

Constructing Identity in "Glocal" Politics¹

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This paper seeks to understand the impact of current global political and socioeconomic conditions on the construction of identity. I advance an argument based on a two-step logic. First, I challenge the characterization of current socioeconomic conditions as one of globalization by marshaling arguments and evidence that strongly suggest that along with globalization, there are simultaneous processes of localization proliferating in the world today. I contend that current conditions are indicative of things far exceeding the scope of globalization and that they can be described more accurately as "glocalization."² Having established this claim, I show how the processes of glocalization affect the construction of Muslim identity.

Why do I explore the relationship between glocalization and identity construction? Because it is significant. Those conversant with current theoretical debates within the discipline of international relations³ are aware that identity has emerged as a significant explanatory construct in international relations theory in the post-Cold War era.⁴ In this article, I discuss the emergence of identity as an important concept in world politics.

The contemporary field of international relations is defined by three philosophically distinct research programs⁵: rationalists,⁶ constructivists,⁷ and interpretivists.⁸ The moot issue is essentially a search for the most important variable that can help explain or understand the behavior of international actors and subsequently explain the nature of world politics in order to minimize war and maximize peace.

Rationalists contend that actors are basically rational actors who seek the maximization of their interests, interests being understood primarily in material terms and often calculated by utility functions maximizing given preferences.⁹ Interpretivists include postmodernists, critical theorists, and feminists, all of whom argue that basically the extant world political praxis or discourses "constitute" international agents and thereby determine their actions, even as they reproduce world politics by

reproducing existing practices and discourses.¹⁰ Constructivists, with whom I share many assumptions and insights about world politics, argue that agents pursue material as well as social goals. Thus, it is not the actors' interest but rather their identity that is singularly influential in explaining their behavior as well as the reproduction of international practices.¹¹ Constructivists maintain that the agents' identities, constituted by social structures, shape their interests and actions in reproducing the existing social structures of world politics. As a result, states often act to defend national identity rather than national interests.¹²

I consider identity an important constituent of human agency. Inasmuch as social reality is a consequence of human actions, these same actions are a consequence of the agents' understanding of their "selves" and their pursuit to do justice to who they think they are. The preference for an appropriate action that justifies their identity makes more sense to agents than interests conceived in terms of wealth and power.¹³ Therefore, any attempt to understand world politics or the global human condition necessarily must come to terms with the process of identity formation and its implications.

In the second part of this essay, I explore the sources of Muslim identity from within and without, and seek to understand how the processes and conditions of glocalization influence the construction of Muslim identity. The 1.4 billion Muslims in the world today represent nearly 25 percent of the global population. They are grouped into about 55 states, again over 25 percent of the world's contemporary nation-states. Thus understanding of Muslim politics is extremely important if one is seeking to understand the nature of world politics itself.¹⁴

Globalization or Glocalization?

The term globalization now conveys meanings that used to be expressed by two contradictory worldviews: modernization and dependencia.¹⁵ On the one hand, it simultaneously suggests the world's enormous technological, economic, and political development as well as the growing relations between contemporary global actors. On the other, it also indicates a realm of discursive contestation between the liberal view, which celebrates the zenith of interdependence, and the radical view, which laments the global hegemony of capitalism.¹⁶

Three palpable developments constitute globalization: the globalization of capital and the integration of markets into a singular global market,¹⁷ the development of communication and transportation technology that is rapidly making space irrelevant,¹⁸ and the convergence of interests among groups and the emergence of transnational cooperations, which is realigning social forces on a global level.¹⁹ The third element also is

described as the emergence of a global society²⁰ and the manifestation of a global culture.²¹ It is in this sociopolitical arena that identity is contested, and it is in this social space where cultures clash and where actors struggle for authenticity and independence from cultural imperialism and seek to defend their national, ethnic, cultural, or religious identities.

Those who are excited by economic integration on a global scale see globalization as the systematic elimination of the "local." Adherents celebrate the emergence of a "borderless world,"²² talk about "global reach"²³ and "global dreams,"²⁴ and announce "the end of the nation-state."²⁵ This economic view, which sees the market place as the primary realm of human existence, has already envisioned the dominance of the market over politics, society, and identity.²⁶ There is no doubt that the market is now global, but to assume that this is the end of all that is "local" is as silly as Adam Smith's suggestion that human nature is only about exchange, trucking, and barter.²⁷ Benjamin Barber's famous article and book, *Jihad versus MacWorld*, exposes the limits of the economic view and shows how the present is being shaped by the two competing forces of integration and fragmentation.²⁸ Even as economies integrate, many polities are disintegrating. Even as capital goes global, identity is increasingly going local. Technology, global communications, and the world economy are destabilizing extant boundaries, but they are not eliminating boundaries altogether: the boundary between East and West Germany disappeared, while new ones emerged within Yugoslavia; the Soviet Union disintegrated while Western Europe moved toward a more textured union.²⁹

One may dispute the impact of economic integration and argue whether boundaries are disappearing or merely assuming new forms. However, one cannot deny the amazing impact of communication and transport technologies in reducing the relevance of space.³⁰ This phenomenon has brought different peoples, cultures, and values so close that they are forced to both clash as well as cooperate. The elimination of space between peoples and cultures, or to use the more influential term, civilizations, has created a new "social space"³¹ that is being hailed as the new global culture.³² This new "global social space" is not new to those whose cosmopolitan attitude toward identity has allowed them to transcend the "self-other" dichotomy in order to achieve a detached and disinterested attitude toward the local. In the works of Islamic philosophers,³³ the epistles of al Ikhwān al Ṣafā,³⁴ the moods of Sufis,³⁵ and, more recently, in the Kantian legacy of Enlightenment philosophy,³⁶ the human desire to decontextualize the finite self in order to merge with the infinite universal has always manifested itself. This desire was expressed through art, theology, and philosophy, and even through grandiose attempts at global conquest.

