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THE IMPACTS OF GLOBALIZATION AND RELIGION TOWARDS SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Religion has long been a driving force in the process of globalization. This idea is not controversial or novel thinking, nor is it meant to be. However, the dominant reasoning on the subject of globalization, expressed by authors like Thomas Friedman, places economics at the center of analysis, skewing focus from the ideational factors at work in this process. By expanding the definition of globalization to accommodate ideational factors and cultural exchange, religion's agency in the process can be enabled. Interestingly, the story of religion and globalization is in some ways the history of globalization, but it is riddled with paradoxes, including the agent-opponent paradox, the subject of this article. Religion and globalization have a co-constitutive relationship, but religious actors are both agents of globalization and principals in its backlash. While some actors might benefit from a mutually reinforcing relationship with globalization, others are marginalized in some way or another, so it is necessary to expose the links and wedges that allow for such a paradox. To that end, the concepts of globalization and religious actors must be defined, and the history of the agent-opponent paradox, from the Buddhists of the Silk Road to the Jubilee campaign of 2000, must be elucidated.

Keywords: globalization; religion; homogenization; anti-globalization backlash; religious actors

Background of the Study

Religion has played a crucial role in driving globalization, with Reza Aslan emphasizing its significant impact on propelling the global spread of messages beyond ethnic and territorial boundaries. Despite being a widely acknowledged concept, the dominant perspective on globalization, particularly by figures like Thomas Friedman, tends to prioritize economic analysis, neglecting the ideational factors at play. This economic-centric approach, rooted in Western-centric historical narratives, fails to recognize that globalization predates Europe's colonial-imperial era and dismisses the enduring influence of religion as a primal force fueling this process.

The historical connection between religion and globalization unveils the agent-opponent paradox, revealing the co-constitutive yet paradoxical relationship between the two. Despite the diversity of religions worldwide, scholars need to acknowledge the complex dynamics, as religion exposes globalization's paradoxes. For instance, predictions of globalization leading to the decline and privatization of religion have been contradicted by a global resurgence in religious fervor driven by the very forces initially thought to diminish it.

The agent-opponent paradox stems from religious actors functioning as both agents and principals in globalization, highlighting the intricate and sometimes conflicting roles they play. Globalization, through homogenization, disrupts cultural norms, prompting some religious actors to view it as an antagonistic force. This perception leads to opposition and resistance, creating a negative feedback loop where those affected seek protection from the

disruptive impact of globalization, even if they may have contributed to its genesis. The article aims to delve into the nuanced nature of the religion-globalization relationship, exploring the complexities beyond mere conflict.

Statement of Problems

Since the 9/11 attacks, a trend in the West has emerged, associating Islam with terrorism, while Al-Qaeda reciprocates by characterizing the U.S. as a Christian or Judeo-Christian nation. The hijackers of 9/11 perceived those in the World Trade Center and Pentagon as adversaries of Islam, leading to a narrative of wars against "Islamofacism" and a divine "crusade" during the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. This perception extends to contemporary attacks on individuals based on cultural and religious attributes, targeting Muslims in the U.S., Western Europe, or India, Kurds in Iraq, and Jews in France. Despite being socially constructed, these religious characteristics serve as a uniting force against those who don't adhere to a specific truth.

Interestingly, the concept of religious identity in the era of globalization aligns with Huntington's thesis. Huntington posits that conflicts in the post-Cold War era will predominantly involve major civilizations rather than states, including Western, Latin American, Islamic, Sinic (Chinese), Hindu, Orthodox, Japanese, and African civilizations. Globalization, by bringing religions into direct contact, has intensified competition and conflicts among them. As long as religions perceive themselves as "world religions" and emphasize their distinct identities, the potential for inter-religious conflict remains high. Fortunately, the final section explores how religions can leverage their core principles to overcome these differences, offering a glimmer of hope in the midst of potential discord.

Literature Review

Initially viewed primarily through an economic and political lens, globalization is often associated with the spread of capitalism, represented by iconic American exports like Nike, McDonald's, and MTV. However, the concept extends beyond economic realms, encompassing an increasingly interconnected world where political, economic, social, and cultural relationships transcend territorial boundaries. This broader understanding emphasizes globalization's profound impact on cultures.

As goods and finance traverse the globe, globalization contributes to the emergence of a homogenized "global culture," reshaping the cultural fabric of the world. This transformative process, while not novel, has significantly reduced the perceived size of the world, causing political, social, and economic events elsewhere to influence individuals globally. In this dynamic landscape, individuals seek stable identities in a constantly changing world, with religion serving as one such source of identity.

Religion, defined as a system of beliefs and practices rooted in the Latin word "*religare*," meaning to bind together again, becomes crucial in providing individuals with a sense of psychological well-being amidst the uncertainties brought by globalization. As economic and political globalization unfolds, individuals turn to religious scriptures and teachings for guidance in navigating a rapidly changing world. However, the relationship between globalization and religion is complex, presenting both opportunities and challenges.