Radical Islam: both a product of globalisation and a serious challenge to it?

Radical Islam is arguably a new concept, which has come to define many ideas surrounding terrorism in the 'globalised' era in which it exists. In many respects, terrorism today is mostly seen as pertaining to Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan and numerous other Islamic states, who appear to be crusading against the onslaught of Western ideals. While the concept of terrorism has been around for centuries, the idea of whether it could be seen as a product of globalisation has been brought sharply into question, due not only to the rapid growth of globalised ideas, culture and products, but crucially, the changed nature of terrorism itself. The multi-faceted nature of globalisation also creates relative uncertainty as to whether radical Islam can be viewed as a challenge to it, especially considering that much of the anti-globalisation movement, while unified in their dislike or distrust of the concept, stand opposed in their aims, protests and outcomes. This essay will assess the term 'globalisation' on both a semantic as well as an epistemological level in order to understand the foundation of the question. Focus will then be placed on determining whether radical Islam can in fact be seen as one of the products of said concept. Finally the essay will look at Islamic reaction to globalisation in order to determine whether it is really a challenge to the concept. All of this will be achieved, while taking into account Huntington's thesis on the global phenomenon and how it may be seen as strengthening the claim that radical Islam is in fact a product and perhaps a challenge to the concept of globalisation.

In order to ascertain the significance of the threat posed by Islamism, it is essential to look at what radical Islam is claimed to be a product of; globalisation itself. While globalisation is often viewed as a new idea marking a period of significant increase in the scope and scale of shared political, economic and social culture and events, conceptions of globalisation have, in many respects, been around for centuries. The 16th – 19th century marked the transatlantic slave trade and a time of great migration, trade and expansion of colonies and with it, spheres of influence, stretching from Africa to the Americas and Europe. Several years later, the growth of the British Empire, led to mass migration, free trade and the newspaper, spreading information on international issues, locally. Without delving too deeply into whether these periods of greater international relations were in fact the beginning of globalisation, or simply a significant period in its history, questions surrounding the contested nature of globalisation are brought into focus, when the concept is analysed from a semantic level.

If globalisation is classified as "a process of increasing interconnectedness between societies"[1], then globalisation can be seen, as previously discussed, as having its origins based in many periods of history; from the Mayflower's journey from England to America, all the way back to Ancient Greece and Alexander III of Macedon, who conquered Persia, modern day Middle-East and parts of Africa. Both of these instances mark periods of mass migration, a spread of culture, and interconnectedness between societies and therefore what some would view as globalisation.

Other thinkers have attempted to define globalisation as a 'stage of capitalism'[2], and while the broadness of the description doesn't necessarily lead to a clearer understanding of the concept, it does again bring forth the idea that Globalisation may have a bias. With capitalism seen as the economic position most heralded by the West, the idea that globalisation in fact favours a particular area of the globe, is the first insight into how radical Islam may be viewed as both a product of globalisation, as well as a challenge to it.

When the effects of globalisation are typically referred to, there are generally positive connotations associated with it;

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however, globalisation can also be seen as having quite decidedly negative by-products also. Many anti-globalisation movements may be seen as rejecting the perhaps unintended by-products associated with the concept, with radical Islam forming a significant portion of this group. For example, the idea of the possible biases associated with globalisation could clearly be seen as an example of this and may be seen as the fundamental ways in which radical Islam is in fact a challenge to globalisation as well as a product of it.

Al Qaeda may be viewed as epitomising the beliefs of radical Islam in both its aims and methods. The organisation is therefore intrinsic to understanding radical Islam as it pertains to international society, with their aims forming the best indication of how it can be viewed as both a product of and a challenge to the concept of globalisation. Although the definitive aims of Al Qaeda remain somewhat of a mystery due to the nature of the organisation, the general agreement is that Al Qaeda endeavours to: remove Western influence within the Islamic sphere; and reclaim Jerusalem as a Muslim state. If these aims are assessed, they form the most prominent example of why radical Islam has come into being in the modern globalised era.

