

# Culture clash

Simon Bromley

**A**lmost as soon as the Cold War framework of Western and United States foreign policy began to dissolve in the early 1990s, the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and such conservative periodicals as *The National Interest* and *The Atlantic Monthly* began to feature articles about 'The West and the Rest', 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', and 'The Coming Anarchy'. Not to be outdone, and ever-ready to distil the conservative preoccupations of the US foreign policy elite into the sedulous prose of academic political science, in the summer of 1993 Samuel Huntington published his now famous article, 'The Clash of Civilizations', in *Foreign Affairs*. He has now expanded, modified and embellished the original argument into a sustained meditation on the new conjuncture of global politics in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

*The Clash of Civilizations* has been widely acclaimed by figures such as Kissinger, Brzezinski and Fukuyama, and it has been respectfully, if not uncritically, reviewed in such liberal journals as the *New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*. The attention that Huntington has received once again attests to his unparalleled ability to articulate and popularize a certain conservative common sense, but to do so by engaging in an apparently meaningful dialogue with the political adversaries of that common sense. It is above all this timely capacity to play to the gallery, to resonate widely with friend and foe, that has marked Huntington's career ever since his rise to fame in the year of the Tet Offensive, with the publication of *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). For while Huntington has played only a relatively minor role in the formulation of US foreign policy as compared with his near contemporaries at Harvard, Kissinger and Brzezinski, he has risen to the presidency of the American Political Science Association and has had a distinguished academic career.

In his new book Huntington puts these personal and political attachments to work in attempting to develop a new doctrine for Western, and specifically US, foreign policy after the Cold War. The striking claim at the centre of Huntington's argument is that the bipolar world of superpower ideological rivalry is being replaced by the clash of civilizations: 'Bosnia is everyone's Spain.' Global politics is still primarily a world of power politics among states, but states, especially the core ones of each major civilization, are increasingly bandwagoning with their cultural kin and balancing against the cultural other. In turn, this claim is elaborated in two contrasting registers which are not always coherently orchestrated, and it is in the ensuing discordance that the real meaning of Huntington's message may be heard. On the one hand, he advances a series of linked propositions about the importance of civilizations in human history and the current rise of what he sees as civilizational consciousness. On the other, he is con-

cerned to diagnose the predicament of one particular civilization: the West. And in the end, it is a deeply conservative rendition of the Western predicament that dictates the overall composition of Huntington's argument and the new doctrine flowing from it.

### **Modernization and the West**

To begin with, Huntington draws a sharp distinction between the processes of 'modernization' (economic and technological development, growing social differentiation and popular mobilization, state-building and nation-formation), and the cultural attributes of 'Westernization' (individualism, secularism, notions of universal human rights, the rule of law, and pluralist forms of representation). In the shadow of the rise to global dominance of the West, countries have three choices: they may resist both Westernization and modernization (parts of Africa?), though this is not a long-term option; they may attempt to modernize by Westernizing (Turkey and Japan, Russia and Mexico); and they may modernize without significant Westernization (China and the contemporary Islamic world). According to Huntington, the latter path is increasingly the dominant one: 'In fundamental ways, the world is becoming more modern and less Western.' Huntington suggests that this is clearly the case for those societies currently modernizing as the West's power declines: 'The revolt against the West was originally legitimated by asserting the universality of Western values; it is now legitimated by asserting the superiority of non-Western values.' He also suggests that it is increasingly true even for those societies which originally modernized in the era of Western dominance: 'Initially, Westernization and modernization are closely linked, with the non-Western society absorbing substantial elements of Western culture and making slow progress towards modernization. As the pace of modernization increases, however, the rate of Westernization declines and the indigenous culture goes through a revival. Further modernization then alters the civilizational balance of power between the West and the non-Western society and strengthens commitment to the indigenous culture.'

Next, Huntington argues that the illusion that modernization was synonymous with Westernization merely reflected the temporary ascendancy of Western power in European imperialism and US hegemony; that a 'universal civilization can only be the product of universal power'; and that as the dynamism of Asian (predominantly Chinese) economic and Islamic demographic growth rates overwhelm those of the West, so Western universalism will increasingly be seen – and rightly so, in Huntington's neat accommodation with the self-conceptions of his foes – as Western arrogance: 'The dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness.' Moreover, Huntington maintains that there is an internal, domestic corollary to this false and immoral identification of Western values as universal: by denying its uniqueness in the face of internal challenges from strangers in its midst, the West is in danger of being undermined by 'problems of moral decline, cultural suicide, and political disunity'.

