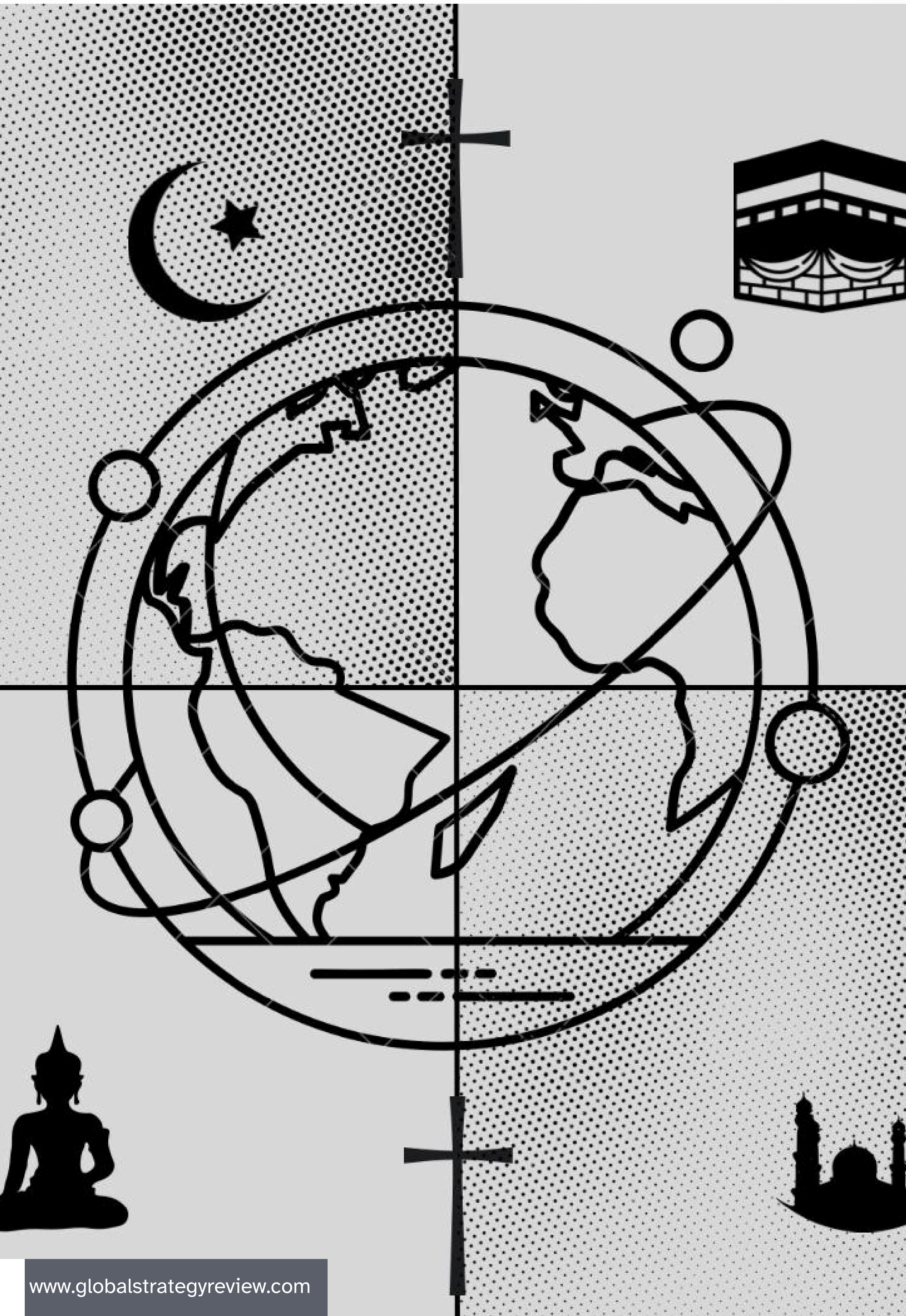


Globalization: Fostering or

Impeding Religious Freedoms?