As previously addressed, it may be perceived that globalisation is a rather unequal concept, significantly benefiting some states, namely the West, over others. Radical Islam could in fact be seen as developing as a result of this, in order to challenge it, thus making it both a product of and a fight against said inequality; with inequality forming one of the negative by-products of globalisation. This inequality is evidenced by the fact that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (SC) are predominantly Western states and amongst these, America is seen as being the most powerful and influential. Alongside this, these SC permanent members economic growth during the same period as that of states within the global south, has always been decidedly greater[3], further illuminating not only the disparity in influence, but also in economies between richer and poorer states. As it has been argued, human suffering creates a background against, which violence becomes justified[4] and this could be seen as applicable to radical Islam, where the violent tactics of terrorism is used as a weapon in order to secure greater freedoms for their people. With horrifying images of civilian death and destruction on Arab television, perhaps deepening the feeling of humiliation and victimisation[5], the actions of groups, such as Al Qaeda, would have been seen by many as justified, aiding them in their reinvention as the defenders of Islamic peoples[6]. The negative impact of globalisation giving scope for a more radicalised form of Islamic culture in order to, what may be perceived as, best serve the people and therefore being both a direct product of globalisation as well as a means of defence against it.

When looking more directly at Al Qaeda's aims, the ways in which globalisation appears to have spawned the radical Islamic movement becomes more apparent. The influence of the West on the global world is evidenced by the fact that the global communications infrastructure[7] and other technologies associated with globalisation are dominated by European and East Asian languages[8] and the economic policies put forward by the global institutions reflect their Western influence, with the focus being placed on liberal economics. With America then being seen as the most influential of all the states within the Western sphere, then America can quite easily be seen as dominating the international sphere and global politics, thus fuelling the idea that globalisation is in many respects 'Americanisation' as they are at the head of global institutions, and are at the forefront of technological advances. From this perspective, that globalisation is somewhat synonymous with Americanisation, it can be argued that Islamic culture has been infiltrated by Western culture due to the technologies associated with globalisation, culminating in a conflict of cultures, or according to Huntington, a 'clash of civilizations'[9].

It can be argued that radical Islam has whole-heartedly embraced Huntington's thesis on globalisation and somewhat understandably, as Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis provides an alternate and perhaps more applicable framework through which to analyse globalisation as a whole. The theory sees conflict arise within the global arena, due to a continual clash of culture, identity and religion. This is not only applicable to the evidently opposed nature of Western and Islamic culture, but also to Al Qaeda's aims. On a purely cultural level, Western and Islamic cultures could not be more opposed, with Western policies being of an almost wholly secular nature, while Islamism being intrinsically linked with governance, illustrated by the concept of 'Islamism' itself; the politicised form of Islamic culture. It is easy to see how radical Islam may have developed as a result of the continued onslaught of what may be viewed as a more immoral Western culture in states governed by religion.

Huntington's theories do however imply that the traditional concepts of state boundaries and nationality are

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diminished in place of the civilizations, which in fact form a more far-reaching interconnectedness between people than superficial borders of states[10]. This coincides with the idea that national solidarity has always rested on a population's shared devotion to a specific territorial homeland[11]; however, increased globalisation has not led to a decrease in the importance of the traditional state, rather the fragmentation of cultures has led to an increased importance being placed on the non-territorial, such as faith[12]. This is highly applicable to Islamic culture and it can be argued that it was America's neglect of this idea, which has quite clearly resulted in a firm uprising of radical Islam, in order to challenge the increased scope and scale of western culture.

American and British involvement in traditionally Islamic affairs could be seen as the most significant factor in the production of radical Islam. Globalisation has led to a significant increase in the involvement of Western states in what is typically viewed as areas ruled by the Islamic spheres of influence. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, American and British action quite plausibly radicalised Arab opinion, where moderates and religious leaders had previously condemned the actions of radical Islamists[13]. This is a prime example of how radical Islam was at least unified through actions directly related to globalisation and may therefore be classified as a product of globalisation, as it radicalised more liberal Islamic views.

