

# CIVILIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION IN A WORLD OF TURMOIL

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*Abstract:* The pivotal question concerns the compatibility or non-compatibility of the current unprecedented global system with a world made up of a plurality of civilizations. In other words, can the world become vastly globalized without this having any substantial impact on civilizations? What consequences will the speedy globalization have on the identity and dignity of various human entities; both as individuals and as a collectivity? The interplay between “globalization” and “civilization” as well as the interaction between globalization and local identity are the main issues of the present study.

*Keywords:* globalization, civilization, localism, empires, world order.

Nowadays, the entire world is undergoing a speedy and tremendous transformation, without a clear indication of the future shape of the world. The “world order” that was established right after the Second World War and was functioning despite a vast range of difficulties, rivalries and conflicts, now rather resembles a “world disorder”. A general uncertainty and confusion dominate the global arena. At the same time, it is a fact that the world today is more globalized than ever before. According to the International Tele-communication Union (ITU), a UN agency, more than 50 per cent of humanity will have access to the internet in 2019 (*The Economist*, December 31 2018). A decade ago the fraction of humanity with internet access hovered around 20 per cent. A movement that has been described as a movement “from Humanism to Dataism” (Harari 2017: 428-462). The critical changes have also occurred in interstate relations. Classical wars are continuing in their usual forms; both between states and particularly against civilian populations (Myanmar), using even chemical weapons (in Syria).

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What is particularly new in this field is the gradual supplement to classical wars by terrorism conducted by new actors like al-Qaida and Daesh and by new forms such as cyberwars, drones, fake news and Huawei-Apple's proxy war.

Parallel to this unprecedented globalization process, we are witnessing the change at the global level, more accentuated in Western societies, of our set of values, ethics and morality. The rise of the *#MeToo* movement, vegans, the ongoing reclaim for acknowledgment of transsexuality, the depressive feelings expressed in the works of authors like Houellebecq (2019) are all manifestations of the beginning of a new global era. An era in search of *thymos*, demand for *Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (Fukuyama 2018). Besides these numerous new soft claims for recognition, there also exist some hard claims relating to the real participation of citizens in the democratic process. This process goes in two different directions. One is producing "populism" and the other is manifesting itself in "popular protest movements" like the "*gilets jaunes*" in France. Related to this, we find similar claims concerned with international financial transparency – a tangible consequence of several huge international money-laundering and global taxation-fraud scandals as well as the question of global warming with its immense and disastrous consequences for humanity. These issues are currently dominating the global value agenda.

These facts and events attest the high-speed process of globalization, which is in an incessant movement of wild transformation. When we look at its trajectory, we get the impression of a very agile horse that has escaped from its pen and is running around on its own. This impression is confirmed when you look at the title of the program of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos (21-26 January 2019). It is entitled *Globalization 4.0: Shaping a Global Architecture in the Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Therefore, there seems to be a need for "shaping a global architecture" with the purpose of keeping the globalization process under control "particularly in the face of recent, dramatic geopolitical shifts and nationalist backlashes against globalization".

In order to grasp the nature of globalization, its evolution, its dimensions as well as its trajectory, we need to conceptualize

it first. This will be followed by a study of civilization. What do we mean by “civilization”? What kind of relations and connections exist between globalization and civilization? And, in addition, if the world is globalized, will it then make sense that a world of various civilizations with their reciprocal challenges and hostilities will exist, side by side, with the globalized world? These are the questions that I will try to answer concisely.

### CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GLOBALIZATION

There is consensus among scholars that globalization is a fact. However, there is no consensus about its genealogy and its chronological origin. When did globalization emerge, when did it become a reality, and from which epoch can we talk about globalization as a fact?

To these questions, there are different answers. The anthropological thesis believes that the inception of globalization is not dated; it relies on the history of humankind. It started the very moment that the first human community was established. Therefore, nothing is new; we have always been living in a global world. Some scholars have established four periods of globalization: *a*) premodern; *b*) early modern; *c*) modern, and *d*) contemporary globalization (Held 2000: 414-436).