The global spirit, I submit, is neither new nor alien to the thinking man or woman.³⁷ What is new, startling, and fascinating about the contemporary phenomenon of globalization is the vulgarized, commonplace proliferation of a consumerized global spirit. This spirit is not found anymore in the noble sermons of prophets or in the elevating poetry of mystics, but in video cassettes, live TV, Web pages, and Internet chatrooms. Such a trivialization of the global spirit is disconcerting. In the past, one needed to be enlightened, one needed to transcend one's own context to begin to think globally. But today the global is in your living room. You do not have to enlighten or transcend yourself, for it descends to you. My concern is best articulated by asking, even as we stand in awe of globalization's political, social, and technological processes, is there an emergence of a global conscience? We are potentially equipped with both the material as well as intellectual tools to usher in the era of global consciousness, one in which the individual self and the global collective can be conceived as one interconnected stream of human consciousness. But even as we accumulate the building blocks of a global culture, we are bursting at the seams from the pressures of proximity. While there is a strong will to globalize the human self through a kaleidoscopic intermingling of cultures and peoples, we succumb to tribal urges, more fancily described as "identity politics."³⁸ We build larger cities,³⁹ but our neighborhoods are getting smaller. Countries merge and form regional blocks, but communities are fragmenting. While science and economics find more ways to reduce geographic space, politics creates new social spaces and seeks to maintain distances in the face of shrinking space.

It is apparent that two distinct characters of human existence are in conflict as never before: the human being as a social person, and the human being as an individual. This clash is a global struggle to define human space. Our need for society is driving globalization and, simultaneously, our instinctive defense of our individual self from the globalization of culture (for many the culture is a foreign culture) is making us cling, often desperately, to that which is quintessentially local. I am suggesting that we are focussed on the local because of globalization. Our conscious, which for centuries was nurtured by our local context, is being dislocated by forces of globalization, whereas identity politics, or the impulse to belong to something, is a search for anchorage. It is this desperate need for locating the self that is being captured in the floating flux of globalization. The tension between cultural structures and human agency is being played out in the confrontation between global processes and localized identities.

But far from making the global spirit truly global, globalization has engendered the opposite reaction. In the political and sociocultural are-

nas, powerful actors seek to globalize the local as a way of coping with the economic and technical drive toward globalization. The logic seems to be simple: If I have to go global, why not globalize those values and points of reference that make me comfortable?

What does globalizing the local mean? One might say that it involves understanding the impact of global processes as a medium facilitating the proliferation of ideas and globalized discourses. In other words, the global culture and global conscious discussed by the adherents of globalization are essentially a recognition of globalized discourses. But these global discourses, I contend, have local origins, for they are consequences of powerful local interests that globalize their concerns through their access to global mediums, such as CNN. For example, recall NBC's coverage of the 1996 Olympics. It was the most globalized, elaborate, technologically sophisticated, and expensive coverage of a sporting event. The Olympics, a wonderful expression of the global spirit, and the apex of technology joined to provide what was heralded as the most spectacular show on Earth: a global event watched by billions.

But before we celebrate these monuments of globalization, we must explore the curiosities of NBC's coverage. During those 2 weeks, we never realized that we were watching a global event. It was like a local festival televised globally. American athletes who failed to win medals won more minutes of global TV time than many of the actual (non-American) winners. We learned more about the homes and friends and pets of American athletes, who sometimes did not even qualify for the finals of their events, than we did about some Chinese athletes who actually won medals. This is particularly intriguing, since more Chinese watched the games than there are Americans in this world. The point is simple: American consumers' purchasing power, in combination with the parochiality and nationalistic (local) sentiments of American viewers, made a mockery of the global spirit. It was not a global event; rather, it was the globalization of a local sentiment: the celebration of American power.

While it is naive to argue that the forces and processes of globalization are completely under American or any group's control, one cannot deny that power undermines the spontaneity of globalization. Moreover, focusing on the local inevitably leads to the use of local power to influence global processes for local interests. Thus, while there is something tangible to the economic and technological elements of globalization, the social dimension is basically the globalized discourses of local interests. In other words, globalization in the social realm is basically global images of local imaginations.

Erik Swyngedouw coined an interesting term, *glocalization*, to describe the simultaneously occurring forces of globalization and local-

ization.⁴⁰ The identity and political crises defining the contemporary human condition spring from tensions between a heightened global awareness of the present and the reawakening of passions deeply rooted in local histories. He argues that the global and the local are not two separate processes, but rather that they are mutually constitutive and, therefore, deeply intertwined. In addition, he employs an empirical analysis from the realm of economics to explain the impact of global flows on local actions and the reverse influence of local actions on global processes.⁴¹ He seems to apply Anthony Giddens' ideas of structuration when discussing how the local and global simultaneously constitute each other.⁴² (The process of structuration implies that as neither global nor local variables can be isolated analytically, social reality can be mapped only by simultaneously considering both forces.)

A similar idea is advanced by Strassoldo in his reflections on globalism and localism.⁴³ In an interesting argument, Strassoldo argues that globalism and localism cannot grow simultaneously (as they are linked in a dialectical relationship), and then posits that globalism and localism grow simultaneously at the expense of the nation-state. Thus, globalism and localism act in conjunction to undermine the nation-state.⁴⁴ While I am inclined to agree with his first assertion, I wish to distance myself from his second claim that the nation-state is declining. Localism, I believe, can manifest itself as nationalism and a return to state-centric thinking. The growth of hypernationalism, which has generated new nation-states like Bosnia and Croatia, indicates that the nation-state is not ready to exit the stage of world politics. New separatist and nationalist movements in pursuit of other nation-states threaten such existing states as Spain and Canada despite globalism and European integration.⁴⁵ It is a tribute to the resilience of nation-states that we have added nearly twenty new nation-states in the last decade alone.