### **Universal chauvinism or liberal universalism?**

Who are these strangers? In Europe they are the Muslims; in the United States they are the Black and the Hispanic populations. Huntington's ultimate concern is with the USA, and what he presents as the multicultural challenge to its identity as a part of Western civilization: 'If the United States is de-Westernized [by non-White multiculturalism], the West is reduced to Europe ... a minuscule and declining part of the world's population on a small and inconsequential peninsula at the extremity of the Eurasian land mass.'

Huntington's diagnosis has given as much comfort to conservatives at home as it has to those proclaiming their cultural peculiarity abroad. For all its resonance, however, the argument is not only false, but also ugly and pernicious. As his

liberal critics have noted, Huntington's argument is false because cultures are not unified, closed totalities centred upon univocal religious doctrines, but are rather multiform, open and contested – subject to interpretation and contestation in relation to different interests and contexts. Indeed, Huntington's own attempt to portray the conflicts and issues of contemporary international politics is in fact remarkably conventional: it is all about the control of territory, peoples, sea lanes, markets, military capability, etc., with cultural alignments being mobilized as means to these ends. Nowhere does Huntington actually identify a significant conflict over culture.

More importantly, however, Huntington's schema of a bipolar world characterized by ideological division being replaced by a multi-polar civilizational order is radically insufficient to make sense of the contours of contemporary global politics. What he spectacularly fails to explain is what 'the rise of the West' and the response to it have all been about. Though the 'revolt against the West' began before the First World War, it was essentially a post-Second World War phenomenon and, as such, intersected in complex ways with the Cold War. Important as this latter conflict was, however, it was not the only development of major international significance. At least as important were two other developments, each very closely related to the other: namely, the reconstruction of the unity of the capitalist world market and its increasing expansion on a global scale; and the generalization of state sovereignty as *the* political form of the modern international system. These developments, though Western in (geographical) origin, are now universal in scope, if uneven in penetration. (Indeed, it was the very *strength* of the consolidation of these forms of economic and political power in their capitalist forms on a global scale that rendered the communist challenge redundant in the long run.)

Throughout this epoch attempts to foster economic growth and consolidate legitimate political authority across the national territory have been the fixed points around which the politics of the South have turned, both domestically and internationally. Within this matrix of developmental possibilities, the forms of ideological or cultural imaginings are now, of necessity, predominantly nationalist. In this context, the 'religious' revival that Huntington and others read as a sign of the weakening of national identification, and as a rise of 'kin-country' international politics, is nothing of the sort. On the contrary, both domestically and internationally, these movements represent a fundamental continuity with the postwar co-ordinates of development noted above: they re-present *new* forms of a basically *nationalist* project. This can be seen in a number of ways once we move beyond the incipiently racist imaginings of Huntington and others ('race' has now become 'culture').

In relation to the Islamic world, for example, Huntington's optic is an instance of the temptation, in Sami Zubaida's helpful phrase, to 'read history backwards', 'seeing the current "revival" as the culmination of a line of development of Islamic politics, rather than as the product of recent combinations of forces and events'. Domestically, the fact is that the dominant literate discourses of the Middle East have been



local adaptations of the social and political thought of the West, and 'Islam' (which is neither a culture nor a civilization, but a religion, and like all religions is socially indeterminate) has only ever prospered as a *political* force when it has adapted to their terrain; *political* Islam was born when it adapted to the matrix framed by the sovereign state, to nationalism (see, especially, Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* [1993] and Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* [1993]). Equally, internationally, there is precious little that is pan- about the advent of political Islam. Of course, there are demonstration effects; there is mutual interference in the 'internal' affairs of other states; there is money (mostly Saudi) flowing around; and so on. Cross-border co-operation between co-religionists is not only strikingly rare; even where it does occur, it is based not on general feelings of mutual religiosity, but on specific political calculations of interest and advantage. As to Huntington's thesis of a Sino-Islamic alliance against the West, perhaps the least said, the better – since the most powerful military state in the world seeks to limit the acquisition of military technology by China and Iran, why do we need to invoke civilizational considerations to explain their co-operation in military matters?

