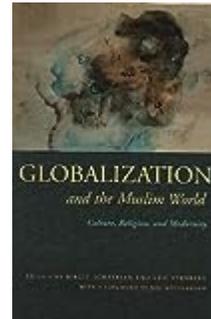




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Re-Thinking Globalization over Self/Other Dialectic

Reading Shirin Ebadi's essay, "Bound but Gagged," in the *New York Times* (November 16, 2004), concerning the restrictive measures which make the publication of her memoir in the United States "almost impossible," I was not shocked at all to observe again the mainstream Orientalist tendency that relegates the world into the "West" and the "rest." Apart from such fallacies that spring from governmental concerns, what is more disturbing is that this Orientalist tendency still continues in both the "Western" academy as well as the academy in the "rest." It is in this respect that I believe this edited volume by Birgit Schaebler and Leif Stenberg is a valuable contribution to globalization and a challenging work to the mainstream approach in social sciences. All the pieces in the book share the concern for looking at local processes, examples and constructions of globality in an attempt to break with the tendency to determine a geographical starting point of globalization, and then to analyze the local/national effects of this historical process. This concern is aptly expressed in Birgit Schaebler's article, "Civilizing Others: Global Modernity and Local Boundaries (French/German, Ottoman, and Arab) of Savagery," where she argues that "local reactions to global civilizing

schemes can imply civilizing missions of their own. They cannot be interpreted as imitation and repetition" (p. 28).

Schaebler rereads the conceptualization of "civilization" versus "barbarism/savagery" as a reflection of the self/other dichotomy not only in relation to the West versus the East, but also with respect to the construction of local dichotomies, within the eastern and western contexts. In this respect, she also touches upon self/other dialectic—and not mere dichotomy—as a tool to understand different experiences with modernity and globality, a common point of reference in the majority of the articles.

Sayres S. Rudy's article, "Subjectivity, Political Evaluation, and Islamist Trajectories," can be read as a search for a "new" methodological tool—a non-continuum model to understand the interface of the local with the global in the case of Islamist ideologies—to theorize globalization, though he totally rejects theorizing globalization as a futile endeavor. However, reading his article one cannot refrain from wondering whether classifying Islamism(s) into different strands as reactions to different combinations of global flows (economic, political, and

cultural) with local ruling practices in relation to the space these combinations provide for subjectivity, defined over choice, is not a step towards theorizing. Moreover, in this challenging article the explanation of “post-modern rejection” of modernity on the grounds of a distaste with the “internal complexity of modernity” and with the ambition to “conjure a world without complexity” sounds rather contentious for the majority of the pieces in the volume, which, in fact, take postmodernity as a defining feature of globalization and/or postmodernism as one of the sources, which according to Schaefer has contributed to theory by providing the grounds for interrogating the homogenizing accounts in the name of universally accepted generalizations and for focusing on the local diversities.

Jocelyne Cesari (“Islam in the West: Modernity and Globalization Revisited”) gives a vivid account of the contextual differentiation in the encounter of “Islam” with globalization in her analysis of “Western Muslims.” The main argument of the article is in line with the spirit of the book in that, after Fred Halliday, she focuses on the similarities rather than differences between Islam and other religious systems as they are affected by globalization. In this respect, she agrees with Rudy’s argument that “two communities of a common habitus but different circumstances will have less in common than with communities of a different habitus in respectively similar circumstances” (pp. 59-60), and thus the general contention that prevails in the book, namely ‘context matters’ in approaching modernity and globalization. However, in substantiating this contention by resorting to the shift in the priorities of the Muslims in the West from “Islamic governance” to “the issues of pluralism and tolerance,” she nevertheless reproduces the much criticized ‘dichotomy’ by referring to the Muslims of Europe and the United States as a totality, i.e., as “Western Muslims.” In Cesari’s contribution, the metaphor of “consumer” recalls the emphasis on “choice” in Rudy’s article as a critical factor in differentiating among different Islamic encounters with globality. While for Rudy the space that is allowed for Muslims to exercise their choices subjectively effects their stance vis-a-vis globalization (and thus helps him to classify Islamism into the categories of personal, communitarian, and militant), for Cesari there are the “secularized Muslims,” who act as “consumers” in their relation with religion (pp. 86-87), and the fundamentalists. Here I am almost compelled to perceive that in this style of classification the fundamentalists literally do not have the “implied consumer rationality,” which I think manifests thinking and perceiving in terms of a

certain context-bound conceptualization of rationality—metaphorically the “consumer rationality.”

