



## GLOBALISATION AND THE VALUES OF PEACE AND TOLERANCE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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**A**re peace and tolerance achievable in the global age? This is perhaps one of the most difficult questions we can expect a sociologist to answer; after all, globalisation is an extremely intricate and complex process and, if one aspect of it is capable of accommodating a “peace and tolerance space”, it also threatens to open up a parallel “violence and chaos space”. Consequently, while “peace” and “tolerance” remain the buzzwords of globalisation and are on everybody’s lips, in the real world they find themselves shaken to their very foundations.

In fact, I am tempted to believe that this paradox represents the essence of what globalisation is all about: on the one hand, fine words about noble humanitarian values, and popular movements that voice support for those values while claiming to reject the crasser aspects of globalisation and, on the other, practices and statements which, while driving the world towards integration (either by force or on a voluntary

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basis), at the same time spread destruction, ruination and anarchy.

In situations such as these, how can it be possible for peace and tolerance to thrive?

Although this is a difficult question, the very fact of raising it could be extremely useful, because it can enable us to gain a better understanding of what globalisation really is and reveal something of its seamy underbelly. Moreover, it also shows a readiness to embrace a “humanitarian element” that is absent from today’s globalisation scene. A person who speaks of fine and noble values – such as justice, peace and tolerance – during the present era is in a similar position to Socrates when he addressed the Athenians and championed the true virtues in an age which valued pride and arrogance above all else, regardless of any impact they might have. Like Socrates, those who preach the virtues of tolerance and peace today are playing a vital humanitarian role by helping to mitigate the negative effects of globalisation.

While our question about the prospects for peace and tolerance is difficult, wide-ranging and rather hard to define, it raises a number of significant points including: How can the world be expected to view the values of peace and tolerance in the age of globalisation? Or, to put it another way, what are the chances of peace and tolerance enjoying the status of established values in a globalised world? What are the challenges those values face and how can they be propagated in the light of those challenges? Before we answer these questions we should like to begin with a brief examination of the problems and contradictions created by globalisation and the obstacles they pose to transforming those values into realities.

### **One: Globalisation: problems and contradictions**

Globalisation is a highly complex phenomenon. This is not only true of the elements and processes that comprise it; there are also fundamental disagreements over what exactly it is, what its history is, and what its relationship is with other concepts such as capitalism, the world order and modernisation. In this paper we do not intend to become involved

in a discussion about its history which, according to some, dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century; that was the century which saw the birth of the spirit of enterprise and adventure in the West, followed by marauding expeditions across the globe in search of wealth and colonies, then a succession of other stages ending with the present day – which represents the climax and most distinctive phase of the history of globalisation. For our part, all we should like to point out is that our present era is one that has seen a massive transformation in communications and telecommunications, a huge expansion of markets and capital, and a rise in the movement of goods, people, ideas and information, to a point whereby conceptions of time and place have been turned on their heads. Physical locations continue to shrink and lose their relationship with time, so that today a person can be in several times and places simultaneously<sup>1</sup>. This is why sociologists characterise the present stage of the world’s history in terms that demonstrate the tremendous changes taking place and their highly complex consequences: it has been described as an “age of uncertainty”<sup>2</sup>, “unregulated capitalism”,<sup>3</sup> “empire of chaos”,<sup>4</sup> “clash of civilizations”<sup>5</sup> or “risk society”<sup>6</sup>.

This is all due to the fact that globalisation is generally too complex to be described simply as the “unification of the world” or its “transformation into a single village”. Probably its most significant contradiction is the fact that today’s world, which is becoming increasingly integrated, regulated and interconnected, is also experiencing conflict and mutual alienation and estrangement. Consequently, “globalisation” has come to be associated just as much with disintegration and confrontation as it is with unification and integration. It may be defined as a disproportionate division, or distribution, of the products of Western modernisation – whether they

1 On the changing relationship between time and place in the age of globalization see; Anthony Giddens: *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990.

2 Ronald Robertson: *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage, 1992.

3 C. Offe: *Disorganized Capitalism*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1985.

4 Samir Amin: *Imbaraturiyat al Fawdh*, Tr. Sana’ Abu Shaqrah, Dar al Farabi, Beirut, 1991.

5 See Samuel Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

6 Ulrich Beck: *What is Globalization?*, Wiley, 2000.

entail the imposition of a uniform model of “modernity” across the globe, or are related to the conflicts, alienation and disintegration created by the daily struggles resulting from the imposition (or opposition to) this modernisation model.

Globalisation, then, may be described as a continuous transformation and reshaping of global and regional relationships<sup>1</sup>. The paradoxical situation created by it raises an important question that has a direct bearing on the values of peace and tolerance: Does globalisation alienate members of the human race from each other or bring them closer together? I believe there is no easy answer to this question. While globalisation creates similar material conditions and patterns in different parts of the world, along with a uniform system of knowledge and information, it also causes people to reinterpret accepted ideas, thereby generating a range of new and conflicting views and concepts that lead to endless disputes and sometimes escalate into violence. Hence we find that a single culture becomes transformed into a multiplicity of cultures, leading to a subsequent collapse of its social cohesion. This is particularly true in situations of rapid change.

Against this background of rising cultural disintegration and global cultural conflict, globalisation continues to pour forth new ideas and agendas through a plethora of channels such as the internet. It is at this level that one of globalisation’s major contradictions becomes apparent – the contrast between one set of discourses which calls for peace, harmony and dialogue, and another set which stokes and aggravates conflict.