### **A gathering racism?**

Huntington makes much of what Ronald Dore has called the 'second generation indigenization phenomenon' – the turning away from Western secular ideologies towards indigenous religions and cultures by the masses and second-generation, post-independence elites. In Huntington's reading, multiculturalism in the West represents exactly the same phenomenon. This is undoubtedly a powerful and important development, but the image of a return to an indigenous culture is misleading, since what is mobilized is invariably a reworked version of the old, more or less appropriate to the circumstances of the new. And, as Dore has himself pointed out, to the extent that this second-generation culture cannot cope with the demands of modernization, which in popular terms now includes many of the freedoms that Huntington takes to be specifically Western, it is in turn rejected or reworked by the subsequent generations. To that extent, the culture of the West has become global and universal: conflicts and negotiations around individual rights (including freedom of thought), the rule of law, and pluralist forms of politics are now present within all civilizations. Huntington simply refuses to listen to these voices in other places, preferring to indulge the siren calls of cultural chauvinism.

In an exactly parallel fashion, Huntington presents multiculturalism within the West (particularly in the United States) as an attempt to reject the West's cultural heritage and to overthrow its liberal political arrangements. A more convincing interpretation, one more ready to engage with these new voices in the spirit of liberal tolerance and negotiation, would see them as attempts to expand and develop the freedoms of Western societies to incorporate all, and not just their White, people. Again, Huntington refuses to attend to these voices; refuses to recognize the legitimate claims of peoples who are not cultural others, but who are for the most part simply involved in the continuing attempt to elaborate and expand notions of rights and freedoms on a more inclusive, universalist basis. Against this, Huntington would have conservatives in the West make themselves the implicit allies of illiberal authoritarians in the rest of the world – and in the name of what? Well, in defence of the inherited position of the Whites in the United States. In sum, Huntington advocates an inversion of the liberal combination of universalism abroad and multiculturalism at home to give us universal White domination at home and an inter-civilizational *modus vivendi* among diverse chauvinisms abroad.

When, early in his career, Huntington advocated the mass bombing of the rural peasantry in Vietnam to drive them into the urban areas of government control, one of his colleagues remarked that the trouble with Sam was that he didn't know the difference between pacification and genocide. It is a sobering comment on the reaction of

conservative America to its loss of ideological bearings after the certainties of the Cold War that *The Clash of Civilizations* concludes with Huntington now being unable to tell the difference between the *realpolitik* remaking of world order and a racist attack on some of the better aspects of Western liberalism.

## DELEUZE GUATTARI & MATTER

18-19/10/1997 Philosophy Dept, University of Warwick

An invitation to submit papers addressing the specificity of the DeleuzeGuattarian contribution to the reformulation of a philosophy of matter. We are looking for papers to address this issue from a number of different perspectives, with the aim of producing a research programme that sharply demarcates the DeleuzeGuattarian project and the enquiries that it initiates from other emergent critical apparatuses.

A philosophy of matter is produced out of pragmatic engagement with DeleuzeGuattari's many headed critique of hylomorphism, atomism, and what in general can be called 'identity theory', theories such as mechanics and energetics, where matter is flatlined under the prerogative of the physical. These lines of attack, and the concern to circumvent representation (the challenge thrown down to "signifier enthusiasts") combine with the attempt to create an immanent grounding of the flows of energetic materiality, a concern less with "a matter submitted to laws than a materiality possessing a *nomos*" (CS 2 508/408).

It will not be a question of making matter the matter of philosophy, but of constituting philosophy as immanent to matter in every case. To flesh philosophy out with zones of materiality is, we think, to take an impetus from DeleuzeGuattari, to make of philosophy a pragmatics. It is a question of free energy, what can be done with the materials synthesised by DeleuzeGuattari?

Zones of engagement include:

- code ▪ hylomorphism ▪ intensity ▪ machinic propositions
- *nomos/praxis* ▪ number: ordinality/cardinality: production
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Abstracts of up to 500 words, and any other queries, should be sent before 15 August by email to:

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