This global-local interaction has received a lot of attention. Most of these analysis, as those discussed above, seem to find global causes in local actions or seek to identify local responses to global intrusions.⁴⁶ In his discussion of local reponses, Alger summarizes the various forms of resistance mounted by local agents in the wake of globalization. He mentions how local actors are "creating a culture of resistance," commonly in the form of social movements seeking to protect something local, and how these objects of concern can vary from local investments to human rights and cultural values and identities. He places Islamic movements within this category. His analysis brings substance and meaning to the cliché "think globally act locally."⁴⁷ Alger's account of this local-global interaction departs from Swyngedouw and Strassoldo for, unlike them, he sees a causal and not a dialectical relationship between the two.

If we find Alger's account compelling, we can conclude that contemporary tendencies of localism are not concomitant with, but rather are a response to, globalism. Thus, increased local activity will not necessarily enhance globalism, as Strassoldo is inclined to believe,⁴⁸ for local resistances may create mitigating circumstances that arrest the tide of globalization. This conclusion may reassure cynics or opponents of globalization. I am inclined to agree with Alger, for while I believe that we live in an era of glocalization rather than globalization, I am convinced that the refocussing on the local seen in contemporary social practices is a consequence of globalization and not concomitant with it.

Glocalization, as I conceptualize it, implicates power, as it posits two kinds of local-global dynamics. First, glocalization is the exercise of power on a global scale by local actors in pursuit of clearly local interests. The creation and maintenance of institutions of global governance (e.g., the United Nations [UN], the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund [IMF], the World Trade Organization [WTO]), international regimes (e.g., NPT, CTBT, human rights), and international linkages (e.g., trade, the Internet, international media, transportation networks) by nation-states or multinational corporations, is neither motivated by nor even influenced by any global spirit in the pursuit of a global society.⁴⁹ This so-called globalization is a consequence of the enormous power accumulated by actors whose vision is limited to self-interest. Thus, at one level, glocalization is merely the result of the global reach of powerful actors.

Consider the case of Iraq, against which the United States has waged two wars in response to its ill-advised invasion of Kuwait. The first war, Desert Storm, forced Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and surrender to "international society." In this war, the United States and its allies killed about 250,000 Iraqis and destroyed only a limited amount of the Iraqi arsenal. But the primary objective of freeing Kuwait was accomplished. Then the United States, in concert with its allies, launched the second invasion, that of sanctions, which has claimed over one million Iraqi lives and destroyed its industrial and basic infrastructure without getting rid of the primary problem—Saddam Hussein.⁵⁰ This second war, which is being waged through sanctions and a systematic quarantine of Iraq, has been more devastating and effective than the first and has been feasible primarily because of the presence of global processes. Such global institutions of governance as the UN, global trade dependencies of states (i.e., oil revenues from exports, and food and medicines from imports in the case of Iraq), and the availability of regimes and institutions that can control global linkages have facilitated the United States' virtual invasion and occupation of Iraq. In a less globalized world, the United States

would have had to achieve its ultimate objectives through a more direct route and at a greater cost and considerably greater risk to American lives. But the existence of global institutions and processes have enabled it to systematically destroy Iraq.⁵¹ Glocalization, which has enabled the United States to exert so much pressure for so long and from such a great distance, has made this current situation possible.

Second, glocalization implies an enhanced consciousness of that which is local as a consequence of the intrusion of the global. Thus, refocussing on the local as a response to the global is the second dimension of glocalization. The search for local identities, the fragmentation of states and communities, and the increasing proliferation of identity politics are all manifestations of glocalization. The success of globalization is unleashing reactionary processes of localization, because those localities that have had to shoulder the burden of change are recognizing that globalization represents the global assault launched by powerful locals. It is the weak states and societies that have had to face restructuring, dislocation, and even disembodiment, while the powerful have merely become more powerful. Thus glocalization represents a struggle to protect the identity, distinctiveness, history, and meanings of all that is local, particularly as the eminence of certain powerful actors becomes global.

Local Imagination and Global Images of Islam

What is the impact of glocalization on the meaning of Islam and the identity of Muslims? I believe that “glocal politics” have done great violence to the image of Islam and the identity of Muslims. Never has Islam faced such an assault of discourses specifically designed to distort, disfigure, misrepresent, and misconstitute it in order to systematically eliminate its value even from the hearts of its adherents. Global images of Islam have been conjured to present it as an atavistic and anachronistic idea having no place in the modern world. Devout Muslims are described as irrational and intransigent people having a medieval mentality and lacking human sensibility.⁵²

Such global images are essentially a construction of Islamic and Muslim identity that reflect the politics of its non-Muslim constructors. The power of these images is altering the very context within which Muslims have traditionally perceived themselves. They are forced to reassess themselves and their values from an outside-in perspective. Their construction of their “selves” is increasingly a defensive response to the assault on Islam rather than a healthy and proactive representation of values and beliefs. Muslim discourses and practices are now being constituted by global images, as opposed to global images representing Muslim practices. Increasingly, one sees Muslim intellectuals producing defen-

sive literature in an attempt to explain Islam to the West in the discursive parameters of the West. The resulting literature often reflects themes that are more consonant with the Western domination of Muslims than the interests of Muslims. Muslim attempts to rearticulate Islamic values in the Enlightenment's lexicology, with such titles as Islam and human rights,⁵³ Islam and democracy,⁵⁴ Islam and pluralism,⁵⁵ Islam and women's rights,⁵⁶ all indicate a sad surrender of the present to the dominant West.

Rather than understanding the present from the explicit interests of Islam and the *ummah* and then articulating reform and development strategies to enhance Muslim interests, Muslim intellectuals are caught up in the powerful discourses of the West and modernity, discourses that serve only the interests of the West and secular humanism. Even when Muslims defend Islam against Western discourses, in reality they are legitimizing the West and modernity by treating it as a standard against which all things must be measured. Thus, Muslim intellectuals seeking to understand and represent Islam often allow Western and anti-Islamic caricatures of Islam to play a constitutive role in their discourses.

