Countering the Clash of Civilization Discourse: A Critical Analysis of Huntington's Reductive Cultural Argument

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to highlight the cultural fault line in Huntington's thesis, 'The Clash of Civilizations'. Huntington proposed his thesis in 1996, after the end of the Cold War, arguing that the conflicts in the contemporary world will be based on cultural identities. However, this research work presents a counter discourse to this reductive argument in the light of Said's (1978) idea of identity and argues that culture, solely, is not responsible for the contemporary conflicts in the world. The primary reason for such cultural conflicts is the power politics for which these conflicts are constructed. The research is qualitative in nature. The data have been collected through content analysis method and have been analysed in the light of the idea of identity as proposed by Said (1978). Said argues that identity is a construct and is always associated with power politics. Through analysis and discussion it has been concluded that culture is simply not the reason behind contemporary conflicts, the reason behind these conflicts is power politics, i.e. the establishing of the relations of domination over the weaker groups or nations.

Keywords*: Countering, Clash of civilizations, Culture, Critical analysis, Reductive, Argument*

INTRODUCTION

Huntington's the Clash of Civilizations, first published in 1993 as an article and later in 1996 as a book, has sparked controversies and heated discussion, both in the academia and the political institutions. The controversies mainly relate to the fault lines mentioned by Huntington, i.e. the inter-civilizational clashes among nations. Ironically the thesis itself contains fault lines, the flaws, the loopholes or the zones of weakness through which Huntington's argument would be deconstructed; the most pronounced zones of weakness in his thesis are the concepts of civilization/s, inter-civilization/s, nation and nations; various identity symbols such as flags,

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headscarves, etc., etc. Hence it is pointed out at the earliest that the fault line (the cultural fault line) highlighted in the present discourse is the flaw in Huntington's argument which he posits in favour of his thesis, thematizing cultural or civilizational clashes among nations.

To build his thesis he enlists seven or eight civilizations such as Western civilization, Confucius civilization, Islamic civilization, African Civilization, Japanese civilization, Hindu civilization, Latin American and Slavic- Orthodox civilization and argues that the future world politics would run on the basis of cultural conflicts of these civilizations which are the sites of these conflicts. However, this research work aims to highlight the cultural fault line, or the drawback relating to the employment of the word 'culture' and 'cultural conflicts' found in the thesis of the 'clash of civilization'. This research work objects to 'culture' and 'cultural conflicts' for their reductiveness and claims that culture is not the primary cause of the contemporary unrest among the nations, rather the construction of every identity, including the cultural identities is always associated with power politics. The concept of identity, as proposed by Said (1978) is always associated with power. What Huntington misses in his thesis is that the conflicts based on cultural identity are actually the reflection of the construction of the relations of power.

Research Objective

1. To highlight the cultural fault line in Huntington's The Clash of Civilization thesis.

Research Question

1. What is the cultural fault line in Huntington's thesis The Clash of Civilization?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity as a Postcolonial concept carries various shades of meanings. It manifests itself through cultural differences, cultural identity or cultural diversity and emerges in the forms of lingual, religious, racial, gender or diaspora identities, to mention only a few. According to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2001), the above-mentioned terms commonly refer to the diversity of cultures and identities, and acknowledging this element can eliminate universal prescriptive definitions. Such differences can be categorized as multiculturalism and one can embrace them happily. It is good to have an accommodating and fostering society embracing diverse cultures. However, in Postcolonial studies, this diversity becomes the standing ground for identity politics. This is a point where various cultures confront each other.

Hence as a Postcolonial theorist, Bhaba (1994) studies these terms as contradictory to drawing the distinctions between these ways of representing any culture. Such cultural differences on which a huge bulk of separate and distinct systems of behaviour, attitude and values emerge, lack to represent the signifiers of cultural diversity. This theoretical perspective of distinction, according to Bhaba, only reflects imperialistic exoticism, as given by the imperial ethnography, such as the heightened notions of liberalism and multiculturalism, global culture or the culture of humanity. Similarly cultural difference does not reside in the fixed, black and white boundaries

but it resides in the grey areas such as in the blur postcolonial identities; and in the process of how these identities come into being. This process is known as the Third Space which emerges from the parent system of difference. Therefore, in Postcolonial Studies, culture and identities are always in action. They are always changing. In a Postcolonial society no fixed identities exist, they exist in hybridity of cultures, the Third Space, as a term is known in Postcolonial theory. A newly born culture always contains the traces of other cultures and other identities.