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Orientation

Although globalization has come to dominate the international arena and internal matters of nation states, its impact remains debatable. Some scholars, i.e. Dawson (2014), have adopted the argument that globalization has impeded the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, whereby adopting and manifesting certain beliefs is challenged by the rise of a number of norms introduced by globalization. Although the sweeping trends of globalization were assumed to bring the world closer and lessen the differences, an extensive body of literature has focused on the detachments and divisions that globalization has produced. Giddens (1990) pointed out that the current era of post-modernization has safeguarded a better quality of living; yet, it has also exposed citizens to several threats related to identity. Freedom of religion is argued by Bloom, et al (2014). to directly influence the identity of individuals and groups, leading them to become marginalized, incoherent, and segregated from the sweeping ideals of globalization and the liberal agenda.

Globalization has competed with the nation-state over a large degree of its sovereignty. This is specifically due to the rise of international non-governmental organizations and bodies that have been able to socialize states and adopt enforcement mechanisms in order to ensure compliance. It is noteworthy to emphasize that this mode of globalization is referred to as globalization from above, as suggested by Gills (2000). Gills and Giddens share a similar view, proposing that globalization has weakened the state's local power and functions that were primarily established to keep order, provide goods and services, and regulate state activities. With the weakening of state power, religious groups came to replace the role of the state, through which a number of extremist groups originated.

In contrast with the several connotations and linkages commonly made with the rise of globalization, the human rights status was highly hindered, with an explicit infringement on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, which are precisely highlighted in the Human Rights Act of 1998. Dawson (2014) argues that the rise of fundamentalism has come out as a response to counteract the ideals associated with globalization. On a similar note, Samimi and Hashem (2014) point out that globalization has paved the way to the formulation of the in-group and out-group belonging. As mentioned earlier, the issue of identity has been heightened primarily following the rise of globalization; this is due to the increasing influence of the West over enforcing a global identity.

Research Questions

The paper seeks to examine a key question that is: Why does globalization threaten religious identities? A number of sub-questions and inquiries stem out of this question, aiming to identify the status of religious freedoms throughout the globalization period, evaluate whether globalization has, in fact, fostered or impeded religious freedoms, and distinguish between the impact of globalization and how cult formation counteracts the influences of globalization. These sub questions are underlined as follows:

1. How does globalization threaten religious identities?

2. How do religious identities respond to the threats faced by globalization?
3. How does cult formation balance the impacts of globalization?

It is significant to highlight that this paper hypothesizes that the rise of globalization is in part responsible for several abuses of the basic religious freedoms. Although it can be argued that the issue at stake is not the result of globalization, it is important to note that the ideals of globalization have for long been related to the respect of freedoms and cohesiveness.

Paper Structure

The paper is going to be divided into three primary parts, whereby the first section will illustrate the conceptual framework for the theories of globalization and cult formation. The second section will provide an in-depth assessment of the transformation of religious freedoms in terms of practices following the rise of globalization, where a thorough literature review and interview analysis with a relevant figure shall be demonstrated. This second section will deliver a thorough assessment of the Christian community in Egypt, as assessing the case of Christians in Egypt would either affirm or deny the impact of globalization on minority religious identities in the Eastern developing states. The third section shall offer the research findings and conclusion.

Methodology

Furthermore, this paper is going to rely on qualitative research methods, primarily presented and conducted in the form of interviews. The significance of this study lies in its empirical examination, whereby an in-depth interview will be conducted with Dr. Andrew Mankarious, a MSc degree student in theological studies and a member of and lecturer at Alexandria school and publishing house. The interview with Mr. Mankarious aims to explore the challenges Christians face from the perspective of the grassroots and shed light on the responses of the church towards the spread of globalization. Additionally, a literature review shall be conducted through which the works of Anthony Giddens on the consequences of modernity along with the works of a vast number of scholars and theorists will be examined.

Conceptual Framework: Globalization and Cult Formation

In order to understand how religion has been affected by globalization and the manner in which religion has responded, it is necessary to explore literature on how prominent scholars have defined globalization and emphasized its impact. Another strand of thought in literature has focused on the concepts developed and used by developing countries to counteract the threats, costs and risks of globalization.

