Sociocultural and Political Forms of Religions in the Process of Globalization

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Abstract: The world has been experiencing totally different era in terms of social change dynamics. Many authors and researchers admit this fact. Such ideas are reinforced through the use of concepts referring to major revolutionary socio-cultural and socio-economical transformations such as "industrial society" and "enlightining" as well as the use of various popular concepts like "the end of history" and "the end of societial". Such transformations being experienced are identified with the concept of "the era of globalization" that regards the world as a "single space". However, such social-cultural and economical transformations experienced both in western world and eastern world seem to have differential results. In this context, the aim of the paper is to analyze the results of globalizations in terms of social representations of major religions.

Key words: Globalization · Organized religion · Communitarian religion · Individualistic religion · Politicized religion · Social movement religion · World religions

INTRODUCTION

We are experiencing an era in which social change dynamics significantly differ from the previous periods. Many authors and researchers admit this fact. Such ideas are reinforced through the use of concepts referring to major revolutionary socio-cultural and socio-economical transformations such as "industrial society" and "enlightining" as well as the use of various popular concepts like "the end of history" and "the end of societial" [1, 2]. Such transformations being experienced are identified with the concept of "the era of globalization" that regards the world as a "single space" [3]. However, these processes witnessed both in the western world and in the eastern world seem to have distinct effects.

Globalization refers to the fact that certain cultural, economical or political norm, value judgement or institutional pattern gains a global distribution and then becomes the single norm in the related field. As a result of advances in communications and transportation, the world with variety of cultures, policies, economies and religions has been perceived as *a single space*. Increased attempts to make perceived the world as a whole through socio-cultural awareness have made the world a place in which cultural similarities and differences are included side by side [4]. One of the globalization theorists Robertson suggests that the world has been experiencing a period that contributes to the development of both

similarity and difference and that the term globalization does not refer to the fast distribution of similarity but also it revivals cultural, religious, political, ethnical and economical differences [5]. Furthermore, Robertson argues that one aspect of globaization is to make the global one local and vice versa. He also states that unlike expectations, the global one and local one are not opposites [6]. In this sense, globalization refers to the fact that common values in the fields of economy, religion, policy, social and culture extends the local and national borders and become worldwide.

With the information technologies and communications that have advanced by the second half of the 20th century, flexibility and flow among the political and economical borders have increased and positive or negative effects of any event occurred in any part of the world could reach the another parts in a short time span [7]. In this new situation the distinctive developments are as follows: the formation of satellite information systems, challenging the national cultures' closed borders, the emergence of global consumption and marketing patterns, the development of collective life styles, the formation of globally functioning political systems such as the UN, the expansion of the human rights coverage, more interdependent economies, disappearence of political polarization that was a product of the cold war period and widespread liberal trends in all domains. As a result of these developments, nearly everybody thinks that the world has become "a huge village" [8].

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The aim of this paper is to analyze the results of globalizations in terms of social/cultural representations of major religions. Certainly it is impossible to provide a complete picture of the effects of globalization on religions since globalizations has impacts on many domains such as economy, arts, sciences, communication and policy. Therefore, the study is limited to major fields in which globalization and religion are the focus.

Religion in a Globalized Religion: Globalization brings obligatory changes in the borders of time and space [9]. In the globalizaed world, statements about the social forms of religions are concerned with the question of how the borders of the relationships among religions are formed. The accounts on this respect are divided into three categories. It is possible to isolate certain spaces for the religious purposes, to limit certain time span and to relate the religion with certain people. Therefore, we may find the definitions of divine spaces, divine time periods and divine people. However, these definitions do not have an absolute and unchangeable content. Instead, divine spaces may vary and temporary, divine time periods can be ambigous in terms of their beginning and end points and people may gain or lose the status of divinity. Furthermore, the ambiguity resulting from the definition in regard to religious and nonreligious can have a flowing characteristic within many social context. Therefore, making a distinction between religious and nonreligious using a method that is open to debate is not so significant in terms of cultural standpoint [10].

Development of nonreligious systems such as economy, state, policy, science or education led to changes and differences in the field of religion. Religious social forms changed based on time period and religion. These forms produced several problems including the problem of living in the same culture though people have different religious orientations. A religion should be structured at two levels: firstly, a different thing according to nonreligious and secondly, a different fact according to other religions. Such an approach requires forms and mechanisms that accounts for where, when and for who the religion should be practised. All three points have equal importance. However, the question of for who is the most significant one for the globalized society. In this regard, using Beyer's (2003: 54) categorization, the most widespread forms of religions can be categorized as follows: organized, politicized, social movement religion and individualistic/communitarian religion.

