RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION TO GLOBALIZATION

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Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned. . . .

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848

Globalization puts everybody’s culture into an industrial strength blender.

Gwynne Dyer

The Bomb Under the World, 1995

On 30 September 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published twelve anti-Islamic cartoons mocking the prophet Mohammed, in what has come to be known as the ‘cartoon crisis’. In October, protests by ambassadors from Islamic countries were ignored by the Danish government. After a Danish Muslim cleric carried the cartoons to a conference in Beirut, demonstrations began in several Middle-Eastern countries. In response to these, right-wing media in Europe and North America began reprinting the cartoons, wrapping themselves in the mantle of ‘freedom of the press’ and vigorously pushing a ‘clash of civilizations’ ideology (e.g. Malkin, 2006). By February 2006 the crisis had grown into perhaps one of the worst confrontations between the Islamic world and the West in many years. Riots and demonstrations ranged from Nigeria to Indonesia, several embassies were burned, economic boycotts cost Denmark up to €1,000,000 a day, and scores of people were killed.

A crisis such as this is, of course, complex and can be analyzed from many perspectives. In this chapter, we will analyze it as both an expression of globalization and a protest against it. On one hand, the crisis

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is an expression of globalization. What began as a few racist cartoons* directed against a local immigrant population was quickly spread worldwide by satellite TV and the Internet. In turn, the televised reactions from around the world were used by extremists on both sides to organize further local responses (indeed, some pundits called the cartoons a gift to Al Qaeda). In some ways, the crisis was a nightmarish parody of the Global Village (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968).

Of more interest, and a good deal more complex, is the crisis as a protest against globalization. That such a seemingly small provocation should trigger such a massive response indicates that a good deal more is going on beneath the surface than is indicated by an insult to the Prophet. In this chapter we will concentrate on religion as a source of opposition to globalization. We will begin with a few brief comments on five dimensions of globalization, and then examine religious complaints against globalization from two diametrically opposed perspectives: Islamism, which has been successful in rallying opposition to globalization, and liberal Christianity, which has not. As different as these two complaints are in style and substance, they are structurally similar. Religious opposition to globalization is based on demands for justice and a defense of tradition.

**FIVE DIMENSIONS OF GLOBALIZATION**

Globalization theory is notoriously complex, with at least four or five incommensurable traditions of analysis (cf. Berger & Huntington, 2002; Beyer, 1994; Ellwood, 2001; Freidman, 2000; Giddens, 1990; Hamm & Smandyck, 2005; Ritzer, 2004a; Robertson, 2001). There is a tendency, even by some sociologists, to describe globalization in abstract structural terms—as an inevitable, universal, and irreversible process, from which the actions of real people have been removed. What is too often overlooked is the importance of human agency, especially, in our case, how people use religious symbols and narratives to mobilize others.

In this chapter we will rather arbitrarily draw some boundaries to frame our discussion. As used here, globalization will be understood as the most recent stage of modernization, in which the processes that have

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* The stereotyped depiction of Arabs in the cartoons bears a striking resemblance to the stereotypes of Jews in Nazi cartoons of the 1930s. See: “Characters from Der Stürmer.”