Globalization is a concept suggesting that society transcends boundaries of culture, religion, race, color, ethnicity or nation. Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikian & Sommer (2014) point out this concept has challenged existing notions of nationalism and autonomy. In addition, it worked on nurturing and fostering key universal principles, i.e.: liberalization, unity of identity and diversity. The term globalization has become a buzzword in recent years in the economic, social and political arenas. It primarily denotes the interconnectedness of the world. The outcomes of the process of globalization, as suggested by Pannilage (2017), are profoundly the rise of multicultural and multifaith societies. These have come to pose a threat to some and a promise to others. In other

words, the impact of globalization has been encouraging to decision makers since it has resulted in extensive economic gains; yet, such economic liberation has been a complex process that has impacted the cultural and political scopes.

Religion, from the perspective of globalization, is a sector that coordinates and manages the domain of values, ethics, morals, ideals and day-to-day activities. Upali (2017) suggested that religion has been viewed as an answer to the concerns and inquiries of man. Yet, it has also come to be regarded as being anti-modernism and anti-globalism. Turner (2001) emphasized on the role of globalization in penetrating the roles and the authority that religion holds. Monshipouri and Motameni (2000) have gone further to describe globalization as a religion and a doctrine in itself.

Religion has been in tension with the sweeping impact of globalization. Obadia (2010) explains the scene as a clash of civilization whereby the ideals of globalization are in conflict with the rituals of religion; and hence the former works to threaten and destabilize the basis of the latter. It is essential to shed light on an argument suggested by Sartori (1975), where he argued that risks don't necessarily produce harm. Accordingly, it is best to ensure that the outcomes of globalization are beneficial and productive for everyone.

The model of cult formation, according to Bainbridge and Stark (1979) entails that religious ideas are designed in a way to appeal to people; and, hence, will be socially accepted by the people. It is noteworthy to highlight that cult formation has been observed to counteract the undesirable impacts of globalization. The model suggests three key modes: psychopathology model, the entrepreneur model, and the subculture model. The three models work to suggest different modes of how religion has been invented.

The psychopathology model of cult formation claims that religion has been invented by some groups as a response to a societal crisis; the theory has stemmed out of a psychotic disease. Through this approach, the founder of the cult seeks to spread his vision to others. It is likely that the founder and others would be cured if the group supports and recognizes the claims and dogmas shared by the founder. On another hand, the entrepreneur model suggests that cults are formed as a business model that aims to provide a service for a certain segment of consumers in return for a payment. Entrepreneurs desire a profitable outcome. Both the entrepreneur and the psychopathology models place a significant emphasis on the role of the individual; whereas, the third model of the subculture stresses the role of the group. Cults in this context gather as an outcome of failed efforts to attain rewards. They aim to solve persisting rooted problems (Bainbridge and Stark, 1979)

The three strands of cult formation agree upon a shared ideal that religious cults are formed/invented. The invention is either for a psychopathic reason due to either a societal crisis, claiming profit, or solving existing challenges. In reference to globalization, a number of threats might support the emergence of a cult aiming to solve undesirable impacts. Bainbridge and Stark (1979) provide an illustration whereby large waves of migrants in Maine have pushed for cult formations as the town wasn't ready to receive new ideas and norms being introduced.

The cult formation primarily works to distinguish between in-group and out-group members. In other words, a social cohesion is fostered and nurtured between members of one group;

whereas, the out-group members are commonly punished/ pushed away at the expense of the in-group (Lifton and College, 1991).

The work on cult formation as a tool to combat threats that could lead to crisis has not received significant emphasis. It is, nonetheless, notable to formulate linkages between the concept of cult formation and its impact on group behavior, specifically religious groups, to further draw reliable illustrations on anti-globalization and modernization interventions and initiatives. This linkage will be demonstrated in the following section of the research paper.

Case Study: Christian Community in Egypt

The research paper seeks to assess the impact of globalization on religious freedoms, specifically Christianity in Egypt, with a primary focus on Orthodoxy as the biggest Christian sect. In light of this, it is of profound significance to shed the light on the type of freedoms this section will be focused on. Freedoms will be assessed in terms of the religious practices and rituals, which would include the regular church services such as the Sunday schools, mass sermons, and related church meetings.