If attention is again placed on the fragmentation of cultures caused by globalisation and Huntington's theory on the importance of civilizations, then the invasion of Iraq could also be seen as creating outrage within the Islamic culture, due to the fact that despite traditional notions of borders, Islamic culture is seen by many as transcending state boundaries. Although the West can be seen as having neglected this aspect of globalisation, the Islamic world did not, and consequently the invasion was viewed as an affront to their culture. The invasion itself entangled America both politically and economically within the Arab heartland[14], and solidified their position within the Islamic society. When Al Qaeda's aims are observed once again, it is understandable how radical Islam may be seen as having developed from direct effects of globalisation. With the spread of Western influence due in large part to globalisation and what could be viewed as the belief that greater global interconnectedness would lead to the reduced significance of state boundaries, Islamic culture could be seen as being under threat, with issues of national sovereignty and independence being at the core of the now radicalised Islamic agenda[15]. This is further evidenced by the fact that not only was Islamic culture greater unified under a more radical agenda, but even more significantly, distinguished institutions and people within the Islamic world, who had previously condemned Bin Laden's actions, were declaring a jihad after American instalment in Iraq and Afghanistan[16]. If Al Qaeda is seen as not only being at the forefront of the radical Islamic campaign, but also having influenced Islamic opinion on a more legitimate level, then it arguably does form a relatively significant challenge to globalisation.

The significance of fringe groups, like the more radical Islamists also took on new dimensions, as it can be seen as the first real opposition to what could previously have been perceived as an incessant campaign by the West, to spread liberal democratic ideals, policies and culture. The opposition presented by Islam, radical or otherwise, may be viewed in a similar way to Afghanistan, when they became amongst the first states to defeat the Soviet Union, Islam may perceived as once again alluding to the fact that challenges to their belief system and occupation within their states ar not well received. In many respects, radical Islamists while viewed as terrorists from a Western perspective can arguably be seen as the first group to truly stem, or at least oppose, the spread of Western culture since the beginning of more modern globalisation. This in itself is a serious challenge to what had previously been a relatively insistent and dynamic flow of Western ideas into all areas on the international spectrum, and therefore a serious challenge to globalisation itself. It has been argued that the states which have the capacity to turn democratic have already done so, and perhaps radical Islam is the first indication of the fact that globalisation, as the spread of democratic and Western ideals has in fact plateaued[17].

The Western controlled globo-political agenda itself is the most illuminating factor however, when attempting to assess whether radical Islam does in fact pose a significant challenge to globalisation. Quite simply, Bush's declaration of a 'war on terror' not only shaped the international agenda since the attack on the World Trade Centre on 9/11, but more significantly changed the face of warfare[18]. Radical Islam has not only created widespread fear throughout the Western sphere, but has also formed what is arguably the greatest threat to the International community as a whole, through their terrorist tactics, but most importantly, the allegiance they pledge to their culture and faith. When Obama was appointed President, amongst the first of his actions was to hold a speech in Cairo, in

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order to address the tension between the states. Obama's address did however take a different tact from that of Bush's administration, and that was to acknowledge that neither America nor the Islamic world are exclusive, "so need not be in competition"[19]. This is a departure from general thinking, as previously discussed, as America is seen as and in many ways does, dominate international society; however, Obama's acknowledgment of the need to reduce the role that the US plays in the Islamic world is one of the clearest indications that radical Islam does in fact pose a rather significant challenge to globalisation. Rather than suppress all Islamic groups, due to the threat posed by radical Islam to the global world, it has become necessary to create stable outlet for political Islam, as opposed to that of radical Islam[20].

Radical Islam has taken terrorism, which was always a weapon of the weak, though usually with little perceived effect, and created what can be seen as a quite considerable challenge to globalisation and the international community. Islam has come to play a very significant position within the international realm, and through the actions of radical Islamic groups, such as Al Qaeda, have been placed at the top of the globo-political agenda by states often seen as being amongst the most powerful and influential. Thus illuminating that radical Islam does in fact pose a relatively significant threat to globalisation as whole. The idea that radical Islam may itself be a product of globalisation is also a highly credible claim, due mostly to the negative by-products which globalisation created, which in turn created a sphere in which radical Islam could not only grow, but flourish. Ultimately, Islamism can be seen as being both born of globalisation, out of a necessity to safeguard the culture, as well as a rejection of the onslaught of Western culture brought about again, by globalisation. Thus making the argument that radical Islam is both a product of and a significant challenge to modern forms of globalisation credible.