In a nutshell, global images of Islam have created a crisis of representation within the Muslim psyche. I shall contrast the traditional construction of Muslim identity from an inside-out perspective with the outside-in construction of Muslim identity to demonstrate the debilitating consequences of glocalization on the construction of Muslim identity.

The Inside-Out Construction of Identity

I use the phrase "the inside-out construction of identity" to indicate the process by which subjects *represent* themselves. This process of representation involves the construction of the self as well as the signifying practices and symbolic systems that locate this constructed self.⁵⁷ At the collective level, representation is a process by which communities, groups, and civilizations present themselves to other entities. In this section, I examine the construction of Muslim identity and discuss its representation. As I have discussed the various sources of Muslim identity in considerable detail elsewhere,⁵⁸ I reproduce only those elements germane to the issue at hand.

In the past, Muslim society relied on two competing sources of identity: Islamic ideals and *'aṣabīyah* (ethnicity).⁵⁹ With the evolution of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al fiqh*), new sources of difference based upon *madhāhib* (schools of jurisprudence) emerged and gradually led to a uniquely Islamic form of pluralism.⁶⁰ Political differences leading to conflicting interpretations of Islamic principles created new identities, such as the Khārijites and the 'Alids. The advent of the nation-state in the modern era added a newer dimension—nationalism—to difference in the

Muslim world.⁶¹ Thus over a period of 1400 years, the Muslim world developed newer sources of identity/difference that have systematically chipped away at the monolithic conception of the Muslim *ummah*.

Broadly speaking, there are five sources of meaning that influence the process of identity formation in Muslim societies: subjective, intersubjective, ideal, structural, and historical. These sources shape the Muslim community as well as the Muslim individual.⁶² Subjective sources essentially are dependent on the self-narrative of the individual and contingent primarily on how he/she interprets his/her past experiences. This subjective identity emerges through an autobiographical discourse that is politically self-conscious.⁶³ Intersubjective sources are essentially an amalgam of shared understandings and collective memories of groups that, when dominant, become sources of identification.⁶⁴ These shared values and experiences provide the symbolic and moral content that generates the sense of collective self-worth needed to bind the members and provide them with a collective identity. Shared goals and shared interpretations of the world also provide intersubjective sources of identity.⁶⁵ The emergence of transnational and even trans-ethnic Islamic movements, such as the Islamization of Knowledge or the *Tablighi Jama'at*, are examples of shared values providing a source of collective identity.

Ideal sources are those beliefs and practices that each Muslim recognizes as defining "the Islamic identity," which is based upon an individual's Islamic beliefs and is characterized by his/her Islamic practices.⁶⁶ This notion of Islamic identity is highly ideal in its construction, acontextual as well as ahistorical, and presupposes the supreme domination of Islamic values to immunize the believer to the material and political contingencies of his/her time or location. Needless to say, this remains an ideal that all Muslims, at the individual as well as the collective level, aspire to achieve.⁶⁷

Structural sources of identity are primarily political and based on the distribution of power and resources in society. Its most prominent manifestation is nationalism. While national identities often are based on ethnic, racial, and historically shared values, in the Muslim world these identities are constructed by the nation-state system.⁶⁸ Kuwaitis, Iraqis, and Saudis have more shared values than differences, yet they consider themselves as different nationalities.⁶⁹ These differences can only be explained through the institutionalization of an externally (British) endowed distribution of power and resources. Structural sources also can be understood in a contemporary context: the emergence of distinct identities among Indian and Pakistani Muslims, despite many cultural, linguistic, and ethnic commonalities is indicative of the role of contemporary sociopolitical contexts in shaping identity.

The historical sources of Muslim identity also have caused differences to emerge in the historical construction of the meanings and significance of Islamic values, symbols, and events.⁷⁰ The most outstanding example of this historically emerging difference is the gradual divergence of Sunni and Shi'i theology and jurisprudence. Groups, sects, and schools of jurisprudence have gained legitimacy and identity through historically constructed meanings that invoke and then romanticize symbols or authoritative figures from the past.⁷¹ Many such historically constituted Muslim identities have proliferated during Islam's 1,400-year history. While these five sources of Muslim identity are analytically distinct, in reality they overlap in every individual and every community. Nobody is only a Ḥanafī or a Shi'i; contemporary Muslims possess multiple identities and are complex amalgamations of the various sources of identities, with some sources exaggerated and others understated.

Within the Muslim world, identity is represented by using Islamic symbols and discourses that have evolved over the centuries. Muslims manifest who they are in their daily practices: how they dress, whether they maintain their beards, which scholars they invoke in their discussions, and which events they celebrate are all signifiers of various meanings that constitute the present's multiple Muslim identities. In the West, Muslims assert their identity by growing beards and wearing head scarves (*hijāb*) to school and on the job. They emphasize who they are when they demand *ḥalāl* food on airlines, refusing to touch or serve alcohol at social occasions, taking a longer lunch break on Friday to offer the congregational prayer. Such adherence to Islamic dietary and prayer schedules is more than just a way to demonstrate to others that they are Muslims; it is a part of being Muslim, a way to reproduce the Muslim self on a daily basis. Muslims use such Islamic accouterments as posters, carpets, and prayer rugs to create Islamic places at home, work, and in public places.⁷² The decor is nostalgic of Islamic civilization and helps create an Islamic environment and reinforces Muslim identities. The use of Islamic architectural designs in mosques globally is an important assertion by Muslims of their collective presence. Increasingly, this is becoming a way of heralding a Muslim presence in traditionally non-Muslim areas.⁷³

Muslims use various combinations of these five sources of identity to represent themselves. Some seek to emphasize their nationality, others stress their religious adherence, and yet some others attach importance to their association with particular movements. The rituals and complex processes of representation allow Muslims to keep Islam alive. This, in turn, provides the normative substance that gives their lives meaning, structure, and direction. The process of identity construction and its representation is a vital element of Muslim existence. If it were disrupted or dis-

torted, it would have unimaginably deleterious consequences on the very future of Islam as a rich and thriving civilization.