For example, there are the familiar calls for a North-South dialogue to reduce the poverty and backwardness gap, and for an interfaith dialogue to mitigate sectarian and religious tension; then we have the succession of international resolutions on the protection of human rights, particularly the rights of women and children, and on the protection of societies from crime, drugs, terrorism and human trafficking. Let us consider all these measures and their worthy promises; then let us see how incompatible they

<sup>1</sup> On the disintegrative effects of globalisation see Ahmed Zayed: ‘*Awlamat al Hadathah wa Tafkikha li'l Thaqafti'l Wataniyah*, ‘*Aalam al Fikr* magazine, vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 7-38.

are with the rhetoric we hear on topics such as the rights of minorities, “creative chaos” and the clash of civilizations.

What should we expect the result of this contradiction to be? Dialogue, harmony, peace and tolerance, or alienation, secession and the creation of boundaries and barriers? The latter is certainly more than a possibility in a world that does not know what its real goals are, makes no genuine effort to reach a true accord and ends up by descending into ever-increasing violence and strife. We can see plenty of evidence to suggest that this is already happening if we look at the recent past. According to the records, the number of armed conflicts around the world rose from 47 in 1989 to 56 in 1990, 68 in 1992 and 118 in 1999-2000<sup>1</sup>. These figures speak for themselves.

Another contradiction - which is possibly even more fundamental – concerns the inequality created by globalisation. Calls for an integrated world and dialogue for the sake of a better future are shown to be nothing more than empty words when one considers the growing disparities between the states and communities that make up our one global society, as well as the pressures which the weaker groups are subjected to within the different societies which comprise it. This situation exacerbates the world’s problems and puts it under severe strain. I am not talking about major challenges such as environmental pollution, climate change, the greenhouse effect, CO2 emissions, the world financial crisis and global economic stagnation (all of which pose significant threats in their own right and cannot be seen in isolation from the disparities between the states at the centre of the capitalist system and the developing countries). What I am more concerned with here is another set of problems that are essentially social in nature:

**1** – Growing poverty and unemployment around the world, particularly in the poorer societies. According to reports, 40% of the world’s population receive 5% of the world’s income and the richest 20% receive 75% of it. Approximately half the world’s population (about three billion people) live

<sup>1</sup> Dan Smith: *Trends and Causes of Armed Conflict*, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2001, pp. 3-4. Available online: [www.edoc.amnesty.org/armed/conflict](http://www.edoc.amnesty.org/armed/conflict)

on incomes of not more than 2.5 US Dollars per head per day. UNICEF reports state that 22,000 children die of hunger every day in the world's poorer regions, particularly the developing countries in Africa and Asia<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the 2009 economic crisis created an estimated additional 81 million young unemployed in various parts of the globe<sup>2</sup>.

**2 – New kinds of crime – particularly human trafficking and related activities.** Globalisation has created a huge upsurge in communications and telecommunications, causing the world to shrink and opening up new channels for the flow of goods, ideas, technologies, ideologies and money. One effect of this has been an acceleration of human movement and the consequent appearance of certain types of crime that were previously unknown. This is largely because, while states are tightening controls over their immigration procedures and introducing stricter border controls in response to fears over terrorism, the rise in illegal movements of people, people trafficking and the exploitation of migrants has become a world-wide phenomenon. Reports and figures show that the by-products of human trafficking – such as drug smuggling, gun-running and the sex trade - have become such a serious global problem that they now pose a threat to modern society. Some seven million people have fallen victim to people trafficking, around 800,000 have been smuggled across international frontiers and a million children have been forced into the sex trade.

People trafficking has generated incomes totalling 32 billion US Dollars and has affected 161 states in one way or another<sup>3</sup>. Thanks to globalisation, the sex trade is flourishing and women and children are being treated as profitable commodities in the global capital market<sup>4</sup>.

**1** Global Issues: *Poverty Facts and States*. Available online: [www.global.issues.org](http://www.global.issues.org), article/26/poverty facts and states.

**2** International Labor Organization: *Global Trends in Youth Employment*, ILO, Geneva, 2010, Annex 1, Table A.

**3** For further details of human trafficking statistics and the states involved in the practice see: [www.PolarisProject.org/statistics/humantrafficking](http://www.PolarisProject.org/statistics/humantrafficking) UNODOC (2009) *Global Report on Trafficking in Perso*.

**4** Ahmed Zayed: *Al Itjar fi'l Bashar: Al Usrah al Faqirah wa'l Tahawwalat al Ra'smaliyah al Raththah, in Al Usrah al 'Arabiyyah fi 'Aalam Mutaghayyir*, Matbu'at Markaz al Buhuth wa'l Dirasat al Ijtima'iyah, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, 2011, pp. 111-148.

**3** – The rising number of refugees; by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this figure – excluding political asylum seekers - had risen to between 18 and 20 million people being forced to leave their homes because of wars, armed conflicts and inter-ethnic strife<sup>1</sup>.

There is a growing social gap between large sections of the world's population as a result of the increase in poverty and deprivation across the globe and this is creating actual and potential conflict between communities as well as between their individual members. Borders between states are being sealed tight in response to rising crime - particularly human trafficking – and illegal immigration and this is likely to lead to new ways being devised in order to evade border controls. This is indeed a graphic demonstration of the paradoxes of globalisation: on the one hand improved cross-border facilities for trade and the transfer of capital, technology, ideas and people and, on the other, stricter controls by governments over their countries' borders. Seen from this angle, globalisation seems to be a liberal laissez-faire process that allows freedom of labour and movement, while at the same time it imposes restrictions on both when it suits it.