[1] J. Baylis, S. Smith and P. Owens, "Introduction", *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), Fourth Edition 2008 [1997] p. 8

[2] J. A. Scholte*, Globalization: A critical Introduction* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan) Second Edition 2005 [2000], p. 15

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[4] Dunne, Kurki and Smith, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), Second Edition 2010 [2007], p. 192

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[11] J. A. Scholte, "Globalization and Identity: From Nationalism to Hybridization", *Globalization: A critical introduction* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan) Second Edition 2005 [2000], p. 225

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[12] J. A. Scholte, "Globalization and Identity: From Nationalism to Hybridization", *Globalization: A critical introduction* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan) Second Edition 2005 [2000], pp. 239-240

[13] F. A. Gerges, "Arab Views of America: Winter of Arab Discontent", *The World Today*, Volume 59 (May 2003), p. 6

[14] F. A. Gerges, "Arab Views of America: Winter of Arab Discontent", *The World Today*, Volume 59 (May 2003), p. 6

[15] M. Azzam, "Islamic Extremism and Terror: Anger and Despair*", The World Today*, Volume 59 (May 2003), p. 7

[16] F. A. Gerges, "Arab Views of America: Winter of Arab Discontent", *The World Today*, Volume 59 (May 2003), p. 6

[17] R. Youngs, "Dicing With Democracy", *The World Today*, Volume 65 (Jul 2009), p. 8

[18] Dunne, Kurki and Smith, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), Second Edition 2010 [2007], p. 191

[19] The Guardian Online, "Barack Obama's Cairo Speech", accessed 02 Dec 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/04/barack-obama-keynote-speech-egypt

[20] M. Azzam, "Islamic Extremism and Terror: Anger and Despair*", The World Today*, Volume 59 (May 2003), p. 8

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that radical Islam is in fact a product and perhaps a challenge to the concept of globalisation.

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Huntington's theories do however imply that the traditional concepts of state boundaries and nationality are diminished in place of the civilizations, which in fact form a more far-reaching interconnectedness between people than superficial borders of states[10]. This coincides with the idea that national solidarity has always rested on a population's shared devotion to a specific territorial homeland[11]; however, increased globalisation has not led to a decrease in the importance of the traditional state, rather the fragmentation of cultures has led to an increased importance being placed on the non-territorial, such as faith[12]. This is highly applicable to Islamic culture and it can be argued that it was America's neglect of this idea, which has quite clearly resulted in a firm uprising of radical Islam, in order to challenge the increased scope and scale of western culture.

American and British involvement in traditionally Islamic affairs could be seen as the most significant factor in the production of radical Islam. Globalisation has led to a significant increase in the involvement of Western states in what is typically viewed as areas ruled by the Islamic spheres of influence. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, American and British action quite plausibly radicalised Arab opinion, where moderates and religious leaders had previously condemned the actions of radical Islamists[13]. This is a prime example of how radical Islam was at least unified through actions directly related to globalisation and may therefore be classified as a product of globalisation, as it radicalised more liberal Islamic views.

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Radical Islam has taken terrorism, which was always a weapon of the weak, though usually with little perceived effect, and created what can be seen as a quite considerable challenge to globalisation and the international community. Islam has come to play a very significant position within the international realm, and through the actions of radical Islamic groups, such as Al Qaeda, have been placed at the top of the globo-political agenda by states often seen as being amongst the most powerful and influential. Thus illuminating that radical Islam does in fact pose a relatively significant threat to globalisation as whole. The idea that radical Islam may itself be a product of globalisation is also a highly credible claim, due mostly to the negative by-products which globalisation created, which in turn created a sphere in which radical Islam could not only grow, but flourish. Ultimately, Islamism can be seen as being both born of globalisation, out of a

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