According to Upali et al (2017), the intrusion of globalization in Egypt has been counterbalanced by an intentional persistence and promotion of religious identities. The tension develops out of a fear of losing initial identities. It is important that the ideals of globalization were spread efficiently through education. Hence, with the rise of international schools and universities, national and religious identities came to be threatened.

The Christian community in Egypt has, for long, been keen on keeping and sustaining its identity. This has been primarily seen through its establishment of Christian-based schools, clinics and health-care services, and sports and arts clubs. Yet, with the modernization and globalization cultures, the Christian institutions strategized their work further (Salleh et al, 2017). According to a personally conducted interview with Mankarious (2021), Alexandria school was launched in 2010 with a purpose of educating the general Christian public on religious topics through its published books and lectures. The school began to integrate lectures on a vast number of topics that are relatively new to the orthodox sphere, such as: digital addiction, life balance, and God in the workplace. Whereas, another range of topics highlighted the roots of the Christian faith and ensured its embeddedness in the identities of the Christian community. These topics ranged from reliability of the gospel to the study of apologetics, and were recently incorporated by the school as a primary approach to strengthen the Christian identity and combat any temptations of questioning it.

Guiney (2011) argues that the freedom of thought and conscience hasn't been directly obstructed; yet, it was challenged and was able to bring forward new forms of solidarity, as reported by the Human Development Report of 2001 by the institute of national planning and the UNDP. The report has also suggested that waves of globalization have served as opportunities that accelerated social capital in Egypt. Such a setting has pushed for collective action directed for the purpose of the public good. The public good in this sense ensures state's sovereignty, as well as the church's sovereignty as in the illustrated case.

Moreover, Herrington (2013) points out that Egyptian society generally perceives globalization in terms of occidental representations, whereby it would have to nurture the key exporter of

globalization's ideals, the western world. The society relates globalization to the Crusades and the Age of Imperialism, which were known to suppress their identity.

Mankarious (2021) has elaborated further on this issue and is quoted stating:

“Christianity in the hearts of the Christians in Egypt has become fluid. Beliefs have been negotiated. It is now relatively difficult to distinguish between the actual Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ and the way it is currently being taught. Alexandria School is keen to go back to the basics of the teachings; yet, it is also keen that Christians are able to relate this to the modern day worldly practices.”

As a Sunday school teacher, Mankarious emphasized that the Church in the early 2000s was keen to teach youth about Christian saints as models of Christianity. However, with sweeping trends of social media and Netflix, the church had to offer different subjects. The school currently works on appealing to the youth through experiential learning activities and sports as tools that would motivate them to join weekly church services.

Findings and Conclusion

Religious freedoms in terms of rituals and practices are still persisting today; yet, globalization has penetrated and influenced every corner of religion. A global world religion has been in the making, as argued by Tuner (2001). Secularism has become the alternative religion. Nonetheless, research was able to prove that religiosity is not dying, but rather transforming. The theory of cult formation, specifically the sub-culture model, has efficiently been able to explain religious groups' response to threats.

It is clear that globalization has indeed threatened Christian identities in Egypt because it was impulsive, inconsiderate of the orthodox traditional context, and appealing to the majority of the population. The latter is considered threatening as it destabilized the norms and traditions of the Christian faith. The key findings of the research can be summarized as follows:

1. Globalization has been considered a process resulting in both opportunities and threats to the Christian faith in Egypt.
2. The church and its relevant institutions have been agile in responding to the current status.
3. The church fostered a new approach to educating the public through using modern-day mechanisms.
4. The role of the cult has balanced the impact of globalization as it worked on maintaining the value of the original identity and ensuring cohesion between the in-group and out-group members. In other words, the church has not been strict in refusing modern-day ideals, but instead used these ideals to support its own purpose, values, and beliefs.

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Annex: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is the school's purpose and vision?
2. When was the school established?
3. Did the purpose of the school shift overtime to accommodate the public's interest?
4. What type of books are mostly sold in the school's library?
5. What is the current Christian community in Egypt mostly interested in?
6. Is the church flexible in integrating these interests?
7. How does the church keep its sovereignty and power?
8. Are Christians threatened by unfamiliar ideas and media influence?
9. How is the church selective of its activities in order to match the modern-day interests and preferences?