon, confined primarily to a domestic domain of “private enterprise,” and evolves into a globalizing co-partnership with the state: a double transmutation, of corporation and state. The former becomes more political, the latter more market oriented. This new political amalgam works at rationalizing domestic politics so that it serves the needs of both corporate and state interests while defending and projecting those same interests into an increasingly volatile and competitive global environment.²⁸

This is not merely about the United States: there is something inherent about the scale at which globalization forces us all to think and learn that makes it opposed to any kind of participatory politics, including democracy. The constant refrain of pundits is that the people must be educated about the issue they happen to be experts of or focused on at the moment—and the list of such topics, each of which requires prolonged mastery of a field, easily runs into thousands. This inevitably leads, in the best circumstances, to the “rule of experts”; it also means that the information necessary to make even modestly informed decisions is based on abstracted information packaged and repackaged for easy consumption by those who are masters of delivery, not necessarily of the particular subject matter. This facilitates the rise of celebrities and populism, rather than engaged participatory politics and of leaders able to inspire and empower the best and suppress the mobs’ worse

impulses. The knowledge on which even the most informed people act under such conditions is highly abstract rather than natural, palpable, and multidimensional, in contrast to the knowledge one has about one's immediate surroundings, family, and community.

Finally, perhaps the most important human consequences of globalization are cultural and religious. To Muslims, as to those concerned with other ways of life (such as the Chinese, the Indians, the Africans, and as it turns out, to many citizens of the Global North themselves), globalization has posed an unprecedented cultural threat to what they value most about their respective ways of life. Euroamerican societies, threatened by immigration from the very lands their corporations have devastated, have only begun to taste the poison they have handed out over the last two centuries. Thoughtful scholars have begun to realize the challenge of cultural annihilation that the current phase of globalization presents to non-Western societies. Renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz once wrote, "We seem to be in need of a new variety of politics, a politics which does not regard ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, or regional assertiveness as so much irrationality, archaic and ingenerate, to be suppressed or transcended ... It depends on developing a less simplistically demonizing, blankly negative attitude toward it as a relic of some savage or some early stage of human existence." Geertz was too naïve if he thought a better attitude, becoming more educated, could solve the problem of cultures, languages, ways of life, and means of living being destroyed by globalization. Elsewhere he noted a dilemma: the world is "growing both more global and more divided, more thoroughly interconnected and more intricately partitioned, at the same time. As the one increases, so does the other."²⁹ How could it be that whereas as other ways of life are being annihilated or fundamentally transformed, as people become more Westernized, they are also becoming more divided? Globalization is not producing a harmonious village; as people are learning to speak the same language and acquiring the same desires and competing after the same things, they are becoming aware of inequalities and injustice in the same way.

Open Questions

While globalization's engine may have been economic, its real presence and long-term effects are ecological, social, psychological, affective, political, and cultural. People's sensibilities, expectations, loves, fears, feelings, sources of information, depth and range of relationships, household sizes,

familial conduct, rate of marriage and children, devotion to family and community, impact on the environment, and knowledge and practice of religious rituals, all have been deeply transformed.

The most indisputable effect of globalization has been the rapid and unsustainable acceleration of ecological degradation. Those in the global South both resent and admire those in the North, hankering after the same lifestyle. This is objectively impossible. Americans make up 5% of the world's population and consume nearly 35% of the world's resources. Even the rise of new economies is largely dependent on the lusty consumers in the global North. Modern liberalism and capitalism are inextricably dependent on a consumerist lifestyle, that is, one in which consumption is a way of life, the right to which Americans militantly demand. If these conditions of individualistic, materialist life are extended to the 70-80% of humanity still living in more traditional cultures—ones on which our continued existence depends and yet ones that are deeply threatened—it would quite simply require several other planets. In addition, the anthropogenic climate change that is directly and inextricably linked to industrialization and modern life has already drastically damaged the planet. Threats such as global pandemics, as they become more frequent and serious, thrive on frequent global circulation of labor and capital, and may singlehandedly sound the death knell for globalization.

Yet, paradoxically, solving the ecological problems, natural disasters, and global pandemics, which do not respect cultural or national boundaries, requires a global cooperation which deglobalization threatens. The knowledge that is needed to sustain increasing global population is being produced and consumed globally. Globalization has enabled the intensification of interaction between cultures; and even under the hegemony of Western liberalism, non-Western cultures have found new voices. Even as critics point out that these refurbished cultures are often mirror images of or superficial reactions to Western cultures, the opportunities that globalization (in particular, the Internet and the social media) have afforded for dialogue, reassertion, and new kinds of solidarities appear to be unprecedented and powerful.

How must Muslim ulama and opinion leaders—the heirs of the prophets—respond to a profoundly changing world? No inexorable laws of social science can decide the result; only the divine will, which rewards right reason and right action. With prophetic action, the specter of (de)globalization can, God willing, be turned into a new, auspicious beginning so our collective future may be better than the unreal present, in which unspeakable harms are visited upon a new Muslim group every day and, like lambs

lined up for slaughter, the rest stand in utter confusion, each pushing the other toward the blade as they all inevitably inch toward it.

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Endnotes

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