## **Two: The need for peace and tolerance in the globalisation age**

The contradictions we have indicated (not to mention a range of other factors) have led us to conclude that, while globalisation has its positive side, it has also produced negative consequences. One of the most important of these is the fact that it exacerbates geographical, social and cultural differences – or “mutual estrangement” – so that consequently “tolerance and peace discourse” has become a vital tool for promoting rapprochement and integration and inspiring humanity with hope for an alternative, more humanitarian form of globalisation.

There is a strong relationship between peace and tolerance. They are both moral values, there can be no peace without tolerance, nor can there be tolerance without peace. We can understand this clearly if we examine the meanings and derivations of the two words. In English the

<sup>1</sup> R. Cohen and P. Kennedy: *Global Sociology*, Palgrave, London, 2000.

word “tolerance” is derived from the Latin verb infinitive “*tollere*”, which means to raise, concede, consider or respect. All these meanings have the connotations of tolerance (or leniency or forbearance). The Arabic root of “*tasamuh*” (the common word for tolerance) has much the same meaning. The noun “*tasamuh*” comes from the verb “*samaha*”, which means to be magnanimous, generous or indulgent, and also has connotations suggesting an ability to endure a situation; when someone exercises leniency or acts magnanimously and with respect, this means that he is able to “grin and bear it”.

In my opinion the word “peace” reflects the same meanings. It is derived from the Latin word “*pax*”, which means tranquillity, lack of rebelliousness and surrender, or accepting a state of general harmony and conciliation. (Historically, the “*Pax Romana*” was a time of peace marked by the cessation of the civil wars in the Roman Empire.) Its Arabic equivalent – “*salam*” or “*silm*” – is derived from the verb “*sallama*” (from “*salima*”), which means to forgive or rescue. Both “*salam*” and “*silm*” have connotations of conciliation and surrender, or even embracing Islam (since entering the Faith is a form of surrender, acquiescence and acceptance – i.e. surrendering oneself and one’s affairs to Allah, Glory be to Him, the Most High)<sup>1</sup>.

So there is a kind of semantic convergence between peace and tolerance. Both suggest an acceptance of the “other”, respect for his point of view and a willingness to overlook differences and coexist peacefully and tolerantly alongside him. A tolerant person is a person who is willing to make concessions to the “other” within the context and limits agreed between them, and consequently live with him in peace and amity. It would be equally true to say that a placid, peace-loving person is almost by definition a person who accepts the “other”, feels and acts tolerantly towards him and accepts his point of view.

Peace and tolerance, then, are inextricably related to each other and

<sup>1</sup> Language definitions in the following dictionaries:

– Merriam Webster. Available online: [www.MerriamWebster.com](http://www.MerriamWebster.com)

*Lisan al ‘Arab*. See “*samh*”. Available online at [www.Baheth.info](http://www.Baheth.info)



have the potential to create a “virtuous space” capable of counteracting the more undesirable effects of globalisation and setting it on the right track. Let us now consider how they can best do this.

### **1 – Focusing on the human aspect of globalisation**

By promoting the values of peace and tolerance we can help foster the positive side of globalisation – the side which reinforces the social movements that oppose globalisation in its present form and seek to replace it with something better. In the view of Michel Kilo<sup>1</sup>, globalisation is “capitalism freed from its restraints, which seeks to reshape the world in the interests of certain states, centres or economies. It marks the beginning of a new era in the history of international exploitation and oppression.” Hence the task of “humanising globalisation” is “the destiny of the entire human race”.

While humanising globalisation is a major challenge both politically and economically, culturally it is even more difficult because it requires a “human culture” which puts mankind at the centre of existence and believes that they are capable of achieving freedom and progress and able to build a rational world with a liberal, democratic culture and universal values. However, man cannot become “the centre of existence” without a new system of virtuous and humane values, the most important of which are tolerance and peace. Man cannot occupy this central space through accumulating material wealth and profits, or through oppression, colonialism, violence and conflict; in fact, the only way he can do this is by embracing “virtuous values” which prevent him from acting unjustly towards his fellow man and create the conditions for tolerant, peaceful coexistence. A humane, alternative form of globalisation does not only give the human race a “central position”; it also puts values, as opposed to capital, at the centre of existence.

It follows logically from this that if capital is forced to comply with these “virtuous central values”, then it will have the potential to cease being an instrument of oppression, injustice, exploitation and alienation.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Kilo: *Min ajli 'Awlamah Insaniyah*, *Al Tafahom* magazine, No. 26, Spring 2009.

## 2 – A common global culture

Closer relationships between peoples can lead to shared global values like peace and tolerance, followed by justice, equality and a commitment to mankind's physical, spiritual, psychological and intellectual welfare. In such a situation mankind would share a common culture which would satisfy their needs, including their religious beliefs – a culture that would enable man to live in harmony with his environment, develop the earth and establish a civilization that would guarantee his dignity and intellectual integrity and provide him with the wherewithal for a decent life. Anthropologists have frequently observed that there is a close relationship between a society's culture and its essential needs.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, as long as all people's needs are similar, so too will be their cultural output, beliefs and attitudes. Even if they may differ in some of their minor details, they will grow from a single root derived from the “virtuous values” we have referred to above, and this means that they will provide the means for a peaceful, tolerant life, or tolerance based upon peace.