Therefore, in such a dynamic process in a multicultural world, identities signify, as noted by Huntington (1996) in the post-Cold-War period. Identities carrying the symbols of world flags, crescents and crosses, head scarves and skull caps, all count because culture and cultural politics have emerged as an important force in contemporary world politics. The world depicted by a Venetian demagogue in *Dead Lagoon*, a fictional work written by Michael Dibdin, "There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are" (Dibgin as cited in Huntington, 1996, p. 20), unfortunately, represents today's world politics which is based on binary oppositions of love/ hatred, good/ evil, and consequently between us/ them.

That is how people in the post-Cold war era are searching for their identities in their culture, their religion, their history, language, heritage, tradition, norms and values and ultimately in their civilizations Nations and civilizations, now-a-days, use politics to advance their interests as well as to endorse their identities. People seek their identities in their differences; who they are and whom they are against is the trend of contemporary politics. The iron curtain which had divided the East and the West in the Cold War era has now been replaced by the cultural line dividing Western Christianity and the Muslims and other Orthodox people of the world which is grounded on its emphasis on religious identities.

The post-Cold war era is no longer a world divided by two blocs, representing the US and the Soviet Union. Instead, the global politics in the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century would be ruled and governed by seven or eight civilizations which are mainly divided into major countries of the world. Therefore, the world has always been tempted to divide itself into we and they, in-group and the out-group, the people of civilization and the barbarians, or, in other words, the Orient and the Occident.

The reductiveness of the 'clash' thesis, submitted by Huntington is because Huntington is unable to see that it is the power politics which is the driving force behind this clash of civilizations. What Said argues is that identity politics works through the construction of various identities and building relations of power over them. This political phenomenon works by the powerful identity groups by dominating and maintaining its hegemony over the others, the less powerful (Said 1998).

In the present scenario, Said's (1978) Orientalism is relevant. This concept suggests the Western idea of establishing its others. Said refutes Huntington's thesis that the future world would be governed by the difference between the West and the rest. That is why Orientalism as a discourse is important to understand because as a systematic discipline it has been successful to

produce an Orient politically, culturally, militarily and ideologically. Any civilization or culture which is other than the West is *other* or Orient.

Orientalism basically works as the corporate institution that deals with the orient by making statements about it such as making authorizing views about it, depicting it, teaching it, and finally colonizing it. Hence constructing a dominating and authoritative relation between the Orient and the Occident. The Orient simply is not an imaginative entity, rather, it is a constructed reality, orientalized, by the West. Said (1978) refers to Vico's account of history which suggests that it is man himself who has constructed his own history, extending it to other cultures and geographies.

From the above account it follows that the clash of civilizations as a post-Cold War thesis is simply a revised version of ideological clashes between the superpowers during the Cold War. Its immense popularity happened only because it filled the vacuum that remained open at the end of the Cold War; which eventually made the way for the policy makers of the West and the US to replay the game of power politics. The clash of the ideologies of Communism and Western Liberalism between the two great blocs during the Cold War era,   was substituted by the clash of civilizations thesis. Inversely, the space vacated by the clash of ideologies discourse was taken up by the New World Order that would govern the future world with the new idea of the clash. The West is still at the centre. While analyzing the clash of civilization thesis, Said appropriates Huntington's views on the Western exploitation as such:

> The West must exploit the differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to western values and interests. To strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate western interests and values and to promote the involvement of nonwestern states in those institutions. (Huntington, 1996, as cited in Said 1998, p. 3)

While highlighting the sources of the conflict among nations, Said and Huntington have tried to seek out the factors which are the sources of conflict among nations. However, both have different stances on the same issue.

