Module 1

Preface to Global Civics

Global Civics, a worldwide movement that spans multiple religions, cultures, and nations, is based on a very simple idea. The idea is that we must understand civics – or the study of a citizen's rights and duties – not within the framework of the nation, but within the framework of the globe. Global civics, then, is a contract between citizens in an age of increasing interdependence between citizens living in separate nations, coming from different cultures, and holding unique religious beliefs.

Developed by the international scholar Hakan Altinay, Global Civics began with a book Altinay wrote entitled [*Global Civics: Responsibilities and Rights in an Interdependent World*]. Since the time of its publication, the book has been translated into several languages. A documentary based on the book was also made by the acclaimed Chinese director Jian Yi, entitled [Name of Documentary]. (The documentary is now available for viewing on YouTube.) Both the book and the documentary are a response to an increasingly interdependent global world, a response that asks us to search for new means of managing our commitments to each other. As such, it highlights the importance of considering a global perspective when we attempt to formulate solutions to political and civic matters.

Academics, social workers, and government officials alike have come to embrace the idea of Global Civics. In particular, some world leaders have offered their input on its relevance to the 21st century. Nobel Peace Laureate Kofi Annan explained how the idea of global civics could be taken up across an array of institutions. He writes, "[The] sense of interdependence, commitment to shared universal values, and solidarity among peoples across the world can be channeled to build enlightened and democratic global governance in the interests of all. I hope that universities and think tanks around the world will deploy their significant reservoirs of knowledge and creativity to develop platforms to enable students to study and debate these issues. This project [Global Civics] is a contribution toward that goal and I look forward to following it closely." (3)

As Kofi Annan describes the responsibility with which we must engage an increasingly interconnected world in the 21st century, his words resonate with what many Muslims have been familiar with since the 5th century. The idea that we are all responsible for one another because our livelihoods, resources, and histories are shared is one articulated by our beloved Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him): "Everyone is a guardian." (1) In Islam, it is our duty to realize that every one of us is a guardian of God's creation in the world. Everyone from the

child just entering adulthood, the student, the mother and the husband to the business owner, the worker, and the politician – all are responsible. Realizing such responsibility is the first step to creating a concrete platform for taking action.

Indeed, there are great moments in the history of Islam when the concept was employed in this way. The Muslim scholar Al-Ghazali highlighted the importance of *mahabbah* (love) in his philosophical writings on community. From *mahabbah*, Al-Ghazali derived the idea of *maslaha* (public good). According to *maslaha* one does not think merely of personal benefit when making a decision, but considers, more importantly, the decision's effect on and potential benefit for the public.

From the ideas developed by Al-Ghazali and others, a thriving civilization emerged more than a millennium ago. In the interim, discoveries were made in the natural sciences. In particular, the fields of medicine, astronomy, and engineering saw scientific revolutions over several centuries. To offer one example, the first scientist to discover that we see with our eyes because light enters the retina rather than leaves it was the 10th century Muslim polymath Ibn al-Haitham. An astronomer and mathematician, he also invented the first pinhole camera after noticing the way in which light came through the slits between window shutters. And the list goes on.

In addition to productive advancements in science, the era saw an unparalleled ethic of equality: community members from all three monotheistic faiths were appointed to important political positions. Muslims, Christians, and Jews were represented also in the cultural production of literature, music, and the arts at large. While under researched in current accounts of the era's history, the contribution of women was also remarkable. The standing ruler at the time, Caliph al Mamun, declared that reason and faith have come together in a harmonious coexistence.

As we celebrate this rich history, we must consider what the past teaches us about the future. What of our history can we bring into the present in order to make a better world? In thinking about global civics in relation to this question, we must consider that not all religions, cultures, and nations have an equal ability to influence how we move forward with a global civics, as well as the fact that, in today's world, a small number of countries have greater power than others. Thus, in formulating a true global civics, we must take into account these power differences in order to make sure that the under-represented groups have a voice.

We must not forget that we are in a place of privilege as we introduce, call for, and begin the process of realizing the content of a harmonious existence. We must recognize that there is, on the one hand, the rhetoric of love and forgiveness, and, on the other hand, the way in which such rhetoric is always at a distance from concrete reality. A quick glance at any newspaper today reveals the way in which love and forgiveness have been denied to entire populations, especially in the Middle East and South Asia. In those contexts, the term "democratization" is often used as a cover for economic and political exploitation. The question for us to think critically and ethically about then becomes: how does offering love and forgiveness to a certain individual, group, or nation deny it to others? In light of this question, we can ask another: how can we create a system of checks and balances such that those who are denied love and forgiveness have the chance to demand their rights?

In relation to science, there are further considerations. At the outset, we must acknowledge that, while science can be used towards productive and humanistic ends, it can also be used – and has been used throughout history – towards the exploitation of natural resources, as well as great violence against humanity. We do not have to go far back in history to remember the effect of nuclear weaponry on millions of people during the Second World War, as well as the constant threat of chemical warfare. Recent history shows us, indeed, that as long as nations consider only their interests, then there will always be mutual animosity between nations with advanced weapons. Global Civics seeks to undermine those national boundaries by considering not what is good for any one particular nation, but rather what is good for the citizens of all nations. In doing so, Global Civics seeks to preserve an important aspect of our common humanity.