## 3 – Cultural pluralism

If peace and tolerance are recognized as shared “virtuous values” in the age of globalisation, this will promote mutual understanding between peoples and enable the notion of cultural pluralism to flourish. In its famous document on cultural diversity the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) affirms the principle of pluralism and points to dialogue as the way to establish a framework of interdependence between peoples, coupled with interaction between different ideas and belief systems<sup>2</sup>.

In this paper UNESCO calls for a new world, or a new kind of globalisation in which all the component parties are equal, even if they

<sup>1</sup> The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was the leading proponent of the relationship between culture and human needs. See R. Firth (ed.): *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Bronislaw Malinowski*, Routledge, London, 1957, pp. 33-52.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO: *Al Tanawwu' al Bashari al Khallaq*, report of the International Committee for Culture and Development (in Arabic), supervised and presented by Jaber 'Asfur, Al Majlis al A'la li'l Thaqafah, Cairo, 1997.

differ from one another in their material resources and assets. It calls for a new framework of tolerant, peaceful coexistence between peoples that is based not upon the economic division of labour between states, but on cultural interrelationships. Moreover, it also stresses the link between peace and tolerance on the one hand, and diversity and pluralism on the other.

The cultural pluralism advocated by UNESCO and those who believe in a “humane globalisation” can only exist in a climate in which there is an abundance of tolerance and peace. Neither of these two qualities can exist in the absence of the “different other” and without a recognition of – and interaction between – “different others”; that is to say, a world in which different human groups work peaceably together for the benefit of all, without any one group imposing its will on – or tyrannising - any other.

### **Three: The chances of peace and tolerance in the age of globalisation**

The question we shall endeavour to answer here is: Can peace and tolerance really be achieved under the present system of globalisation?

The reality is that globalisation in its present form only allows peace and tolerance to exist at a rhetorical level. While “peace and tolerance discourse” can be heard across the world, it also carries a subtext which implies that, as well as the opportunities that exist for creative peace, tolerance and interaction between different peoples and cultures, mankind also faces significant dangers. Furthermore, at present such discourse is “just talk” and can only be heard in speeches at conferences, pageants, festivals, competitions and other formal events divorced from the realities of everyday life. From our perspective – as we pointed out earlier – our situation is not unlike that of the conflict between Socrates, who called for virtue and goodness, and the arrogant Athenian leaders who rejected those moral qualities.

I believe this is something we need to be aware of as we seek out the opportunities for peace and tolerance in the age of globalisation.

## 1 – “Peace and tolerance rhetoric”

Where did all this talk of peace and tolerance come from? It was almost certainly initiated by those people who are aware of the hidden dangers of materialistic, consumerist globalisation and its alienating effects. The United Nations and its organisations and agencies have been the most active proponents of the values of peace and tolerance and their discourse is without doubt based upon an anti-globalisation culture that highlights the unjust principles upon which globalisation is founded, its consumerism and the social disintegration it causes, and the domineering arrogance of the big powers in the modern world.

Calls for a “culture of peace and tolerance” have been gaining traction in the corridors of the United Nations for some time; in 1997 the UN General Assembly included the question of a “peace culture” on its agenda and the year 2000 was declared an International Year of Peace. Subsequently the decade from 2001 to 2010 was declared a Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World and a “peace culture” plan of action was approved. Following this, peace, tolerance and mutual understanding between states became a major theme of the speeches of world leaders and their General Assembly representatives and the Assembly issued several resolutions on the subject, including the need for co-operation and harmony between religions and cultures<sup>1</sup>.

At its 1995 Conference UNESCO issued a Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and a plan for implementing the UN’s Year of Tolerance (approved by the UN General Assembly on UNESCO’s recommendation in 1995). In 1996 the General Assembly called upon member states to mark the International Day of Tolerance each year on 16<sup>th</sup> November by organising programmes of educational and cultural activities aimed at promoting dialogue, positive interaction and a rejection of violence and extremism, while stressing the need for peace and tolerance and a commitment to the principles of UNESCO’s Declaration on Tolerance. (The Declaration affirmed that, while tolerance is a virtue of which

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<sup>1</sup> The UN General Assembly’s reports can be seen online at: [www.un.org/ar/ga](http://www.un.org/ar/ga)

the world stands in desperate need, it is threatened by fanaticism and violence.<sup>1)</sup>

As a further step, UNESCO also established a Chair of Human Rights, Tolerance and Peace and other chairs were set up in several universities in order to carry out studies on human rights, tolerance and democracy and provide education and training in those fields. Through UNESCO's influence the issue of peace and tolerance also became a feature (if indirectly) of a number of academic chairs dedicated to various other disciplines, including a Chair of Philosophy and an Ibn Rushd Chair<sup>2</sup>.

Calls for a culture of peace and tolerance started to permeate from the General Assembly and UNESCO into other institutions such as civil society bodies. These in turn began to foster world peace and tolerance and recognize the role they have to play in creating democratic systems. Numerous symposiums, seminars and conferences were held and websites were set up calling for peace and tolerance, particularly between peoples who were prone to wars and armed conflicts<sup>3</sup>. Research centres were also established to study peace and conflict resolution, and academic books, papers and other publications were published on these topics and related subjects. Perhaps one of the most significant of these in the Arab world is *Al Tasamoh* (now *Al Tafahom*) – a periodical published by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs in the Sultanate of Oman since 2003 - which plays an important role in studying and promoting a culture of tolerance and acceptance of the “other”, by offering a range of different points of view – including religious opinions – on the question of tolerance.