The Outside-In Construction of Identity

Muslim identity is also constructed from outside by others for purposes of explaining—not necessarily understanding—Muslim culture and Muslim behavior. Edward Said, in his *Covering Islam* and *Orientalism*, has done exceptional work in exposing Western constructions of Islam and Muslims as the inferior “other” in opposition to which the superior “Western self” is constructed.⁷⁴ He argues that the identity and conceptions of the Western self are discursively dependent on the image of an inferior and antithetical Islam. John Esposito, in his *Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, shows how Islam’s normative challenge is constructed as a security threat to the West. Thus the West’s imagination and image of Islam is understood either as a civilization’s need to define itself through the process of negative creativity—the construction of an inferior other—or as a civilization’s need to maintain its internal cohesion by identifying or even imagining external threats.⁷⁵ As a result, Islam is either the inferior other or the threatening other. However, in the light of our discussion about the condition of glocalization, we can offer an alternate understanding of the images of Islam generated and proliferated globally by essentially non-Muslim sources.

Let us consider the most prominent images of Islam presented by the global media: Islam as incompatible with democracy, Islam as an oppressor of women, and Muslims as terrorists.⁷⁶ While the rhetoric on fundamentalist Islam is receding, the question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible is taking center stage. In July 1998, when this paper was written, a search under the key words “Islam and democracy” on Lexus-Nexus resulted in 374 recent relevant articles in Western newspapers and news magazines alone. Over 64 academic articles and numerous books have been published on this theme. The global media’s demonization of Islam has resulted in a great deal of literature that has exposed the prejudices and biases in the coverage of Islam.⁷⁷ Some have discussed the dynamics of power that underpin the logic and premises in the Western imagination of Islam. But what they have not done is to show how the so-called globalization has facilitated a global assault on Islam and how the primary motivations for these imaginations are essentially local interests. I will show how global images of Islam serve particular local interests by examining the global discourse on Islam and democracy. This case study will show the linkages between globalization and localization and show how glocalization influences identity formation.

Imagined Contradictions: Islam and Democracy

One of Islam's most egregious flaws, in the current opinion of the West⁷⁸ and of some Muslims who are so westoxicated that they can see no good in the "self" (Islam) and have allowed their minds to be culturally and ideologically colonized by the "other" (the West),⁷⁹ is its asserted "incompatibility with democracy." For nearly two decades, Western commentators have berated Islamic civilization for its lack of a democratic ethos and for being the singularly most important factor in thwarting the modernization and democratization of Muslim societies. And westoxicated and colonized Muslims have echoed this anti-Islamic rhetoric calling for the secularization, reformation, or marginalization of Islam within Muslim societies.⁸⁰ The latest salvo is couched in the language of "civil society," for now Western commentators have discovered that Muslims lack institutions of civil society, an important ingredient of civilized society based on respect of rights and freedom of political participation. Yahya Sadowski has aptly named this "debate" on Islam and democracy as "The New Orientalism."⁸¹

There have been two kinds of responses to the debate on Islam and democracy. Western scholars such as Esposito, Piscatori, and Voll, and experts such as Robin Wright, have argued that Islam and democracy are compatible.⁸² Pointing to Islamic institutions of *shūrā* (consensual governance), they have argued that Islam is not a barrier to democracy; rather, it is secular authoritarianism and its Western allies. Some Islamists seek to promote Islamic democracy, a few of them after realizing that democratization and popular participation will benefit them politically, and others because they genuinely believe that Islam provides a mechanism for popular participation in governance.⁸³ *Mujaddids* (revivers) like Maulana Maududi, Hassan Turabi, and Raschid Ghannushi emphasize the sources of democracy within Islam's sacred sources.⁸⁴ Others reject it outright as un-Islamic on the grounds that laws are divinely given and cannot be created by human beings, as happens in a democracy, for this would constitute an unacceptable violation of God's rights.⁸⁵ While I applaud Western scholars for defending Islam and educating a civilization largely ignorant and prejudiced against Islam, I reject both responses from the Islamist camp. I reject them because they are reactionary and insist that even debating the compatibility of Islam and democracy allows those who bear ill-will towards Islam to define the parameters of Islamic discourses.

Muslims do not have to reinterpret Islam, and thereby garner recognition and acceptance, to show that it is similar to non-Islamic societies. What Muslims need to concern themselves with is the nature of Islamic governance in the contemporary era.⁸⁶ We need to ask ourselves tough questions: Are we developing Islamic societies that allow Muslims the

freedom to understand and practice Islam without compulsion and intimidation? Have we developed societies and mechanisms of governance that have created just societies worthy of emulation and where both Muslims and non-Muslims would prefer to live? Are we fulfilling our mission as God's vicegerent on Earth who have been entrusted with establishing just and virtuous societies? And when it comes to democracy, the only legitimate inquiry is whether democracy can facilitate Islamic governance. It is not democracy that is primordial; it is Islam. The only question that Muslims⁸⁷ can be interested in is whether innovative ways of organizing societies, such as electoral politics (which is often misunderstood as democracy), are compatible with Islam or not, not the other way round. Increasingly, scholars are realizing that both secularism and governance without Islam have no future in the Muslim world,⁸⁸ and that Islam will set the parameters of Muslim discourses, institutions, and organizations.