Organized Religion: One of the distinctive features of today's global society is the distribution of organizations in all sectors of life. These organizations affect social and religious life in terms of different aspects everywhere. However, the strongest ones are those that are religious, economical and political. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been influential both in national and in international domains. Within NGOs, there are various religious organizations with varying power, size, internal patterns. Such organizations make the religions more concrete. Christian Rome Catholic Church is of course the biggest of them with its many suborganizations. On the other hand, each organized religion has its own organizations such as Buddist churches, Hindu organizations, Islamic sects and groups, etc. Such organizations' size exhibit a great variety. In other words, they can be totally local or completely global. These are functional in making the religion concrete. On the other hand, time and number are two significant elements in forming the social legality of a religious organization [11]. Relatively recent religious formations such as Bahaism or Scientology or more organized Rome Catholic Church all realize their organization in theological centers and represent themselves using a strong organization strategies.

In the contemporary globalized society, the most significant advantages of organizations is the ability to form social borders. Organizations regard the people as those belonging to them and those not belonging to them. They also categorize social behaviour as those a part of the organization and those nor a part of the organization. Such differences are developed based on membership concept. Religious organizations are very clear about their own situations, who their rulers and the setting of their typical activities. Furthermore, they voice the aim of their activities. In this way, abstract functions, goals and categories are made concrete. Organizations can include many differences that cannot be included by members of society by themselves. Their strategies may address certain individuals or the society as a whole based on their purposes. Their internal patterns may be transparent like those of universities, firms or public institutions or they may be less transparent again based on their purposes [10].

Politicized Religion: In today's society, members of religious organizations resist against categorizations since they have to admit that religion should be limited to its own space. This resistance generally occurs as being

politicised. It is witnessed in Iran and Afganistan as its radical form. However, there are other examples of this fact. In these cases, states have a religious orientation in terms of identity and ideology such Israel, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zambia, Sri Lanka, Tayland, Indonesia, Russia and also England, Sweden, Germany. Regardless of the religion, in all cases religion has an organizational dimension. If the state uses the religion to gain a social form the religion becomes politicised.

The other related point is the shaping of religion by the state and the control of the state in regard to thing related to the religion. In many part of the world, religions have become a kind of political means. Such states as Indonesia, China and partly Russia provide a list what they endorse as religion. In Indonasia, only Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism are regarded as religion. The list of China is the same but Taoism in China is viewed as subcategory of Hinduism. In Russia, only those religions established before a certain time period are regarded as religion. Although in many countries there is no definition in regard to what religion is, there are debates about recent and marginal religious entities in countries such as Japan, Argentina and France [10].

Social Movement Religion: The ingredients of a social movement is subject to hot debates. Here social movement refers to those movements that are mobile. It is concerned with the mobility of people, ideas and material resources to change the current social order and to develop new social forms [10]. They have related organizations. However, social movements and the organizations are not simply interwined. Women's movement and environmental movements of after 1960's can be stated as examples. Although each social movement has its own organization such as American national women's organization or Gren Peace, their protest movements, marginal publications, social debates, lobby activities and other symbolic activities provide them with a concrete existence. Unlike religious organizations, religious movements are more closely related to certain time periods, places and people.

In sociology studies, such entities are called religious movements. However, many of them, particularly recent religious movements are different from those defined above. These movements are established within a certain time period to have members. The examples of them are as follows: Brahma Kumaris, Church of Scientology, Falun Gong, United Church of Christ, Soka Gakkai. There are other similar movements such as Transandantal Meditation, New Age, Neopaganism (Wicca), Tai-Chi Chuan and Qi Gong. Although each has a related organization, the involment is generally not regular, accidental and far away from a common authority and individualistic. As observed in Transandantal meditation, some movements has become weak in recent times and there is trend towards more organized structure. Particularly as in Neopaganism, the thinking structure of the movement is against organized activities. Therefore, although they meet for various rituals they do not have either official organizations or membership procedures. As seen in Neopaganism, the reason for recognition is about their freedom.[1] However, in other cases such as Transandantal meditation, organizational order can be viewed as a way to have dynamic movement and continious mobility [10].