Yet for others, globalization is a *process*, which denotes a combination of globalization and fragmentation that started with the First World War, when the “war integrated some colonial economies more deeply into the international economy, fostered the enunciation of universalist (if antagonistic) ideologies in the shape of Leninism and Wilsonianism” (Clark 1997: 7).

The Second World War “was without question, a *world* war that had an impact on human lives, economic systems, political philosophies [...] and served as a catalyst for the globalizing of political ideas, none more so than the concept of human rights” (Clark 1997: 199). To Thomas Friedman, the real origin of the new era begins in November 9 1989: “when the walls came down and the windows went up” (Friedman 2007: Chapter 2, Flattener #1: 48). The event not only symbolized the end

of the Cold War but also allowed people from the other side of the wall to join the economic mainstream.

Continuing our path of investigation, we meet scholars who interpret globalization as an “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distinct localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990: 64). To Fukuyama, globalization is a *value* that puts an end to one history and marks the beginning of another; a peaceful Kantian democratic world (Fukuyama 1992). For others, globalization is an *anti-value* because of its uneven impact on and its destructive aspects related to undeveloped or semi-mature economies. Then there are those for whom globalization is an *ideology*. From this perspective, there is no alternative to globalization, which justifies “the need for repressive police and military forces to prevent destabilization of the world economy by outbursts of protest from the disadvantaged outsiders” (Cox 1996: 23).

Whatever its origins, globalization compresses the time and space aspects of social relations. Therefore, the two notions of *time* and *space* are essential to understand the concept of globalization.

Globalization is uneven. Its impact on Western countries is deeper and more visible than in other parts of the world. Yet, with regard to the means of communication in cyberspace, countries like China and Russia as well as North Korea and Iran have, in some domains, managed to surpass the Western world by using and misusing the sophisticated technical instruments.

The process is identical, however, and the differences concern only the degree and intensity of its implication. One could validly argue that the search for individual, local and national identity is not necessarily contradictory to globalization. On the contrary, the different identity claims (i.e. local, regional, religious and cultural) must be seen precisely as a means of regulation aiming to keep globalization within acceptable limits for various human communities; and also as an effort against subjugation and anonymity. In Giddens’ words, it is true that globalization “pulls away” from the nation-state, but at the same time, globalization also “pushes down” – “it creates new de-



mands and also new possibilities for regenerating local identities” (Giddens 1999: 31-32). The upsurge of nationalism in Scotland as well as in some other regions like Catalonia, Corsica and Kurdistan are indicative of people’s attention to their own identities. At the same time, these people are becoming progressively globalized and planetary, taking positions on questions such as child labor, air pollution, gender discrimination, international money laundering, and supporting new global movements like #MeToo. In other words, under the process of globalization, the system of local and parochial identity and loyalty is gradually supplemented with the system of multi-identity and multi-loyalty. A phenomenon that could be entitled *glocalism*.

In sum, we observe that globalization is not equivalent, identical or reducible to *internationalism* or the *intensification of interdependence*, though these are part of it. Globalization goes beyond these concepts. It implies not only the relations between states and international as well as transnational organizations, it also embraces relations between citizens worldwide, influencing their identity, language, and culture.

## THE PROBLEMATIC OF CIVILIZATION(S)

The pivotal question concerns the compatibility/non-compatibility of the current unprecedented global system with a world made up of a plurality of civilizations. In other words, can the world become vastly globalized without this having any substantial impact on civilizations? As a rule, trade will automatically increase the intensity of cultural exchanges. Trade carries along the culture of the traders. The history of humanity stands as proof of the importance of cultural exchange through trade. What is valid for traditional and primitive trade is, a fortiori, valid for a highly sophisticated system such as capitalism. Capitalism introduces profound structural transformations in a society. Capitalism requires division of labor, networks of distribution, banking systems, etc. Such transformations entail social and hence mental and cultural changes. A deep and constant implementation of capitalism in a society will shape the world vision of the people. When a global economic system