Turning our attention to the purpose of these discourses, we must ask why Western scholars, journalists, government officials, and enlightened citizens are so disturbed that Muslims are not enjoying the freedoms and mystical benefits of life in a democratic and liberal society. An answer that points to the goodness of Western hearts is less than acceptable, for these very same hearts have shown a heartless disregard for the plight of Iraqi children; dispossessed, occupied, and oppressed Palestinians; suffering Kashmiris; and homeless Kurds, among other Muslims, who have suffered far more than missing the pleasures unique to democratic societies. There is no initiative from the West to alleviate poverty in the Muslim world. Thousands of Muslims die from starvation or malnutrition, but liberal Western hearts find few tears to shed for them. But yes, those same hearts ache when a Taslima Nasreen does not enjoy the freedom to abuse Islam or Muslims. Some in the West are eager to "convert" the Muslim world to their way of life—minus the prosperity of course—by demanding that Muslims transform themselves and learn to appreciate Western values of freedom and democracy. The Christian zeal to proselytize remains strong in the "secular" West, which continues its crusades to shape the rest of the world in its own image.

Explanations based on assumptions of realpolitik appear more compelling than those based on the West's assumed dedication to the emancipation and well-being of the rest. I believe that the discourse on Islam's incompatibility with democracy serves certain local interests rather than any global drive toward universal democratization and cementing of international civil society. Images of Islam as incompatible with democracy delegitimizes Islamic movements seeking authenticity and local governance of their own societies and economies. These global images also legitimize, in the eyes of the so-called international community and

the silent majority of Muslims who remain insulated from the travails and struggles of Muslim activists, the systematic and often brutal and inhuman suppression of local resistance spawned by the Islamic impulse. The discourse on Islam and democracy delegitimizes Islamic self-determination and provides the rationale and justification for preventing the democratization of Muslim societies. It is clever, cruel, and hypocritical all at the same time.

What interests and whose interests are served by delegitimizing Islam? Four particular entities benefit from the erosion of Islamic influence in Muslim societies. First, global capital has a major stake in culturally homogenizing the world. The interests of capital are served by multinational corporations with a global reach but local allegiances. These corporations are great mechanisms for exercising power globally and also act as conduits for transferring wealth to the home countries. It is a matter of national interest that compels President Clinton to intercede on behalf of American firms and help them capture or force open foreign markets. These corporations act in concert with the "priests of modernity" who wish to convert the rest of the world to their religion of secular humanism.⁸⁹ Secular humanism allows economic rationality to constitute human lives and hastens the spread of a consumerist culture at the expense of tradition. This globalization of shallow consumerism and cultural homogenization⁹⁰ fills the coffers of powerful corporations who grow extremely wealthy by peddling meaningless products like sugar water mixed with air! The resulting profits often go into the pockets of investors, primarily from the country of origin, and they pay a 30 to 40 percent tax on these profits to their respective nation-states, making them even more powerful.

Thus economic homogenization, or globalization, is the source of power and influence in several Western nations whose corporations benefit the most from the present economic structure. Robert Cox, a critical scholar who describes globalization as an ideology, emphasizes the role of capital in restructuring international and national economies. I completely concur with his analysis on the subject. Capital requires Islam to end its resistance to the march of Western culture so it can thrive. It is not a coincidence that the global media, which is primarily responsible for propagating images of Islam on a global scale, is a capitalist enterprise seeking to maximize profit—not truth.⁹¹

Second, Israel is a major beneficiary of the globalization of anti-Islamic images.⁹² Israel fears that the Islamization of the Muslim world will give more substance and impetus to Muslim efforts to free Jerusalem and restore Palestinian rights. By sustaining the claim that it is the sole democracy in the Middle East and struggling against fanatics, Israel seeks

to maintain the incredibly high levels of monetary, moral, and military aid it receives from the West.⁹³ Its self-proclaimed image in the West as the only democracy in the Middle East, and the opposing image of Islamists as uncivil and undemocratic terrorists, also serves as a justification for the inhuman repression it periodically unleashes against Palestinians to dispossess them of their lands, dignity, and rights.⁹⁴ Even such Western scholars as Fred Halliday describe how many supporters of Israel see Islam and Israel as engaged in a zero-sum game and therefore assume that the rise of Islam will herald the demise of Israel. Their reaction to Islamic resurgence can be seen in the hostile treatment of Islam in their discourses.⁹⁵

Third, the interests of ruling authoritarian Muslim elites are served by portraying popular movements as Islamic and undemocratic, and therefore unacceptable. Country after country in the Middle East has seen democracy destroyed in the cause against Islam with the active support of Western democracies.⁹⁶ Algeria's emerging democracy has been replaced by chaos, civil war, and untold suffering to keep the ruling secular regime in power and to keep Islam out.⁹⁷ Turkey has done great damage to its so-called democracy by banning Islamic parties, the study of the Qur'an, and other Islamic activities. In many Muslim states, secular despots are stifling democracy with American and French monetary and military assistance by launching wars against Islamic movements. The United States has extremely close relationships with many Muslim states, but one does not see it using its influence to promote democracy in those states. The United States has a mutually beneficial relationship with many Muslim despots, and it fears that further democratization of the Muslim world may not serve American military and economic interests. Discursively, Islam and democracy may be compatible or not, but empirically Islamists and democracy are increasingly becoming staunch allies as the West and authoritarianism unite against them.

Some readers may find it difficult to believe that the West would oppose democracy. I would like to remind them of the CIA-inspired riots that toppled a fledgling democracy established in Iran in 1953 when it perceived a threat to its economic interests.⁹⁸ The CIA-orchestrated coup destroyed a democracy and replaced it with an authoritarian monarchy not so long ago. Continued European support to the generals in Turkey and Algeria further supports my claim that the West prefers an authoritarian and Islam-free Middle East to a democratic one. The West, through manipulation of corrupt secular elites, advances its own interests, whereas a potentially popular regime would seek to advance the interests of its own people and would be difficult to manipulate.⁹⁹

While the global image of Islam continues to question its compatibility with democracy, important empirical data is largely ignored by these

analyses. Consider the number of Muslims who live in democracies: 250 million in Pakistan and Bangladesh, 20 million in Malaysia, 60 million in Turkey, 65 million in Iran (Islamic Iran is far more democratic now than it was under the Shah), 125 million in India, 35 million in Europe, and nearly 8 million in North America. There are also millions of Muslims living in South Africa, Australia, and South America. The total number of Muslims living in democratic societies exceeds 600 million, yet we continue to question the Muslims' ability to adapt to democratic practices. Amazingly, Muslim states have even elected women as heads of state: Tansu Ciller in Turkey, Khalida Zia in Bangladesh, and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan—an achievement that America has yet to duplicate. The democratic achievements of these Muslim societies are never included in discussions by those who assert the incompatibility of Islam and democracy.