## 2 – Promoting cultural interaction and peace

Cultural interaction is another way of promoting peace and tolerance. If globalisation has led to actual conflict and disintegration, it has also

<sup>1</sup> For UNESCO's declaration of principles on tolerance see: [www.unesco.org/ar/social-and-humansciences](http://www.unesco.org/ar/social-and-humansciences)

<sup>2</sup> On UNESCO's academic chairs see: [www.unesco.org/ar/social-and-humansciences/unesc-chairs](http://www.unesco.org/ar/social-and-humansciences/unesc-chairs)

<sup>3</sup> The Bint al Rafidain Organisation in Babylon has set up its own website to promote a culture of peace, dialogue, tolerance and acceptance of the “other”.

produced various forms of discourse that have the potential to be highly disruptive on a global scale. One of the most significant of these is the notion of cultural conflict, or the clash of civilizations – a thesis proposed by the American thinker Samuel Huntington who observed that the world is undergoing a process of cultural polarisation. Since the Cold War, he claimed, the world has seen the emergence of new civilizations and identities (particularly the Islamic and Chinese civilizations); at the same time, there has been a growing awareness of a link between economic and political interests and “cultural regions”. Consequently, alongside a decline in ideologies we are witnessing a resurgence of cultural and religious identity, which is leading to increased conflict and competition between civilizations<sup>1</sup>.

Although there is much truth in the concept of a clash of civilizations and inter-cultural and inter-religious conflict in the globalised world of today, it holds little appeal for those like us who are seeking an alternative version of globalisation and regard it as a factor in generating alienation and new enmities at a time when they were believed to be (almost) things of the past. (I am referring here to religious and cultural enmities.) This is why there is a growing counter-discourse which sees genuine opportunities for dialogue, tolerance and peace rather than conflict, leading to a new kind of civilization based upon cultural and spiritual values rather than mere crass materialism.

Numerous philosophers and thinkers have been attracted by the idea of cultural interaction and cross-pollination. Indeed, the philosophical notion that human societies are in a constant state of advancement and development is a fundamentally humane one which sees a people’s progress as an indication of movement towards perfection and intellectual maturity and a willingness to develop harmonious relations with other cultures<sup>2</sup>. In many ways it is similar to Hegelianism with its dialectic

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<sup>1</sup> See Samuel Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> A supporter of Condorcet and Auguste Comte’s views on progress. Comte’s comments on positivism as humanity’s new religion could be understood to mean that in this context positivism is a unifying force between mutually antipathetic forces.

of progression towards a state of perfection and maturity before finally attaining the Absolute, which is Pure Spirit and Total Perfection – i.e. a form of perfection that is intellectual and spiritual as opposed to material and political<sup>1</sup>. Nietzsche’s search for the *Übermensch*, or Superman, in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* is also a search for a state of perfection in which man is free to exercise the full power of his will – in the interests not (as some people think) of a tyrant or oppressor, but for the sake of virtue and goodness<sup>2</sup>.

While it is true that the goal here is an ideal state which may never actually be achieved, the very process of striving to achieve it is bound to reduce the intensity of inter-cultural conflict and inspire hope in the prospects for a “perfect civilization”. However, materialistic, consumerist globalisation has the opposite effect, since it drives people apart from each other rather than bringing them closer together, so that consequently the aspiration towards a perfect, mature civilization has tended to give way to the more modest goal of cultural interaction.

Thinkers, politicians and international organisations have helped spread this idea among the different peoples of the world. Here I should like to return to the UN’s initiatives in this regard, particularly the efforts of UNESCO, which held an international conference on inter-cultural dialogue from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> April 2001.<sup>3</sup> In his message to this conference UNESCO’s Director-General wrote: “Dialogue is the main tool for improving relations and mutual understanding between different cultures and it will continue to be so. We are in desperate need of serious and broad-ranging dialogue, because it is the only way we can succeed in ensuring that we listen to each other, adjust our attitudes and appreciate the points of difference between us. Through committed and serious dialogue we can resolve conflicts, overcome disagreements and bandage wounds. Thus we will

1 For the concept of pure spirit and pure perfection see Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Galaxy Books, 1976.

2 For the concept of the Perfect Man, see Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

3 The conference was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, and addressed by Jacques Chirac, Abdoulaye Wade and Seyyed Mohammed Khatami. See UNESCO, *Dialogue among Civilizations*. Available online: [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/00/2001/200112591/e](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/00/2001/200112591/e)

be able to begin our main task of infusing globalisation with a humane – or humanitarian – quality and making it a more acceptable process that promotes greater equality [between nations, societies and individuals].”

The notion of inter-cultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence enjoys its strongest support in those weaker cultures that have suffered most from the ravages of globalisation and its gross materialism. Over the past ten years the Arab world has seen countless discussions, conferences, books and articles on the proposition that dialogue between civilizations is one of the keys to an alternative globalisation. Indeed, many Arab thinkers who are in favour of it believe that it offers a way towards understanding and emulating Western culture. They are not advocating a return to Western colonialism; instead, their focus is on the West’s interest in studying, identifying and understanding different civilizations. It is through dialogue that people can understand the “other” and coexist amicably with it in a diversified world<sup>1</sup>.