Because of these considerations, Global Civics will end up functioning differently between developed and developing countries. An American scientist at an engineering firm that creates military aircrafts, for instance, must assume a different form of responsibility from a social worker Pakistan whose home was demolished by a weapon created by that firm. The scientist must be responsible for rethinking his or her work after learning from the social worker about his or her work's effect on others. In the name of Global Civics, an economically privileged Western citizen has a responsibility towards a disenfranchised non-Western citizen. We must be wary, though, of Western initiatives that impose their particular standards on foreign contexts. The goal of Global Civics, then, is to improve the quality of humanity across power differences while remaining sensitive to what each context asks for in its own terms.

The ethic of the Fetzer Institute, which is committed to the humanistic values of love and forgiveness, offers an interesting model to follow. One facet of the institute's mission is nurturing the responsibility towards others. A theme Fetzer

emphasized in its most recent conference is responsibility in the realm of the natural sciences: "As scientists and residents of Earth, we also are acutely aware that ours is a fragile planet… It is our responsibility to extend our love beyond personal needs and maintain these resources with every effort toward their sustainability. We therefore call for a more profound understanding of the scientific basis of love and forgiveness, as essential knowledge, allowing us to meet the challenges of the 21st century and beyond."

In this book on global civics, we have the chance to come together and think about how scientific research and responsibility intersect. Scientific research, after all, is premised in creating concrete solutions to complex problems. Because of this, science will likely play a pivotal role in helping Global Civics realize itself. Research in Biology and Environmental Studies allows us to understand, for instance, the overarching concerns that humanity faces today, from the effect of carbon monoxide and corporate pollution on the environment to the effect of resource and water scarcity on the livelihoods of children around the world. More than simply identifying problems, scientific research has the capacity to provide the keys to unlocking the door to these complex issues.

At the end of the day, we must remember that, while it is easy to say that humans are interconnected, it is more difficult to agree on exactly how. This is why the idea of a global civics is daunting. We may agree in the abstract, but developing a concrete framework between people who have never met each is a complicated procedure that might be jeopardized if not enough voices are heard. This is why, more than anything, this book asks you to join the conversation. How we manage our increasing interdependence, while continuing to face obstacles that make understanding difficult, is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Pursing it in the Middle East, which has been largely absent from this challenge, is now more important than ever.

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The World We Live In

Any attempt to start to think about a global civics needs to commence with establishing a baseline and a balance sheet about the world we live in. The United Nations and the World Bank have extensive data that are available online for anyone's perusal. Penguin

Group USA publishes a *State of the World Atlas* series, which presents some of that data in a visually comfortable format.[1] In the same vein there is also *The Global Citizen's Handbook*.[1] Websites such as gapminder.org allow for interactive inquiries.

The World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) and World Public Opinion (www.worldpublicopinion.org) can provide answers on what people in different parts of the world think on a wide range of issues. The World Values Survey has the added advantage of having completed five rounds, which allows one to track over time critical changes, such as support for gender equality across the globe. It also has a user-friendly interface that allows nonspecialists to analyze their vast database with remarkable ease.

Contextualizing where we are also requires us to grasp where we have been. There are too many histories of the world to choose from here. Each group can identify a couple for themselves. However, omitting Angus Maddison's work on the broad historical trends in the world economy would be a significant loss[1].

We have an understandable tendency to assume that their own reality—likely to be urban and modern—is the dominant lifestyle. However, we need to be reminded that other realities exist. Ron Fricke's film *Baraka* (1993) should be a part of all global civics viewing lists; it is a remarkable visual presentation of human diversity and would serve as a helpful challenge to default assumptions[1]. Similarly, Richard Nisbett's book *The Geography of Thought* is a powerful reminder that formidable intellectual traditions and cognitive frameworks outside the Western tradition exist and need to be taken very seriously.[1] As we recognize different intellectual traditions, a key question emerges: To what extend can we know the predicament of the other? Paul Haggis film *Crash* (2005)

presents that very real dilemma. Any thoughtful discussion regarding global civics would be lacking if it did not face up to this issue honestly.

From the book Global Civics by Hakan Altany

The birth of Global civics:
"There is a story of sorts behind the idea of Global civics: I happened to be on a sabbatical when the last Israel-Lebanon war broke out. I was looking into global governance proposals at the time, and it struck me how incapable our existing frameworks were in responding to a generic, diffuse, and nevertheless powerful aspirations for a better world, and I decided to think and work outside the box. My hunch was that we had ask bigger and fresher questions. I came across social science scholarship that were asking similar questions. Yale and Brookings were interested in this line of inquiry and offered me fellowships. I did couple papers in 2010, the book in 2011, and the documentary in 2012. The Academy came in 2013." Hakan Altany

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[1]. See Dan Smith, *The Penguin State of the World Atlas*, 8th ed. (New York: Penguin, 2008).

[1]. World Bank, *The Global Citizen's Handbook: Facing Our World's Crises and Challenges* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

[1] Angus Maddison, *The World Economy* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2006)

[1] A similar work is *Earth from Above* by Yann Arthus-Bertrand. Much of the stunning photography is also available at www.yannarthusbertrandgalerie.com

[1]. Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).