

Globalization or Recolonization?: The Muslim World in the 21st Century

Ali Mohammadi and Muhammad Ahsan
London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 2002. 196 pages.

Globalization has been a burning topic of interest for social scientists and the general public for the last 2 decades. However, a Muslim discourse on globalization has not been sufficiently developed. The current book seeks not only to present a dramatic picture of the ummah within the globalized network of mainly economic relations, but also offers policy solutions to get out of this crisis and create the Islamic ummah as an active actor in global economic and political affairs.

As the title suggests, in this book globalization does not have the positive connotations that it has in liberal western scholarship. In fact, it is seen more as a recolonization of the Third World, and, in particular, of the Islamic world. The first chapter lays the theoretical ground, the last one concludes the argument and gives a strategic plan to counter recolonization, while the other six chapters concentrate on different aspects of globalization. What comes out of the comparative analyses between the developed and the developing non-Muslim and Muslim worlds is the striking fact that Muslims score the lowest in almost all areas. Besides calling the Muslims' attention to this disconcerting plethora of problems, the authors masterfully document how the myth of interdependence fades away, notwithstanding evidence of the unequal treatment by the "global" economic and

political institutions, when the Muslims' interests are at stake. In many instances, the economic and political variables go hand-in-hand with the informative ones that perpetuate and legitimize these unfair actions through a fundamentalist image of Muslims.

In this regard, chapter 2 depicts the Muslim world as "another world" than the Third World with its collective problems, and shows how it is far behind the non-Muslim world in terms of basic indicators. Chapter 3 looks at the debt trap and international aid issues, while chapter 4 explores the trade gaps of the Muslim world along with the prospects of an Islamic market. In chapter 5, the authors shift their attention to military and political variables, where they compare the military expenditures of Muslim and non-Muslim countries and record that Muslims spend less than non-Muslims in this area. Chapter 6, the most interesting chapter, considers western interventions in political conflicts involving Muslims as implications of "western fundamentalism," as opposed to the dominant image of Islamic fundamentalism. Chapter 7 looks at the media by discussing how the western media represents Muslims and the Muslims' insufficient use of communication technology.

The book's strength stems from its well-grounded arguments based upon statistics and mainstream western media sources. When brought together, facts and figures support their main thesis that "contemporary globalization did not emerge as a 'natural' development, but rather as a created entity driven by the major global players through agencies, such as the IMF, the World Bank, WTO, and the global media." Unlike the dominant perception, globalization does not denote only the "interdependence" of countries and their economies. In fact, this is the case only among the developed countries, whereas the defining characteristic of relations between the developed and developing worlds is the latter's total dependence upon the former. Among the merits of the book is the authors' search for the roots of the ummah's "recolonization" under the guise of globalization, as well as the way out of this circle.

In spite of these accomplishments, some issues need to be resolved in order to make an effective case against globalization. For example, the book does not seem to have articulated enough of its own framework. Where do the authors stand vis-à-vis the theories that have extensively dealt with the same economic relations? Although the authors mention some causal factors (e.g., foreign debt, a lack of competence in global trade and investment, regional conflicts and high defense expenditures, and the interference of western-dominated political interests) that account

for the ummah's current state, they do not specify how these factors cause the result. In addition, in a context where postmodernist and postcolonial currents have gained currency, it is unusual that the book takes developmentalism for granted.

More importantly, it can be argued that overall, this book is economically biased. Although the study of contemporary globalization is generally situated in the international political economy field, since its motivator has been market deregulation, culture is increasingly gaining significance. However, the book generally grants, at most, a corollary status to cultural factors.

Added to this is the authors' silence on the everyday debates about Islam's role in this underdevelopment. What is the Muslims' response to these accounts that hold Islam responsible? Except for one place, Islam is not deemed an exogenous variable to the analysis. This implies that Islam's prevailing formulations are taken for granted, and thereby relegates the ummah's civilizational crisis to just an economic crisis.

As for the policy suggestions, the key role is again attributed to economic reform; only the last page touches upon political reform. It is as if the ummah's economic integration, which the book advocates, could be achieved with the current leadership, whose conflicting interests are mostly contrary to the public interest. Political variables are at work in the book only as they refer to international politics.

Overall, this book presents the incredibly demoralizing picture of the ummah and offers a solution. But a more extensive analysis on the intellectual, cultural, and micro-meso level forces would certainly grasp a lot more about the ummah's various crises. Muslims should not count on their current leaders to create the ummah, when their simple efforts on the grass-roots level could carry the seeds of our dreams.

Halil Ibrahim Yenigün
Graduate Student, Department of Political Science
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas