The Dilemma of Human Rights in the Context of Contemporary Globalization

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Abstract
This article examines the complex issue of human rights within the context of contemporary globalization, a debate that has become one of the most challenging intellectual and political questions of our time. The study focuses on the contradiction between the universal discourse of human rights—which claims global applicability—and the cultural and political hegemonic practices exercised by major powers in the name of these values. This tension reflects the imposition of a single Western model that overlooks the diversity and particularities of other societies. The article aims to analyze the crisis of the Westerncentric foundation of human rights and to reveal how this concept has shifted from a purely human value to an ideological tool employed to serve political and cultural interests. Its significance lies in shedding light on the selective and politicized application of human rights and in emphasizing the need to reassess their philosophical foundations to ensure fairness and moral credibility. Adopting a critical analytical approach, the study traces the Western intellectual roots of human rights within Enlightenment philosophy and the social contract tradition. It then examines the transformation of the concept under globalization and analyzes its political and cultural instrumentalization. The findings show that globalization has not achieved justice or equality as often claimed; instead, it has deepened social and cultural disparities, while the universalist discourse of human rights is frequently used to legitimize Western cultural dominance. The article contributes a critical perspective that calls for an alternative humanistic framework grounded in intercultural dialogue and a balanced relationship between cultural particularity and universal ethical principles. Such a framework would help develop a genuinely moral and inclusive conception of human rights—one that transcends hegemonic tendencies and better reflects the diversity of human experience.
Keywords: Human Rights, Globalization, Cultural Hegemony, Universalism Enlightenment Thought, Socia Contract, Intercultural

Introduction
The contemporary world is witnessing unprecedented transformations in its modern

history—changes reflected in the growing complexity of international relations and in the deepening economic, technological, and cultural interconnectedness among nations and societies. These transformations have not only reshaped the geopolitical landscape but have also redefined the theoretical questions central to the social sciences, particularly those related to identity, power, cultural hegemony, and the universality of norms. Globalization, as both a lived reality and an intellectual construct, represents the primary framework within which these debates unfold. It transcends political and cultural boundaries, imposes new patterns of interaction, and positions individuals and societies within a rapidly shifting global order where concepts such as sovereignty, citizenship, and collective identity are constantly renegotiated.

Within this broader global and theoretical context, the discourse on human rights occupies a pivotal place. The modern idea of human rights often celebrated as one of the greatest achievements of Enlightenment thought emerged from Europe's internal struggles against feudalism, religious authority, and absolute monarchy. Rooted in a specific historical and philosophical milieu, it embodied the triumph of individual autonomy over institutional domination, the elevation of reason over guardianship, and the assertion of freedom against coercion. Yet with the rise of globalization, this historically situated concept was gradually transformed into a "universal" standard promoted by dominant Western powers, often without sufficient attention to the cultural, religious, and civilizational diversity that characterizes human societies.

This shift has generated a profound intellectual and moral tension that lies at the heart of contemporary social science debates: How can norms grounded in a particular cultural experience acquire universal legitimacy without erasing difference or perpetuating dominance? Does globalization truly expand the universality of human rights, or does it merely universalize a Western centric model under the guise of moral principles? These questions reflect a broader scholarly concern with the asymmetries of power in global norm diffusion and the potential instrumentalization of human rights in international politics.

With the advent of the twenty-first century, the idea of human rights has become subject to renewed scrutiny both within and beyond the Western world. Postmodernist thinkers, critical theorists, and antilocalization movements in the West have questioned the rational foundations of modernity, the coherence of liberal narratives of freedom and equality, and the gap between proclaimed principles and actual geopolitical practices. Meanwhile, intellectual voices across the Islamic, Asian, and African worlds have challenged the assumption that Western liberalism can serve as a universal template, calling instead for frameworks that recognize civilizational plurality and cultural particularities. These debates have reinvigorated discussions about the nature of universality itself whether it is an inclusive human ideal or a tool of epistemic hegemony.

Consequently, the contemporary discourse on human rights is situated at a complex intersection of universality and particularity, idealism and strategic interests, ethical vision and political reality. While globalization claims to promote shared human values, empirical realities often reveal the use of these values to justify political intervention, impose cultural and economic models, and reinforce neoliberal market logics that reduce the human being to a commodity. This tension underscores an essential theoretical question: Are human rights

an expression of innate human dignity, or are they socially constructed norms shaped by historical forces and power relations? And if they are to serve as a genuinely universal standard, how can they be reformulated to reflect—not override—the diversity of the human experience?

The predicament of human rights in the age of globalization thus reflects a deeper crisis in the foundational structure upon which the modern concept rests. Dominant powers that claim to champion freedom and equality often simultaneously pursue economic and strategic agendas that exacerbate inequality, dependency, and social marginalization. In parallel, technological and digital advancements—once heralded as tools that would expand the horizons of liberty have ushered in new forms of surveillance, cultural homogenization, and psychological alienation, raising additional concerns about the future of human autonomy in the global age.

From this perspective, examining the human rights dilemma within contemporary globalization is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is an inquiry into the fate of the human being in a world that is increasingly unified materially yet fragmented morally. This study therefore seeks to position the research problem within its broader social and theoretical framework by engaging with ongoing scholarly debates on global norm diffusion, civilizational plurality, and the crisis of Western modernity. Central to this inquiry is the question of whether globalization can still serve as a platform for anticivilization dialogue and the construction of a shared ethical horizon, or whether it has become an ideological façade that masks deeper structures of domination. Exploring these issues provides a pathway to reenvisioning human rights through a model that integrates universality with cultural particularity one that aspires to a more just, humane, and balanced global order.

First: Globalization and Its Contemporary Manifestations
Globalization is one of the most defining phenomena of the current historical stage. It is not merely an economic slogan or a transient commercial movement, but rather a comprehensive historical process that affects all aspects of human life political, economic, cultural, technological, and legal. It is a multifaceted phenomenon with multiple dimensions in which material and symbolic factors intertwine, expressing a new phase in the evolution of global capitalism and its drive to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state toward an open global space in which distances shrink and barriers between nations and societies gradually disappear.

The Concept of Globalization
Many scholars define globalization as a complex historical process that reshapes the world into an interconnected network of relationships, in which the movement of goods, services, information, capital, and ideas intensifies across borders with minimal restrictions. From this perspective, globalization is an objective dynamic that pushes human societies to restructure their values, institutions, and systems in accordance with the logic of the global market and modern technology (Taqāl, 2021).

French thinker Edgar Morin argues that globalization represents "the reconstruction of the planet as a shared homeland for humanity," yet it simultaneously embodies a profound paradox: it unifies the world materially through the economy and communication, while

dividing it morally and culturally by deepening inequalities and imbalances among peoples (ʿAbd alMuṭṭalib, 2020).

The Multiple Dimensions of Globalization
Globalization is not merely an economic process; it is an integrated system that manifests across several interconnected fields:

Economic Dimension
Economic globalization constitutes the core of the contemporary phenomenon, exemplified in free trade, financial market liberalization, and the expansion of multinational corporations dominating key sectors such as energy, food, and communication. This dominance has led to vast concentrations of wealth in the hands of a small number of individuals and institutions, widening the gap between the Global North and South, as well as between the rich and poor within individual states (Ibn Bakhtī, 2022).

Technological and Communication Dimension
The digital and communication revolution has marked a qualitative shift in human history, as the world has become connected instantaneously through the internet and modern media. This has accelerated the flow of information and the exchange of ideas and values at unprecedented levels. However, this revolution has also generated new forms of cultural and cognitive domination, as technologically advanced countries increasingly control knowledge production and the shaping of global public opinion (alʿAdasānī, 2022).

Cultural Dimension
Communicational openness has facilitated cultural interaction and increased exchanges between civilizations. Yet it has also revealed a tendency toward "cultural homogenization" and the imposition of the Western model as the sole global standard. This has triggered defensive reactions from nonWestern cultures seeking to reaffirm their identities and preserve their particularities. Thus, cultural globalization has become a symbolic battleground between "identity" and "universality" (Khiṭāb, 2022).

Political and Legal Dimension
Globalization has contributed to restructuring the international system by reducing the authority of the nationstate in favor of international and regional institutions and transnational corporations. This shift has sparked extensive debates over the concepts of sovereignty, citizenship, and democratic legitimacy. It has also prompted attempts to establish "universal legal norms" that transcend national legislation under headings such as "international legitimacy," "humanitarian intervention," and the "responsibility to protect" (alḤaṭṭāb, 2022).

Social and Environmental Dimension
Globalization has produced new patterns of social and economic inequality, with wealth accumulating on one side while poverty and marginalization intensify on the other. Furthermore, unrestrained industrial and consumer expansion has contributed to global environmental crises threatening the planet's ecological balance, including global warming, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity (alʿĪsā, 2020).

The Fundamental Paradoxes of Contemporary Globalization
The complexity of globalization lies in its internal contradiction: on the one hand, it brings societies closer and opens new horizons for human cooperation; on the other, it reinforces mechanisms of domination through capitalist market forces and the media and cultural influence of major powers. Globalization today embodies two opposing tendencies:

- A unifying tendency that seeks to universalize the Western model and its political and economic values under the banner of "universality."
- A fragmenting tendency that pushes local identities and national cultures to resist and redefine themselves in response to "cultural penetration."

In many of its dimensions, globalization has shifted from a promise of liberation and integration to a system of globalized control, where values, knowledge, and social relations are subordinated to the logic of profit and competition, and where the human being is reduced to his economic role as a consumer or producer. As this logic expands, crises of values, identity, and justice intensify, making globalization a dualfaced phenomenon: it carries within it the potential for progress and prosperity, yet simultaneously entrenches alienation and dependency (Taqāl, 2021).

Second: The Problematic Nature of Human Rights in the Globalized Context
Historical Roots of the Concept
The idea of human rights traces back to modern European philosophy, which emerged amid the major transformations of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the political revolutions in Europe and America. It was the product of a long struggle against absolutist rule and ecclesiastical tyranny, expressing the triumph of the individual, reason, and the social contract over absolute authority. The 1776 American Declaration of Independence and the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen stand as the most prominent legal and political manifestations of this new worldview, which elevated liberty, equality, and fraternity to the status of universal principles (Bāzīd, 2023).

Yet the "universality" proclaimed by Enlightenment thinkers was, in reality, a partial universality, grounded in a specific European historical and cultural experience. It initially applied only to the "white European man," while colonized peoples, women, enslaved persons, and nonEuropeans were excluded from its scope. Thus, the idea of human rights that emerged as a product of Western modernity was inseparable from its particular philosophical, religious, and cultural foundations (Sulaymān, 2021).

The Crisis of Western Universality
With the rise of globalization in recent decades, the concept of human rights has faced a dual crisis in both theory and practice. On the one hand, intellectual movements within the West—such as postmodernism—have criticized the rationalist and centralist foundations of Western modernity, arguing that the Western humanrights discourse rests on exclusionary binaries: "the civilized human versus the backward other," and "the West versus the rest."

On the other hand, voices from outside the West—especially from the Islamic, Asian, and African worlds—have increasingly challenged the "universality" of these rights, calling for their reinterpretation in light of the cultural and civilizational specificities of each society (Saʿd alDīn, 2022).

Human rights have often been used as a political tool to justify intervention in the affairs of other states under slogans such as "defending freedom" and "promoting democracy," while grave violations committed by major powers themselves are overlooked. This creates a stark moral paradox: the Western rights discourse raises the banner of universalism and humanity, yet practices domination in their name.

The Tension between Universality and Particularity
The core dilemma lies in the fact that the Western formulation of human rights is grounded in the concept of an autonomous individual detached from community and nature—a liberal vision that elevates individual freedom as the highest value. In contrast, nonWestern cultures—such as Islamic, Confucian, Indian, and African traditions—are based on communitarian concepts that bind the individual to the community, to nature, and often to the sacred. Thus, what is considered in the West a "natural individual right" may be understood in other cultures as a social or religious value inseparable from a framework of duties and responsibilities (Bassiūnī, 2020).

Historical experience has demonstrated that advocating the "universality" of human rights in a Western mold overlooks the plural civilizational nature of humanity. Values that originate in a specific context cannot serve as a universal standard of justice and morality without either being emptied of substance or generating countercultural resistance. For this reason, new concepts have emerged in contemporary global thought—such as cultural relativism, intercivilizational dialogue, and plural humanism—as attempts to transcend the epistemic and moral monopoly exercised by Western centrality (Madafar, 2021).

From Rights to Interests: The Political Instrumentalization of Humanitarian Discourse
Within the new global order, "human rights" have frequently become a diplomatic pressure tool used to justify intervention, sanctions, and the shaping of international public opinion. While moral rhetoric is invoked in discourse, selective policies on the ground ignore violations when they are committed by Western allies or when they serve strategic and economic interests. American thinker Noam Chomsky has highlighted this paradox, remarking that "freedom in the American sense is the freedom to plunder; everything else is mere slogans" (Ibrāhīm, 2020).

This utilitarian use of human rights has stripped them of their moral sanctity and transformed them into an ideological instrument in the hands of powerful states. With the expansion of media and communication technologies, humanrights discourse has become part of a global battle over imagery and public opinion, where military and economic interventions are marketed as "humanitarian rescue operations." Thus, humanistic values themselves have been turned into symbolic commodities within the mechanisms of the market and cultural hegemony.

Toward Reconstructing the Concept
The real crisis facing the idea of human rights in the age of globalization does not lie in rejecting the concept itself, but in the urgent need to reshape it in a way that renders it more inclusive and genuinely human. Rather than serving as an expression of a single cultural model, human rights should reflect a pluralistic civilizational interaction that recognizes difference and derives its legitimacy from intercultural dialogue rather than unilateral

imposition. Consequently, building a renewed human rights framework requires transcending the fragmented vision that isolates the individual from society and nature, and moving instead toward a holistic perspective that links rights to duties, freedom to responsibility, and citizenship to global belonging (Bazeed, 2023).

The future of human rights depends on humanity's capacity to achieve a genuine balance between particularity and universality—where universality becomes an expression of shared values rather than civilizational dominance, and particularity becomes a space for mutual enrichment rather than isolationism. A form of globalization that reduces human beings to economic entities and exhausts nature in the name of progress cannot serve as a foundation for an authentic system of human rights (Sulayman, 2021). Today, humanity must rediscover itself and establish a human rights paradigm that integrates humanization, morality, and justice in the face of the logic of the market, profit, and exploitation.

Third: The Crisis of Universal Reference and the Duality of Human Rights Practice in the Global Order.

The Crisis of Universal Reference
The notion of universal reference in human rights is premised on the belief that a coherent system of moral values and principles can apply to all human beings, regardless of cultural, religious, or geographical affiliation. Yet in the contemporary age of globalization, this assumption faces a profound crisis, reflected in the collapse of philosophical and ethical consensus on the very concept of the "human," and in the emergence of intellectual and cultural pluralism that undermines the idea of a unified human model that the West sought to impose since the eighteenth century.

Modern universalism in human rights emerged from the European Enlightenment, which positioned the human as the center of the universe, reason as the criterion of truth, and individual freedom as the essence of human dignity. However, this universalism never fully liberated itself from Western centrism, which defined the human in culturally specific terms. The socalled "universal human" was, in reality, the European, white, male, liberal subject against whom all others were measured. NonWestern cultures remained, in the Western imagination, "margins" in need of refinement and civilization in the name of modernity and progress (Bassiouni, 2020).

In the current era of globalization, this bias is reinforced through softer yet more pervasive instruments—such as media, technology, international organizations, and multinational corporations—whose cultural and economic influence reproduces the Western paradigm in thought, consumption, politics, and education. Contemporary universalism has thus become a subtle tool of domination, imposed in the name of human values and practiced in the name of rights and justice, while concealing immense economic and geopolitical interests.

The Duality of Human Rights Practice
One of the most striking paradoxes of global human rights discourse is the deep divide between theory and practice. While major world powers proclaim the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, they simultaneously pursue policies that contradict these very principles.

For decades, the United States and the European Union have supported authoritarian or occupying regimes whenever such alliances served their economic or military interests. Meanwhile, the rhetoric of "human rights" has been selectively used to justify military intervention or impose sanctions on other states. Thus, what is presented as a universal moral principle is often wielded as a political instrument activated only when aligned with prevailing power dynamics (Sulayman, 2021).

American thinker Noam Chomsky has highlighted this contradiction, arguing that talk of freedom and human rights in U.S. foreign policy is meaningful only insofar as it serves market freedom and economic exploitation. Similarly, French philosopher Michel Foucault viewed Western rights discourse as part of the mechanisms of power and knowledge that dominate bodies and minds under the guise of ethics and humanity. Hence, what is promoted globally as a "world system of human rights" is, in fact, a system for managing and regulating inequalities in ways that sustain the interests of dominant powers.

From the "Universality" of Rights to the "Domination" of Values

This duality has led to the erosion of trust in Western human rights discourse and has fueled a wide civilizational critique questioning the legitimacy of its universal claims. How can human rights be meaningfully invoked in a world marked by wars, blockades, cultural erasure, and the extraction of resources—all in the name of democracy? And how can one justify ignoring the economic and social rights of millions in the Global South while championing "freedom of expression" and "political choice" in affluent Northern societies?

What we are witnessing today is an unequal globalization of rights: while certain individual rights are expanded in line with the Western model, collective rights—such as development, sovereignty, and national dignity—are increasingly marginalized. As a result, the "universality of human rights" becomes a form of symbolic domination that reproduces global inequalities by imposing a single cultural model as the standard of civility and modernity (Khattab, 2022).

The Implications of the Crisis for the International System

This intellectual and moral crisis is clearly reflected in the nature of contemporary international relations. Instead of serving as a foundation for building a more just and solidaristic world order, universal values have become an arena of contestation among great powers and a tool for legitimizing policies of domination and coercion. As a result, the credibility of international institutions—such as the United Nations and the Security Council—has eroded, as these bodies have repeatedly failed to uphold justice and equality among states, increasingly subjecting their decisions to power dynamics rather than the principles of international law (Al'Issa, 2020).

Moreover, the vast economic and technological disparities between the Global North and the Global South have rendered the application of human rights norms selective and uneven. While wealthy nations speak of "human rights," they simultaneously impose financial and trade policies that entrench poverty, dependency, and structural inequality in the South, depriving millions of people of the basic conditions of dignified life. Thus, we are confronted with a tragic paradox: the rhetoric of rights expands in discourse while shrinking in reality.

The Need for a New Humanistic Framework
Overcoming the crisis of universal reference and the duality of human rights practice requires reconstructing the global value system on more equitable and balanced foundations. Rather than imposing a single model in the name of universality, it is necessary to acknowledge the multiplicity of civilizational and religious references that enrich the human understanding of freedom, dignity, and justice. True universality does not entail universalizing Western values; it entails a shared commitment to higher human principles formulated through intercultural dialogue and grounded in the principle of equality among peoples (Khattab, 2022).

Furthermore, human rights cannot be reduced solely to their political and civil dimensions. They must also encompass economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, for humans do not live by freedom alone but require material dignity, social justice, and ecological security. Only then can globalization shift from a force of alienation and domination to a force of connection and humanization, restoring the human being to their rightful centrality as a rational, creative, and solidaristic agent.

Fourth: Toward a New Vision of Human Rights in a Multicivilizational World
The Need to Transcend the Monolithic Paradigm
The current crisis of human rights is not merely a crisis of implementation or legal compliance; it is a deeper epistemological and conceptual crisis concerning the very foundations upon which the idea rests and the civilizational outlook that shapes it. The historical experience of globalization has shown that imposing a single cultural model in the name of "universality" inevitably produces tension and conflict, as it overlooks the diversity of human experiences and the multiplicity of ways in which dignity, freedom, and justice are understood. It has therefore become imperative to move beyond the Western monolithic paradigm toward a more open and inclusive humanistic vision inspired by intercultural dialogue and the building of bridges among diverse particularities rather than erasing or marginalizing them (Al'Adsani, 2022).

