

Book Review

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking World Order*, New York: Free Press, 1997, pp. 367; Index bibliography. Price: £ 9.99; ISBN 0-7432-3149-X;

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This book examines what will happen in the new world order which followed the end of the bipolar Cold War. The author argues that we are now in a multi-polar world – an end to the era of ideology. No longer will people construct their identity based on ideology. The question “who are we?” appears to be pivotal. People try to answer this question based on culture (religion, language, history, and tradition). According to Huntington, in the new world order, an emerging culture and identity-based conflict or “clash of civilizations” will occur, and then a global war will take place, that is a war among religions of different civilizations.

In this review, I will examine Huntington’s treatise in terms of emerging key issues and events that either undermine or reinforce the writer’s arguments. First issue is the date of the book. It appears that eleven years after its publication the book has not been revised in spite of dramatic events engulfing the world, and no new chapters have been added. Since 1997, many events have occurred in the world, the most important one being the 9/11 attack of the World Trade Center in New York at the heart of a key actor in the world politics (USA). The attackers were identified as to Muslims from developing countries. The adoption of the so-called “War on Terror” by the USA and her allies, and the invasion of two Muslim states (Afghanistan and Iraq) spectacularly prove Huntington’s theory. However, the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the western states in particular, in the wake of recent war in Georgia, nuclear program of Iran, and finally North Korea’s dismantlement of its nuclear program – after a protracted negotiation with the USA to remove North Korea from its terrorist list – are events that raise many new questions about the efficacy of Huntington’s “clash of civilizations”. In the particular case of US-North Korea stand-off, it seems to be case that the so-called “Clash of civilization” can be negotiated, even resolved. Thus, it is high time Huntington considers revising – indeed, rewriting – his book.

Second, methodologically Huntington used a constructivist approach in explaining identity. Therefore, he emphasizes on human meaning and social structure to construct new identity in one hand, and, on the other, to explain relationships between different religions and civilizations in the post-Cold War era. He examines the dialectical relationships in international politics to expose the way in which contrasting narratives of religions are

constructed in the definition of self and others, or the othering. In fact, Huntington uses religion as a main source of identity for nation-states. Moreover, he considers religion as a central issue in international relations. This issue paves the way for my next criticism.

The third problem is, Huntington takes a reductionism approach in his explanations of the world after the collapse of the USSR. He ignores all other factors such as economy and the impact of Information Communication technology (ICTs) in defining international relations. Related to the pivotal role of economy and ICTs, another important factor, which the author ignores, is the environmental problems - especially ozone depletion and global warming. These shared problems make different states in the world come together rather than “clash”. Therefore, religious reductionism ridicules Huntington’s interpretation of a world, which is increasingly characterized by interconnectivity. In particular, Huntington’s conceptualization of “fault line of different civilizations” is highly skewed toward culture, ethnicity and identity – not economy, technology and environment.

A fourth limitation of Huntington’s treatise is an assumed cultural superiority of the West – an assault on *Cultural Relativism*. The author believes that western culture is superior to non-western civilizations. Though Huntington uses the constructive method, he contradicts his methodology by emphasizing the superiority of the western culture on non-western cultures especially the Islamic culture. Therefore, he recognizes other cultures in negative ways. In other words, he considers the diversity of cultures as the challenge to the western cultures, especially when other cultures such as Islam and Confucianism (China) are perceived as aiming to capture influence in the international arena. Furthermore, Huntington cautioned western nationals to stop migrating out of the West because of the diffusive influence of other cultures on western culture within western societies. Actually, this is xenophobic. In my point view, Huntington is seeking to expand the concept of “cultural shock” to international level. According to the author, religion is the vital element of culture so that the concept of culture is more likely to mean religion. For instance, he calls for the exclusion the Greeks from western cultures simply because they are Orthodox not Catholic or Protestant and, further, Greeks are not Anglo-Saxons. In this case, he ignores all influences of Greek civilization on Western civilization. Overall, the author is absolutely against the motto of tolerance, which in my view celebrates the relativist expression “we are equally different”.

A fifth limitation of Huntington’s book is that isolationism and antagonism are consistently emphasized in the book. In order to reinforce western power, Huntington calls for the fortification of the West – that is, a conscious drawing of a political frontier between “western civilization” and others. So that, Western enemies (Muslim countries, China, even Japan) should be seen as threat to the west, and will responsible for any failure of the West in the future.

Nevertheless, the book offers very strong arguments about the resurgence of Islam and Chinese civilizations; Islamic revivalism is about to pervade Muslim societies. He argues that there are many reasons behind the resurgence of the Islamic civilization such as rapid growth of population, economic growth, education etc. Furthermore, the book offers very novel

argument about world politics and the construction of the new identity. In this sense the author has achieved his aim.

It is apt to end this review with a reference to the former president of Iran, Muhammad Khatamy, who provided a cogent response to Samuel Huntington. In his famous book *Dialogue among Civilization*, Muhammad Khatamy calls all religions to dialogue especially Islam and Christianity. Finally, Khatamy adopts optimistic method about civilizations, while, Huntington adopts the pessimistic method. Khatamy agrees a very fundamental point, which is that, it is true that west has controlled technology products but east is origin source of all religions. The west provides material needs for world but east has provided spiritual dimension (available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue_Among_Civilizations).