functions through a system experiencing technological revolution, it will inevitably have an impact on the mentality and attitude of the people concerning existential questions related to life and death, conflict and co-operation, time and space. Civilization is often defined in vague and ambiguous terms such as: “the inevitable destiny of a culture” (Spengler, in Huntington 1996: 42); “the kind of culture found in cities” (Bagby 1958: 162-163); “civilizations are invisible, just as constitutions” (Toynbee 1995: 46); etc. In reality, such definitions say nothing tangible and workable about civilizations. Fernand Braudel provides us with a better definition when defining civilization as “both moral and material values” (Braudel 1995: 5). Immanuel Wallerstein, who is also skeptical about the various definitions of civilization, makes a distinction between “historical system” and “civilization”. In his view, civilization refers “to a contemporary claim about the past in terms of its use in the present to justify heritage, separateness, rights” (Wallerstein 1992: 235). Despite the differences of opinion among scholars, there is at least unanimity on civilizations being broader than a single culture and larger than a group of cultures. In other words, civilization is a macro-formation composed of patterns, systems, and movements

that are again broken down into various schools and movements. The patterns are the arrangements that give the parts a relationship to one another and to the civilization as a whole, whereas systems have their own unity, regardless of whether they happen to form a part of a still larger system (Melko 1995: 30).

Therefore, the inclusion of a “historical formation” or a “material” dimension into the cultural body and memory seems indispensable, at least when the objective is a workable concept.

In my view, great and cumulative civilizations are composed of two inseparable parts. The first part is made up of an explicit world vision that may be a set of cultural systems, an ideology, or a religion, which is generally the case. The second part is a coherent political, military, and economic system often concretized as an empire or a historical formation. I define civilization as a junction between a world vision and a historical

formation. In other words, when a specific world vision is realized through a historical formation, this fusion is called civilization. Therefore, the constitution of a historical formation without a comprehensive world vision will shape tribes, empires, states, and other forms of political entities, but not a civilization. Similarly, when a world vision stands without a body – a “physical” shape – it is merely ideology, culture or religion and not a civilization. A real civilization is necessarily a generative entity, in its discourse (world vision) as well as in its historical formation. By way of example, an imperial institution seconded the Roman civilization with its elaborated cosmopolitan vision and the Islamic civilization with the Koran as a world vision and the Caliphate as a historical formation.

Each civilization possesses its own standard. The standard of Chinese civilization is different from the standard of Islamic civilization, just as the standard of European civilization is different from the standard of Indian civilization, etc. Put simply, the standard of each civilization represents the general culture or cultural DNA of a people in a specific period. Furthermore, the standard of civilization is the criterion determining who is “civilized” and who is “uncivilized”. “Uncivilized” in one civilization may be “civilized” in another and vice versa. Weak civilizations produce only weak standards in terms of degree and scope of applicability and acceptance. There is a direct correspondence between the real power of a civilization and the extension of its standard. When one civilization becomes stronger than another civilization, its standard will prevail and become the dominant standard. The dominant standard is often imposed on others (e.g. “capitulation”, “unequal treaties”), but it can also be interiorized and voluntarily accepted (conversion to a religion, “norm cascade”, and adherence to democracy).

Contemporary state orientation moves roughly in the direction of capitalism and liberalism. This tendency is most immediately noticeable in the “center” of the world system (the West), but also in countries such as Russia, China, Vietnam, and Iran. However, these countries have yet to “internalize” the norms associated with the Global Standard of Civilization, but they are at the stage of pre-internalization or “norm cascade” (Finnemore 1998: 887-911). This factual observation does not



necessarily imply that all these countries share the same ideas and values and have similar approaches to human rights, democracy, and liberalism. On the other hand, it is undeniable that, in a historical sense, the gap between different world visions is now as narrow as it has ever been. Two pillars of the current mega civilization remain unchallenged, and adherence to liberalism and capitalism (in various ramifications) is on the increase. In other words, globalization has considerably reduced the differences between various world visions. Not yet complete convergence, but not complete divergence either.