Comparative studies in philosophy and anthropology have demonstrated that each civilization possesses its own value system expressing its unique understanding of the human being and existence. Difference, therefore, does not signify contradiction but complementarity. For example, Islamic thought emphasizes the principle of "human dignity" as an integrated concept that unites rights with duties and links freedom with responsibility. East Asian philosophies—such as Confucianism and Buddhism—highlight the communal and ethical dimensions of human existence in relation to nature and society. Western intellectual heritage, by contrast, stresses individuality, rationality, and citizenship. Synthesizing these diverse dimensions enables humanity to construct a comprehensive and consensual conception of human rights that transcends ideological rigidity and embraces creative pluralism.

Toward a Plural, Decentered Universality
The "new universality" that the world needs must not replicate the Enlightenment model of the eighteenth century, which was rooted in dominance and cultural superiority. Instead, it should be a plural, decentered universality that reaffirms the value of reciprocal civilizational exchange. Rather than deriving human rights norms from a single cultural center, they should

emerge from an equitable intercivilizational dialogue in which all major cultural traditions participate as equal partners, not subordinates (Ibn Bakhtī, 2022).

In this context, several contemporary thinkers—including Claude LéviStrauss, Roger Garaudy, and Mohammed Arkoun—have called for reexamining the philosophical foundations of modern universality and shifting from the paradigm of "cultural homogenization" to that of "civilizational exchange." Human beings can only be truly universal insofar as they preserve their particularities, for authentic universality is the common ground of diverse identities, not their negation. On this basis, human rights can be grounded in diversity and mutual respect rather than civilizational supremacy or Western centrism.

Integrating Economic, Environmental, and Social Dimensions
Contemporary experience has shown that limiting human rights to their civil and political dimensions is inadequate in a world marked by deepening social and environmental inequalities. Freedom of expression loses its meaning when individuals are denied access to food, housing, education, or a healthy environment. Human rights must therefore expand to incorporate economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights in order to guarantee human dignity and enable people to participate meaningfully in shaping their own destinies (Abd alMutalib, 2020).

In the age of economic and digital globalization, political authoritarianism is no longer the only threat to human wellbeing. New forms of alienation have emerged: marketdriven exploitation, consumerist dependency, technological surveillance, the commodification of data, and the accelerating destruction of nature. A new human rights framework must therefore include principles of environmental justice, the right to sustainable development, and the right to digital privacy—fundamental rights that safeguard both the planet and humanity.

Towards an Ethical and Participatory Humanism
Reconstructing the framework of human rights in a world of multiple civilizations necessitates a profound ethical and intellectual transformation in our perception of humanity itself. Rather than viewing the individual as an independent competitor solely pursuing selfinterest, humans should be seen as integrated beings in solidarity with other people and the environment that sustains them. This requires a return to the ethical dimension of human civilization, which links freedom with responsibility, knowledge with values, and progress with justice (AlTaqal, 2021).

Contemporary globalization has brought peoples closer materially, yet it has distanced them on a human level and weakened the sense of shared humanity. Therefore, the task of human thought today is to rehumanize globalization—transforming it from a purely economic and technological phenomenon into a humancentered project that places dignity and justice at its core. This can only be achieved by establishing a new universal ethic founded on understanding, tolerance, and participation rather than exclusion and superiority.

Conclusion
In light of the foregoing, it can be asserted that the dilemma of the concept of human rights under current globalization lies in the contradiction between its universal discourse and its

selective practices, as well as its failure to accommodate the civilizational plurality that forms the essence of humanity. Globalization, promoted as a stage of global integration, has in reality become a tool for reproducing economic and cultural hegemony.

Therefore, overcoming this predicament requires an intellectual and ethical revolution that redefines the very concept of the human being and constructs a new universality based on justice, equality, and mutual respect. The world does not need more written "rights," but rather a genuine human will that transforms these rights into a lived reality for every person, regardless of their origin, color, or culture.

The future of humanity depends on its ability to achieve this delicate balance between universality and particularity, between freedom and responsibility, and between humans and nature. Only when humanity succeeds in building a pluralistic universality that honors diversity and sanctifies life can it be said that human rights have been liberated from the confines of ideology and have become a shared right for all people—a symbol of dignity and a prerequisite for global peace.

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