The number of communal religious structures has been increased in parallel to globalization. It is well-known that modernity consisting of individuality and rational trends modified the content of religions and its position in the modern world. However, it is possible to argue that post-modernity has made the religion more individualistic. Since globalization revival the local one, religious movements have increased but at the same time such religious movements begin to have global networks. All these developments bring about religous pluralism. The term religious pluralism was developed by John Hick (1995) and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1991). They argue that all major religions with different reflections in various societies have resulted from the same, single source [12, 13]. They covertly state that the religion that will be the basis of global civilization is the tradition of Judeo-Christianity [14].

In this context, how various religious movements such as Ahmadiyya Movement, Gulen Movement and Moonism benefit from the global conditions or how they perceive this process is relevant. The founder of Ahmadiyya Movement Mirza Gulam Ahmed argues that

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[1] In *Invitation to the Sociology of Religion*, Zuckerman (2003: 72) uses the example of Church of Scientology in the USA to explain the attempts of religious movements to gain legal status. For Zuckerman, Scientology is trying to gain a "real" religion status because several reasons through international lobby activities. Its pamplets are full of indications its goal to have a religion status. If it is recognised as a religion, then it can enjoy many social benefits ranging from tax reduction to social respect. But, if it cannot, it will experience many legal problems and social isolation. The thing that brings a social recognition is not the number of its members or its history, but reasonable public relations and succesfull attorneys.

he is assigned by the God to introduce the essence of Koran to all societies and he is the Mesih who has been waiting for. He points out the significant role of communication to create global effects in many aspects of life. It is also suggested that the founder of Nurculuk Said Nursi who shares the ideas of Gulam Ahmed touched the fact of globalization before its emergence attempting to make his approach mystique. F. Gulen who was trained within the tradition of Nurculuk also tries to benefit from globalization. Moonism is another religious movement that have a wide range of activities such as media, commerce, industry, education. In this regard, another religious movement callled The Electronic Church emphasizes the significance of communication in religious structure and uses it for its global activities [14].

Researchers dealing with globalization and religion mostly focus on cultural pluralism. The other topic analysed is the attitudes of religious organizations towards globalization and its social reflections. Another topic studied is the changes witnessed in the religious understandings and perceptions in the globalized world [14].

Communitarian/Individualistic Religion: The last form, namely, communitarian/individualistic religion, can be briefly stated because as mentioned above it is a transition point between organized religion and one that is not socially recognized as religion except for observators.[2] In many parts of the world, religion is experiencing locally or regionally but it may not have a clear system. The actual examples of it are local religious practices in India, China and Africa countries. Bellah's and his followers' practice called sheilaism is another example [15]. Such practices can be a series of cultural practices that do not belong to any major religions. Halloween, etc. can be regarded as a kind of religious practices but it does not belong to any religious category because its goal is not to create a religious awareness. For communitarian/individualistic religion, organized religion is a model. Such practices lead to researchers to ask the following question: Are there any common characteristics of the religions? [10].

It is not common characteristics that determine what is religion but it is the religion itself that make it [10]. From a religious perspective rituals, symbols, practices are determining elements of the religion and are in opposite direction with the life's material, ordinary aspects.

Furthermore, all things included under the category of religion have rituals, techniques and practices that make the communication possible at a transcendental level. In order to understand this level and to reach it, all religions employs various methods, some of which are similar to nonreligious practices. Such a formal common points is not enough to identify the border between religious and nonreligious. Opposites and forms are much more determining factors [10].

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the 21th century, the world is experiencing very fast economical, political, cultural and religious changes. Regardless of criticisms such as contemporary version of imperialism or of positive evaluations, globalization and its results have become significant study topic in social sciences [16]. In other words, globalization is a social fact with its political, cultural, economical and religious aspects. Therefore, to criticise it or to support it is not so much reasonable. If we view the history progressing teleologically, globalization, of course, is a step towards the future. Certainly, globalization leads to several problems in social life. But if these problems are understood as being against the current situation, it inhibits having a realistic approach towards globalization. Globalization refers to modification of many processes of social and cultural domains and this process makes the familiar ideological appraches invalid. Therefore, ideology-oriented approaches cannot provide us with healthy and acceptable results. At this point, globalization should be viewed as an action. Instead of being on the positive or negative side of the globalization, the significant point is to describe the current situation. Focusing on the negative aspects of globalization does not have any function than cancelling the problem-solving [17]. Negative outcomes of globalization does not require the total rejection of the process.

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[2]Zuckerman (2003: 2) argues that organized religion and religiosity have decreased but the forms of communitarian/individualistic religion have increased. He provides several examples of it using daily events.

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