There is no historical evidence that the primary aim of civilizations is the establishment of internal peace. Historically, all civilizations (except the democratic civilization) have produced internal conflicts resulting in war. In fact, internal conflicts have been the main source of the decline of civilizations. In other words, a clash within a civilization has been more frequent and more damaging than a clash between civilizations. This is a general remark, valid for all civilizations including the pre-democratic Western civilization. In fact, Western civilization has been one of the most war-haunted civilizations. Here, I am not referring to the innumerable, bloody and horrifying external wars related to Western colonialism and imperialism. I refer to internal wars such as the Hundred Years' War, the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the Napoleonic Wars, and the First and Second World Wars. Similarly, the powerful Roman Empire could not escape its fate of division and the rise of the Byzantine Empire as a new rival. The Islamic Empire followed the same path and was divided into many parts (Abbasids, Fatimids, Seljuqs, etc.) causing its final decline as a civilization.

Now, the question is why the horrifying war history of Western civilization did not cause its decline. Why did the West become paradoxically stronger, and why is its civilization still shining, not like a dying star but as a dominant and unchallenged civilization? Which characteristics of this specific civilization make it so unique? Some Western scholars argue that Western civilization is actually in decline. Oswald Spengler represented this line after the First World War and Samuel P. Huntington raised his voice to warn of grave dangers threatening this civilization. However, if we consider the West as a



whole (the USA, Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan, etc.), no serious symptoms indicate a coming decline. Nevertheless, it is true that like any other civilization, the current Western civilization could of course also be subject to decline. This has not yet happened. Essentially, because what characterizes this civilization and differentiates it from all other previous civilizations resides in the fact that Western civilization is based on liberal democracy. Based on freedom and rule by the people, it possesses crucial qualities of self-discipline and self-correction. Therefore, and despite some periodic political crises and social tumult, “in established democracies [...] given the nature of the political culture and the strength of democratic institutions, liberal democracy is likely to exhibit a considerable resilience in the face of rising populist threats” (Öniş 2017: 33). There is neither a tangible sign indicating China’s possible return to Maoism, Russia’s to Stalinism, Vietnam’s to the Hô Chi Minh era, or even Iran’s to the Khomeini era. On the contrary, numerous indicators show that these countries intend to pursue policies of reform, though in a zigzag trajectory. Therefore, the rise of an Islamic world empire, based on Koranic values (Mozaffari 2017) or a Chinese civilization, based on a communist one-party system seem inconceivable in a foreseeable future. The challenge in the future will more likely be about the mechanism of supervision on immense accumulated power and wealth in the hands of a few non-state empires like Amazon, Google, Apple, Huawei, and Samsung rather than the fear of the rise of a new totalitarian civilization.

## CONCLUSION

Globalization has a very destructive aspect: It generates anonymity, reduces individual cultures to a common denominator, and standardizes identities. However, it is also a unique opportunity to promote communication and understanding between people of various cultures and encourage their mixing. From this perspective, there is no clash between civilizations, for the simple fact that since the information technology revo-

lution and the restructuring of capitalism have induced the networking society, the very existence of different and multiple civilizations is questionable. In fact, the idea of the existence of different and multiple civilizations side by side, and/or against each other, belongs to the pre-technological revolution period where, in the absence of the modern and sophisticated worldwide communication and information networks, contact between different civilizations occurred sporadically and by war and voyages. In the present time, there are no clashes between civilizations: Civilization, of course, in the terms defined in this study. Unless we define civilization purely in terms of culture, abstracting it from its hard elements: political, economic, and military power. If there are clashes, these are going on between different “standards of civilization” and not between civilizations, since there exists only one global civilization, currently dominated by Western civilization.

There is a permanent interaction between the trend of globalization and the rising claims for recognition of personal and collective identities. These two trends do not run parallel to each other. They are crossing each other permanently. Globalization provides a sophisticated technology that permits individuals and collectivities to take *selfies*. Cultural, artistic, ritual and culinary selfies. Never has humanity had so much information about each other’s identities as today. It is noticeable that, for the first time in history, the formation of super-text and meta-language integrate written, oral, and audio-visual means of human communication into the same system. In this way, much action/interaction occur via the internet, creating at the same time an almost common terminology and rules that must be respected for the purpose of the continuation of the new system (the Web). The new common terminology and common rules will progressively create a new culture (the “Web Culture”) shared by individuals and groups belonging to different conventional cultures. The problem therefore is not so much the trend of globalization. The problem is rather the management of the extraordinary amounts of information flows. How do we choose between them, and how do we escape from them? That is the question.

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