### 3 – Global civil society

The current interest in civil society stems from the rising domination of market forces and the increasing power of the state. In its present-day form globalisation has created a savage version of capitalism and enabled nation states to arm themselves with instruments of repression which the rich states are using against the poor ones and the poor states are using against their own populations. Consequently we can conclude that the emergence of civil society is a natural reaction against this situation. Civil society consists of independent organisations and groupings that are not connected to market forces or the state and involve people in their activities on a free, voluntary basis. Arab thinkers describe it as a “freedom space which operates independently”<sup>2</sup> in such a way that its independence enables it to set both the state and the market on the right

<sup>1</sup> Wajih Kawtharani: *Azmat Nidham ‘Alami am Sidam Hadharat*, in Fakhri Labib (ed.): *Sira’ al Hadharat am Hiwar al Hadharat*, Munadhdhamat Tadhamon al Shu’ub al Ifriqiyah/al Asiyawiyah, Cairo, 1997, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> See Ahmed Zayed: *Dirasat al Mujtama’ al Madani fi Misr: Qira’ah li’l Haql*. Paper presented to the Conference on Civil Society in the Arab nation, Amman, Jordan, March 2005.



track. At the same time, it gives individuals the opportunity to work and act unrestrictedly on their own behalf.

This opens up a prospect for a third alternative – a Middle Way – which recognizes the anomalies created by globalisation and puts forward ideas for an alternative economy. This was summed up by the French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin: “Yes to market economy but no to market society.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, we do not reject or deny globalisation and the kind of economy it imposes upon the market, but globalisation must not be allowed to transform society into a market ruled by competitiveness and conflict.

This clearly reflects an aspiration towards a globalisation model that brings people closer together through a range of independent organisations that they set up and manage themselves. These are the civil society associations; some of them are regional, others international.

Since they have taken upon themselves the task of confronting globalisation or exposing its “other face”, even regional or transnational associations have found that they also need to perform a global role. Academics and thinkers have described this development as an “associational revolution” – a process which has been spurred on by the development of information technology, worsening economic and environmental crises and the need for a form of social capital based upon mutual relations and trust<sup>2</sup>. We may describe this “associational revolution” through the global civil society networks as an expression of an aspiration for world peace and tolerance and a rejection of violence. Hence it would be wrong to say that all these international (or national) civil society associations are anti-globalisation, or working to establish an alternative version of globalisation. They are much broader-ranging and more diverse than that and include pro- as well as anti-globalisation organisations. They can be divided into four main categories:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quote from L.M. Salamon, S.W. Sokolowski and R. List: *Global Civil Society: An Overview*; the Johns Hopkins University, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> See K. Chondary: *Global Civil Society, Globalization and Nation-State*. Paper presented at the ISTR Conference, Toronto, Canada, 2004. Available online: [www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org)

(1) Supporters of globalisation: These are organisations and movements that are enthusiastic champions of globalisation and the expansion of international capital and world governance on the basis of supra-national laws and regulations. They are in favour of multi-national corporations and pro-globalisation governments and generally benefit from globalisation themselves in the form of either logistical or financial support.

(2) Opponents of globalisation: These are organisations and movements that reject globalisation and call for a reassertion of the nation state, the existence of which they see as being threatened by the relentless march of globalisation. Their supporters, who are drawn from the right, left and middle of the political spectrum, may differ with each other over the details. However, they are all agreed that globalisation is a harmful phenomenon and that its economic and legislative expansion needs to be curbed.

(3) The reformers: These form the broad base of the organisations and movements that accept globalisation as an inevitable reality. At the same time, however, they call for reforms to give it a more human or “civilized” character. This would entail “infusing” it with higher doses of justice, tolerance and peace, while creating opportunities for greater equality so that all can benefit from a more equitable economic and social system.

(4) Those looking for an alternative: These include organisations and movements that are neither pro- nor anti-globalisation but operate through channels that are independent of governments and international organisations. The result is the creation of free, independent spaces that challenge globalisation. For example, they may boycott certain types of food or international brands, or resist armaments and wars in an attempt to create a different and better world.

If we ignore the first category, we will find that the other three are critical of globalisation or call for its reform or the development of alternatives to it. This shows that this area of the civil space is growing both

locally and internationally; however, it offers an opportunity not to destroy globalisation, but rather a chance for its main players to “mend their ways” and come up with a more just version of globalisation that is better able to unite people towards common goals through a culture of peace and tolerance.

## **Four: Challenges facing peace and tolerance in the age of globalisation**

Some people (particularly the powerless and those with humanitarian instincts) harbour the hope that the world is capable of overcoming globalisation in its present crude form and replacing it with a juster version governed by virtuous values. The categories we described above show that there is indeed a chance (if a remote and not very obvious one) for this hope to be achieved. However, while this hope may have begun to see the light of day in the minds and consciences of those seeking new prospects for humanity, materialistic globalisation is becoming ever further entrenched and producing new “counter-humanitarian challenges”. In this section we shall endeavour to identify them.

### **1) Political hegemony and the stereotyping of values**

Globalisation with a human touch, based upon a culture of peace and tolerance, is a form of globalisation which allows for pluralism and creative competition. It leaves peoples with the opportunity to live in dignity and preserve their cultural heritage and beliefs. However, globalisation as we know it today is of a different stripe. It imposes models of political and cultural hegemony, forcing peoples to follow centralised political and cultural agendas. In fact it could be true to say that it has replaced Eurocentric centralisation with global centralisation. Western-style modernisation - particularly its cultural aspect – has become widely criticised during the present era, with the result that Eurocentrism has been replaced by globalisation and a multi-polar world, led by America, and a new kind of centralisation has appeared which reflects a political and cultural model dominated by the USA and the major industrial nations.