Until recently over one billion Christians, primarily in eastern Europe and South America, lived in totalitarian states. But nobody ever asked whether Christianity was compatible with democracy. We can only conclude that the fallacious logic connecting Islam with the lack of democracy in some parts of the Muslim world and then extending it to all Muslims is the exercise of power globally against Islam by local interests. These local interests take their local imaginations of Islam and globalize them through their access to global processes, institutions, and media. The idea of Islam as incompatible with democracy is nothing but a local idea blown up, inaccurately and unfairly, to global proportions. The secular authoritarian elite has used Western images of Islam to justify repression of democratic impulses and to delay democratization indefinitely. Many of these regimes, like the current one in Algeria, receive huge amounts of aid from the West. Often, the foreign aid is used to prop up repressive state mechanisms.

Fourth, the West's civilizational interests are served by spreading unflattering images of Islam. Recent scholarship in the West, particularly the Huntingtonian discourse of the West vs. the rest, has highlighted the significance of the idea of "a West" to the conservative elite in the United States, Britain, France, and Germany.¹⁰⁰ The remarkable success of such articles as Fukuyama's "The End of History?"¹⁰¹ and Huntington's "A Clash of Civilizations?" is indicative of sensibilities that still value exclusionary constructs like the West. In an era when identity politics dominate the social arena and identity is contested at every level, civilizational politics is just another manifestation of the same. That the idea of "a West" based on Judeo-Christian ethics, as well as liberal and capitalistic values, is still dear to a large section of Western elite is evident. It is in defense of "the West" that Islam is vilified in the global media, which is in reality a Western media with a global reach.¹⁰²

Many analysts have argued that the West needs an external threat to maintain its internal cohesion.¹⁰³ Increasingly, the West now experiences a threat from within as Islam gains a significant presence in the West. Millions of Muslims in the United States, Britain, France, and other European nations are challenging the Judeo-Christian foundations of the West's normative structure while simultaneously putting Western claims of pluralism, tolerance, and religious freedom to a severe test. The growth of Islam, as opposed to just the number of Muslims in the West, is unleashing a conservative response that is forcing such ideas as Huntington's to the forefront of public debate. The internal challenge of Islam presents a threat to Western identity. For over a century the West has defined itself as antithetical to a negatively conceptualized Islam. But now this "despised other" has become a noticeable part of the "self." What can be more disquieting to a civilization that for centuries has prided itself on its un-Islamic character?

Some members of the Western elite see the global resurgence of Islam and its rapid expansion in the West as a serious threat. For them, it generates a crisis of representation. If Islam is part of the West, then what is the West? While Islam in the West deconstructs the West from within, Islamic resurgence undermines the West from without. Islamic resurgence, particularly its intellectual and normative implications that reject Western liberalism, unbridled capitalism, and Western democracy as unjust, unfair, decadent, racist, materialist, and immoral, present two challenges to the West. First, it forces the West to examine itself critically. The ensuing self-evaluation is less than flattering. The inequity, injustice, and discrimination found in the West and by the West undermine its self-image of a supercilious civilization that takes its moral credentials for granted. Second, the Islamic alternative makes it look like "just another civilization," rather than the inevitable end/goal of human progress that it assumes it represents. Very simply, the Islamic challenge means "the West is not the best." Therefore, it is only natural that a piqued and insecure West would unleash a discursive war on Islam to delegitimize and marginalize Islam's challenge to its universality.

The process of self-appreciation and self-glorification undergoes various phases in the West. Its discursive assaults on "others" is synchronized with these phases. When the West admired itself for its political and economic development, Western intellectuals described Islam as a barrier to development. When the West admired itself for tolerance, it found in Islam nothing but intolerance. Now that the West admires itself for democracy, it discovers that Islam is incompatible with democracy. The discussion about whether or not Islam is compatible with democracy has nothing to do with Islam; it is about the West, about reproducing the iden-

tity of the West by contrasting it with an assumed other. Ironically, by adopting Islam as its "other," the West has made Islam necessary for its own existence. If the West is not Islam and if there is no Islam, then there is no "West." Thus, in a curious sense, the Western imagination of Islam has become a constitutive element of Western identity, for the West cannot imagine itself without imagining Islam. And if the logocentric distance between Islam and the West is deconstructed by systematically challenging the assumed differences between Islam and the West,¹⁰⁴ the West begins to de-center and disappear as a distinct entity. Today, the West is exclusive because it alone is truly democratic and the rest of the world seeks fervently to emulate it. Western scholars have demonstrated that not only was Islam more tolerant than the West, but that it is not an impediment to development. However, if Islam were shown to be democratic, then what would be special, particular, and characteristic about the West? If one were to agree that Islam poses a threat to Western identity, it is easy to understand Western images of Islam as the consequence of the wrath of Western "image makers."

In the discussion so far, I have shown how specific interests benefit from a global assault on Islam. The discourse on Islam and democracy is not about Islam or global prospects of democracy¹⁰⁵; it is about the authenticity and particularity of the West. It is simply an exercise in the representation of Western identity. This discourse also serves the local and particular interests of international capital, Israel, and secular Muslim ruling elites. It is in the pursuit of these interests that attempts have been made to reconstruct Islamic identity from outside-in by employing globalized images of Islam. This outside-in construction of Islam and Muslim identity is a process of "glocal politics"—where local interests act globally and global narratives actually relate local tales.