In this respect, I shall note that, despite the criticisms against dichotomous, materialist, idealist, and homogenizing explanations of the encounters of the Muslims and/or “Islam(s)” with globalization, the authors cannot refrain from falling into the traps of looking at Muslims from an inescapably “dichotomous” perspective. This point is authoritatively elaborated in Patrice C. Brodeur’s contribution, “From Postmodernism to ‘Glocalism’: Toward a Theoretical Understanding of Contemporary Arab Muslim Constructions of Religious Others.” In line with the general methodological stance in the book, Brodeur argues that for refraining from the pitfalls of both the modern and the postmodern look at Muslim identity, a synthesizing, rather than a mutually rejecting, attitude should be adopted. He calls this attitude “glocalism,” considering the “self/other, sameness/difference” dialectic in analyzing the construction of identity. I would dare to argue that Brodeur’s article more clearly fits part 1, in that, although he focuses on “Arab Muslim constructions of religious others,” his exploration of glocalism as a method is telling with regards to how to study the “others” and/or the “self.”

In proposing an alternative reading of the other—in his case the Arab Muslims—to modern and postmodern approaches, Brodeur’s contribution also resonates with Mehrzad Boroujerdi’s critical analysis of the indigenization movement in social sciences, with special emphasis on the “Islamization of knowledge” (in “Subduing Globalization: The Challenge of the Indigenization Movement”). While acknowledging the contributions of the indigenization movement as providing some sort of checks-and-balances mechanism against the dualistic and totalizing tendency of “Western science,” i.e., the generalization of not only “aim and method of the science,” but also its “problem(s),” he expresses reservation about the counter-tendency of “nativism,” which calls for an identical essentialism and ethno-centrism that, in turn, reproduces the much criticized totalization and dualism.

In line with Boroujerdi’s distaste of Islamizing, not the substance, but the methodology of science, Leif Stenberg, in his study on *The International Institute of Islamic Thought* (“Islam, Knowledge and ‘the West’: The Making of a Global Islam”) along the axis of knowledge/authority relationship rejects Islam as a source of scientific knowledge, and argues that Islamizing of science would enforce the “reconstruct[ion] and reproduct[ion] of the dichotomy between the West and the

Muslims” (p. 107). This is because the attempt of “religious scholars” to reinstitute their authority with regard to (scientific) knowledge—i.e. Islamize science—and to the *tawhidic* approach, in the final analysis, leads to “assigning metaphysical aspects” to science (pp. 108-109). In other words, he criticizes Muslim scholars who aim at reaching a correct, unitary and, thus, universal meaning of Islam as a source of not only ethical, moral knowledge, but also scientific knowledge, by discussing the Islamic texts, for not looking at “Muslims as actors ... that is focusing on the study of interpretations and on relations between interpretations” (p. 110).

All the chapters in the second part of the book, with the exception of Toby E. Huff’s “Globalization and the Internet, the Malaysian Experience,” do exactly what Stenberg proposes. Huff focuses on the Malaysian meeting with Internet technology and discusses the political implications of government-backed foundation and processing of knowledge-based economy as a development strategy in the Malaysian context. He sounds optimistic for the potential contributions of internet technology to the economic development of Malaysia (“with the new information-based products, there is a ‘blurring of the line between core and peripheral’ countries,” p. 147), while acknowledging that the outcomes of this “opened and unknown terrain” cannot be foreseen precisely (p. 143). Nevertheless, he gives hints that the more one country globalizes in terms of the creation of a network society, the more it democratizes.

Different from the “business and commercial point of view” that Huff adopts in analyzing the interface between the local and the global (p. 138), Heather J. Sharkey, in her article “Globalization, Migration and Identity: Sudan 1800-2000,” focuses on the identity formation in Northern Sudan and argues that community consciousness is not formed in solitude, in a process, which entails and fosters isolation of the “local” and/or “national” from the “global.” On the contrary, Sharkey’s analysis of identity-building in the Northern Sudan, with regards to over two hundred years on the axis of migration, as an explanatory variable in the contact among the global, national, and local identities, reveals that community consciousness is not formed through a totally exclusionary process; rather it is formed through a synthesizing process, which attests to the fact that identity in itself is a historical construct that is open to changes and modifications rather than a static outcome of some essentializing and freezing program.

Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen’s article “The Global

Mufti,” on the al-Jazeera channel, specifically on the program (“Sharia and Life”), in which Yusuf al-Qaradawi is presented, according to Peterson, as “the new media shaykh,” integrates many of the issues discussed in the book (p. 154). The article explores the effects of “telecommunication” as “a central component if not the very essence, of the current drive for globalization” (p. 154), on the Islamic knowledge and Muslim identity, and vice versa. While emphasizing the inevitable mutual influence between the medium and the message, Petersen also notes the very modern attributes of both al-Jazeera’s and al-Qaradawi’s styles and discourses against the arguments of postmodernity and/or traditionality (pp. 161-162). In this respect, the dichotomies of the modern and the traditional, of the modern and the postmodern, of the universal and the particular are once more rejected as a reduction of the complexity of the modern into frozen categories. In his contribution Petersen also persuasively touches upon one frequently, however casually, emphasized aspect of globalization, namely the dissolution of the nation-state. Similar to Cesari and Sharkey, Petersen focuses on the connection between identity-building and globalization with reference to “transnational Islam(s)” that exceeds beyond the nation-state borders—in the case of Global Mufti, the borders of Qatar—and/or “transnational Muslims” as a universal community with a shared consciousness of watan—in the case of “Shari-a and Life,” the “al-watan al-Arabi_.”

Catharina Raudvere’s article on a group of Muslim women activists in Istanbul (“Where Does Globalization Take Place? Opportunities and Limitations for Female Activists in Turkish Islamist Non-Governmental Organizations”) further confirms that there is more than one Islam and that one should look at Muslims as actors in order to understand what Islam is. Raudvere shares with us the findings of a five-year-long focus group study that she conducted in a *vakâf* in Turkey run by Muslim women. She admits that trying to arrive at definitive conclusions about “the products of globalization and [the factors that are] productive of globalization,” as an unfolding historical process, is a cumbersome endeavor (p. 167). In this respect, she clarifies her aim as “to approach—not answer—the question of where globalization takes place” (p. 167), and takes globalization as an effect not a cause (p. 185). Ultimately, her discussion once more displays the common concern of the contributions to the volume: “the context is important.” Raudvere’s piece, which integrates analyses at different scales, namely, at the level of the inter- and intra-group relations; of the status of the Muslim women in their closer vicinity; and, in the larger Turkish society, provides substantial evidence for

interrogating and dismissing the dichotomy between the modern and the traditional in the case of Turkish Muslim women.

Although postmodernism and/or postmodernity take their place in almost all the contributions to the volume, either with negative inference or as merely one of the “signs” of globalization, they take the stage in Anne Marie Oliver’s article, “The Scandal of Literalism in Hamas, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and Beyond.” In conducting a “literal” analysis, i.e., the analysis of literalism in affecting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Oliver moves beyond the actor in the construction of the self/other dichotomy and tries to find the roots of the “death of the subject” in vertical literalism.

The present volume is a valuable contribution to studying Islam(s) and/or Muslim(s) and their encounter with globalization in that it aims at dismissing Orientalism in a conscious endeavor that can be observed in

the majority of the articles, and in the theoretical and methodological arguments raised against the rather superfluous separation between the modern and the traditional that leads to a counter-positioning between the “West” as the rational subject donating the appropriate tools to understand the “rest,” in our case the “Muslim world,” as a singular, homogenous object of study. On the other hand, the book is completely “modern” in that the articles explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the possibility of reaching an understanding of what happens “here and now,” i.e., globalization, but with the contention that the current state of affairs is a passing in history. Though this history is universal, its repercussions are bound to the local dynamics as well as to the particular conditions under which the junction between the local and the global takes place. In this respect, I think that the book is a challenge not only to the classical Orientalist and those who have been captured by Islamophobia, especially after September 11, but also to those who have long been engaged in a process of self-Orientalization.

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