At the political level, globalisation's new ascendancy has been achieved through the imposition of a series of political and economic agendas. The most significant of these is political liberalism, which champions the interests of the individual and calls for a degree of social justice underwritten by the state. In many countries these policies have not led to genuine development, but rather to conditions that have produced higher levels of poverty and unemployment, rising tensions at home and increased repression – even to the point of tyranny - on the part of the state.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while these policies have been introduced in order to foster the interests of the individual, they are incompatible with the new social contexts in which they find themselves (such as ethnic and sectarian divisions). As a consequence they are not conducive to communal peace and tolerance, but rather the opposite.

This observation should not be interpreted as an attack on liberalism as a concept or a philosophy. Rather, it is a criticism of the way in which governments are coerced into adopting certain policies as a result of the centralising and “dictatorial” character of globalisation, which forces them to comply with World Bank and International Monetary Fund diktats. As a consequence they find themselves drowned in debts and obliged to resort to measures such as the repression of their own populations. Thus although globalisation may appear on the surface to have a human face, in reality it creates contradictions that are bound to threaten communal peace and harmony and stretch the boundaries of tolerance between individuals and groups to an unacceptable degree. It is this factor that – in Edward Said's view – makes globalisation and neo-colonialism so similar<sup>2</sup>.

From this we can conclude that this form of globalisation – or “neo-centralisation” – is a form of hegemony that applies just as much to the cultural sphere as it does to politics and economics. In doing so it takes modernisation out of its Western context and – after adapting it slightly to conform to what it sees as “local conditions” – it grafts it on to traditional, non-Western societies. This is why globalisation has always

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1 The Arab Spring societies are witness to this situation in which poverty, deprivation and political repression were factors in driving peoples towards revolution.

2 See Edward Said: *Orientalism*, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1978.

had a tendency to “stereotype the world” – an operation which entails two processes: firstly, by establishing capitalist-style economic, political and social models, such as markets and banks, nation-states and educational, military and municipal systems; and secondly, by spreading ideas and concepts such as freedom, equality, values and human rights. During the current phase of globalisation stereotyping has begun to change direction somewhat, so that today its focus is more on values, ideas and “positive images” of such things as capitalist economics (free movement of labour, freedom of choice etc.), capitalist political notions (freedom, democracy, human rights etc.) and capitalist cultural and social values (empowerment of women, creative diversity, freedom of religion etc.); at the same time, it promotes the American approach to these issues by adopting a range of different types of media channels and “hidden persuaders”.

These “positive images” apply not only to value systems, but also to numerous other areas of life, including happiness, love, hatred, art, religion, statesmanship, gender identity etc. This has resulted in a “stereotyping of the intellect and the emotions” and a narrowing of the distance between the world of the image and the world of reality (or between reality and fantasy).<sup>1</sup>

So the globalisation culture tries to create a single, standard, universal social system and lifestyle. Instead of being a culture that develops naturally and in response to evolving circumstances, as was the case in the past, it has become subjected to a clearly defined economic, political and social agenda – an agenda outlined in the rhetoric of the industrial countries. (This particularly true of the political discourse we find in America, Britain and Germany.) It is set out in detail at international conferences on topics such as population, women and crime, to name but a few - which are generally designed to follow the political agendas of the major industrial nations and to put forward (or “impose from the globalisation centre”) new ideas on the family, marital relations, human rights, the “peace culture” etc.

1 Ahmed Zayed: *'Awlamat al Hadathah wa Tafkik al Thaqafat al Wataniyyah*, in *'Aalam al Fikr*, Kuwait, Vol. 1 No. 32, p. 19.

## 2) Identity, peace and cultural boundaries

The way in which globalisation stereotypes the world is producing various kinds of polarisation, not only on a global scale but also regionally and domestically, and in doing so it is forcing peoples and communities to defend their identities by pulling up the drawbridges and fortifying their own cultural boundaries. In fact, it could be true to say that the concept of the relationship between the “I” and the “other” – which is based upon tolerance, acceptance and getting on together – is changing from one of common assumptions to one of uncertainty.

If the relationship between the “I” and the “other” is becoming primarily one of uncertainty, the question of identity begins to rear its head and the boundaries of identity become cultural (and maybe even physical) fortresses characterised by extremism and violence.

Identity is a process of “ongoing consolidation” with a specific culture which has its own language, symbols and social characteristics.<sup>1</sup> The way in which the world is becoming stereotyped by globalisation is leading not to a rising sense of cultural identity at the political and social levels, but rather to alienation, conflict and endless cultural strife. While on the one hand globalisation has let us live the dream of freedom and emancipation (at the rhetorical level), it has also plunged us into conflict over questions of identity: Who are we? What is our history? What will become of us? What is our role in life?

These questions awaken the “I” and cause the “we” to take a back seat. And if these uncertainties continue and spread, harmony and shared assumptions will eventually be put to the test in no uncertain terms.

In a previous paper I described this process as a “process of recognizing boundaries” – i.e. a communal awareness of cultural boundaries and possibly rising hostility towards other social groups.<sup>2</sup> This process is also linked to what academics call a “process of inter-

<sup>1</sup> Jordan Marshall: (In Arabic) *Mawsu'at 'Ilm al Ijtima'* (tr. Mohammed al Jawhari and others), Vol. 3, Al Majlis al A'la li'l Thaqafah, Cairo, 2001, pp. 1570-1577.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Zayed: See above; p. 25.

boundary alienation”, or “deterritorialization”, which may be interpreted as uprooting a social group’s cultural experience and training it to adapt to other cultural experiences in different times and places.<sup>1</sup> The result of this process is that, while people find themselves experiencing other cultural systems which are essentially different from their own national cultures, they also develop a heightened sense of their own identity; this produces “divisive identities” which may on occasion escalate into violent conflict, as happened in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and numerous other states composed of more than one ethnicity. These conflicts are designed to “restore recognition of boundaries” – a situation known as “reterritorialization”.