Conclusion

I have argued that local interests are globally reconstructing the meaning of Islam and, in so doing, are reshaping Muslim identity. I also have debunked any claims to universality, claims that the processes of globalization so strongly insinuates. Globalization is not a spontaneous convergence of cultures, polities, and economies, but rather the reshaping of various local structures in order to accommodate global capital and its cultural needs. Moreover, such restructuring is engendering a refocusing on the local in the form of heightened concerns for identity by creating a crisis of representation.

Like other constructivists, I believe that identity is a very important element of social reality. It determines human action by shaping an agent's interests and the normative frameworks within which agency

becomes operative. Since identity and interest are linked so closely, it is important that the control of identity-shaping processes be anchored locally so that local interests are served. If Muslims allow the glocal discourse on Islam to shape their values and their identity, they will cease to act in their own interest. If the West, Israel, secular Muslim elites, and global capital are allowed to reshape Muslim values and Muslim identity, the subsequent actions of Muslims will be in the interests of these actors and will do untold harm to Muslims themselves. Thus it is important that the cultural assault of globalization be resisted. Identity must be guarded jealously, lest one is enticed inadvertently into subjugation in the name of globalization.

Endnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies, at Villanova University, PA, 7-8 May 1998. I am grateful to Dr. Fathi Malkawi for useful suggestions that have improved the quality of this paper. I would also like to thank Reshma Khan for her invaluable support that keeps me going.
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82. John L. Esposito and John Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996). John Voll and John Esposito, "Islam's Democratic Essence," *Middle East Quarterly*, no. 1:3 (September 1994): 3-19. John Esposito and James Piscatori, "Democratization and Islam," *The Middle East Journal*, no. 45:3 (Summer 1991): 427. Robin Wright, "Islam, Democracy and the West," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 71:3 (Summer 1992): 131-45.

83. See, for example, the essays in Azzam Tamimi (ed.), *Power Sharing Islam* (London: Liberty, 1993). See also Mohamed Elhaschmi Hamdi, "The Limits of the Western Model," *Journal of Democracy*, no. 7:2 (April 1996): 81-85.

84. Maulana Maududi, "Political Theory of Islam," in *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, edited by Khurshid Ahmad (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1975), 147-72. See Seyed Abdas Araghchi, "Islamic Theo-Democracy: The Political Ideas of Maulana Maududi," *Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, no. 8:4 (Winter 1996-1997): 772-97. Hasan Turabi, "Islam, Democracy, the State and the West," *Middle East Policy*, no. 1:3 (Fall 1992): 49. Hassan Turabi, "The Islamic State," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, edited by John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 241-251. Abdelwahab El-Effendi, *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan* (London: Gary Seal Books, 1991), 159-62. Raschid Ghannouchi, "The Battle against Islam," *Middle East Affairs Journal*, no. 1:2 (Winter 1993): 41. See "Ghannouchi in His Own Words," in Emad Eldin Shahin, "Tunisia's Renaissance Party: The Rise and Repression of an Islamic Movement," *Middle East Insight*, no. 11:2 (January-February 1995): 32.

85. For instance, consider movements like Hizb al Tahri, which reject democracy as unlawful in Islam. See M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "First Islamic Society then Islamic State. But Democracy Now!," *The Diplomat*, no. 2:6 (November 1991): 49.

86. For example, see Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Islamic Governance in Post-Khomeini Iran," in *Islamic Fundamentalism*, edited by Abdel Salam Sidahmad and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 143-162.

87. Clearly here I am working under the Qur'anic definition of the Muslim, for whom Islam is the primary source of principles and values that guide human existence and not any contemporary reformist ideas that allow Islam to be only a part-time indulgence or just a cultural artifact of Muslim societies.

88. See, for example, Mumtaz Ahmad, "Islam and Democracy," 35.

89. See Paul Smith, *Millennial Dreams: Contemporary Culture and Capital in the North* (London: Verso, 1997).

90. See James Mittleman, "The Dynamics of Globalization," in *Globalization: Critical Reflections*, edited by J. Mittleman, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 1-20.
91. Also explore other essays in J. Mittleman (ed.) *Globalization: Critical Reflections*, for more on the subject.
92. Yahya Sadowski, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," 33-34.
93. Raphael Danziger and Bradley Gordon, "[End American Aid to Israel]: No, it Remains Vital," *Middle East Quarterly*, no. 2:3 (September 1995): 13-21.
94. Said, *Covering Islam*, p. 31.
95. Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, 187-92.
96. John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 19.
97. Mamoun Fandy, "Tribe vs. Islam: The Post-Colonial Arab State and the Democratic Imperative," *Middle East Policy*, no. 3:2 (Summer 1994): 40-51. Ghassan Salame, "Islam and the West," *Foreign Policy*, no. 90 (Spring 1993): 22-37. Lars Gule, "Islam and Democracy," *Forum for Development Studies*, no. 2 (1992): 211-32.
98. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 81-96.
99. *Ibid*, pp. 81-96.
100. Samuel Huntington, "The Westernization of the World," *Resurgence*, no. 182 (1 May 1997), 14. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 72:3 (Summer 1993): 22. Samuel Huntington, "The West: Unique, Not Universal," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 75:6 (November 1996): 28. Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, "The Logic of the West," *World Policy Journal*, no. 10:4 (Winter 1993): 17. John Ikenberry, "The West: Precious, Not Unique," *Foreign Affairs*, no. 76:2 (March 1997): 162.
101. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989): 3. Francis Fukuyama, "Are We at the End of History?," *Fortune*, no. 121:2, (15 January 1990), 75.
102. See the collections of essays, Yahya R. Kamalipour (ed.), *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).
103. See Samuel Huntington, "American Identity: The Erosion of American National Interests," *Current*, no. 397 (1 November 1997): 8. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*.
104. See M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "Dialogue of Civilizations?," *The Diplomat*, no. 2:5 (June 1997): 45-49.
105. See also Timothy Sisk, *Islam and Democracy: Religion, Politics and Power in the Middle East* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1992).