Conflicts of this kind do not necessarily involve violence. There are other, more peaceable, versions in which the process of “inter-boundary alienation” takes on a “hybridized” form; in this form traditional culture and its symbols are promoted, reinforced and reinvigorated.<sup>2</sup>

We can infer from this analysis that the process of “recognizing the boundaries of identity” also entails a recognition of the boundaries of peace and tolerance between peoples and social groups. While it is true that “recognizing the boundaries of identity” plays an important role in maintaining sustainable social cohesion, when it involves negative attitudes towards other communities - or overweening arrogance about one’s own – peace and tolerance will be placed in jeopardy.

### 3) Extremism and violence

Extremism and violence are the main challenges facing the values of peace and tolerance in the world of today. Extremism can take on many forms - the capitalist system which is an adjunct of globalisation has produced some historically unprecedented versions – but we can clearly identify four types:

- Political extremism, reflected in the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe, which led to a world war and millions of deaths. This type of

<sup>1</sup> See J Tomlinson: *Globalization and Cultural Identity*, The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 275.

extremism really belongs to the past, but it still rears its head from time to time in various countries and guises.

- Ideological extremism, associated with the emergence of totalitarian political systems which, while achieving notable successes in industrialising and modernising their countries, were guilty of extreme repressive practices against their own peoples. Examples of this are the Cultural Revolution in China and, even more notably, Stalin's victims in the former Soviet Union.

- Racial extremism, based on creedal or political myths and prejudices and involving various forms of occupation and repression, as – for example – in the case of Zionist extremism, whose followers stole the Land of Palestine and killed, violated and dispersed its inhabitants. (Another example is the extreme racism that stripped the Africans of their land, exploited their labour and discriminated against them in numerous different ways, as happened in South Africa and Zimbabwe during the colonial era.)

- Religious extremism. This - the most modern form of extremism – has been created by capitalist globalisation and is characterised by the Islamic and Christian extremism we see in the world of today.

An historical analysis of these types of extremism will show us that the world, which ostensibly calls for peace and tolerance (the United Nations and its bodies were set up at the end of the Second World War to promote peace and goodwill between peoples), continues to generate a range of different types of extremism which are totally incompatible with the values of peace and tolerance. Numerous studies on extremism have shown that extremist groups use every available means in order to strengthen their solidarity in the face of their external enemies.<sup>1</sup> Consequently it becomes a case of “us” against the “other” – every “other” being regarded as an enemy to a greater or a lesser degree. In such a situation peace becomes almost impossible to achieve.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Wintrobe: *Rational Extremism: The Political Economy of Radicalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, Ch. 2.



The disintegrative forces of globalisation have been unable to defeat extremism, despite having been able to penetrate some of these groups and influence their ideas. Rather than breaking up those groups, the usual outcome is that they turn to violence towards their (supposed) enemies in order to reinforce the sense of solidarity between their members. Undeterred by the threat of punishment, these groups are not afraid to lose their lives for the sake of the Cause – as we see from the readiness with which extremists are prepared to blow themselves up.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of this may be even more serious. Firstly, it may cause the spread of extremism; the very process of trying to prevent extremism can encourage others to support the targeted extremist groups and heighten awareness of “cultural boundaries”, and secondly, the extremist groups may be more inclined to resort to violence or counter-violence.

The situation is exacerbated by the globalised economic system, which creates ever increasing poverty and deprivation; this explains why researchers are inclined to see a link between it and rising levels of extremism and violence, particularly in poor countries.<sup>2</sup> However, the kind of violence that we see in poor countries is not only inspired by extremism, since there are also a range of political and social factors involved, which may be expressed in violence against a ruling political system or reflected in ordinary crime levels.

Here we should perhaps note that, while globalisation threatens peace and tolerance at a global level, the challenges it poses at a local level may be even more challenging.

## Conclusion

Although many centuries have now passed since Socrates put forward his argument in favour of virtue, the ideal of virtue is still alive today. Ever since the time of Socrates there have been empires with their own versions of globalisation, kingdoms and states have risen and fallen, and today we

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. Chs. 5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of these studies see Richard Sandbrook, David Bomano: *Globalisation, Extremism and Violence in Poor Countries*, in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, 2004, pp. 1030-1077.

have a modern form of globalisation on the Western model. Under the present system, which has been imposed on the world through the tools of direct and indirect imperialism, we find a jumble of juxtapositions and contradictions of a kind the world has never witnessed before.

In this paper we have cited the example of Socrates as we try to understand the challenges of achieving peace and tolerance in the globalisation era. The world has changed a lot since his day, but the paradoxical situation he described is still here: a global consumerist society arrogant in its material development and arrogant in the way the strong oppress the weak – a society of conflict and alienation between man and man in which peace and tolerance are under serious threat. It is against the background of this welter of contradictions that voices are raised in an appeal for a “humane globalisation” based upon peace, tolerance and mutual love and understanding instead of injustice and aggression.

Today we have the example of Socrates before us in a Socrates-less world.