Al- Ahsan (2009) points out the serious flaws in the thesis of the clash of civilization. According to him, the thesis first proposed by Bernard Lewis and popularized by Huntington during the 1990s was implemented by the Bush administration. However, it was pointed out as seriously flawed by the Obama administration. The flaw which is being highlighted by Al-Ahsan is the difference between the Islamic and Western   civilizations. He observes that although the two civilizations are different, they share certain commonalities between themselves. The idea of such differences has been proposed on the basis of misapprehension of some historical events between the two which needs to be corrected for peaceful coexistence of the nations.

Haynes (2019) notes the flaw in the clash of civilization thesis by highlighting the September 2018 US trade war with China countering to balance the imbalance of 375 billion US dollars. The writer views such a clash as economic and rejects the thesis which is exclusively

based on cultural and religious values. Critical responses to the thesis highlight major drawbacks such as that the civilizations do not belong to entities, they do not have clear boundaries and they do not have a distinct set of values to be distinguished with other civilizations. Therefore, the thesis must be revised for any future plan in world affairs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research work is qualitative in nature. The data have been collected through qualitative content analysis method, which is an empirical method of analyzing texts, including videos, pictures and the books (Mayring, 2021). The primary source of the data is the book, The Clash of Civilizations, by Huntington, published in 1996. Specific passages relating to cultural identity have been selected and   have been seen through the lens of the concept of identity as proposed by Said (1978).

Coding scheme of the content is based on the selected words and phrases such as 'culture' and 'cultural conflicts' as used by Huntington and they have been countered by Said's idea of power politics. In order to present a counter-discourse to the discourse of Huntington's thesis, the contents of Said's theory of identity and power politics have been taken into account. Therefore, through this method, Huntington's reductive definition of culture and cultural conflicts and the future world order based on these identity markers has been refuted.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Huntington's thesis The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of World Order emerged after the publication of *The End of History* by Francis Fukuyama as a post-Cold War thesis that argues that after the end of the Cold War the clash between East and West is over and liberal ideas have got success. The entire future course will be dominated by liberalism. However, Huntington argues that after the end of the Cold War, the future of world politics would be determined on the basis of the clashes among civilizations. He enlists seven or eight civilizations and argues that people in the future world would be seeking their identities in terms of their civilization. They would contest on their culture, religion, ethnicity, and language. And this cultural identity is marked by the various symbols, icons and flags of their respective culture, religion or language. While presenting his hypothesis, he recalled a meeting of Russian and American scholars held in Moscow in 1992, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union where instead of Lenin's statue, a Russian flag graced the occasion. He observed:

> The years after the Cold War witnessed the beginnings of dramatic changes in peoples' identities and the symbol of those identities. Global politics began to be reconfigured along cultural lines. Upside –down flags were a sign of transition, but more and more the flags are flying high and true, and Russians and other people are mobilizing and marching behind these and other symbols of their new cultural identities. (Huntington, 1996, p. 19)

However, what Huntington misses in his argument is that the flags, icons and symbols have always been the part of one's identity, such as expressed by the nationalist movements all over the world especially after decolonization and independence of various Third World nations. National flags, national anthems, national languages, state religions, have all been the expressions of nation and nationhood of decolonization movements such as those expressed by India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka after their independence from the British imperials. Such an example of nationalism as a postcolonial aftermath, has been submitted by Rais (2017). He mentions the history of Pakistan as an example to substantiate his argument. According to him, the emergence of Muslim-Nationalism during the Pakistan movement in the subcontinent can be studied as an example. India had a deep-rooted Hindu identity for Hindus in the subcontinent. In this particular context, Indian Muslims were in dire need to construct their identity. They found identity of religious differences as the easiest tool to mobilize the people. Construction of the Two-Nation theory stands as an example for making the new nation-state.

Huntington further builds his argument by substantiating it with other examples such as Sarajevans waving of the flags of Saudi Arabia and Turkey during the Sarajevan identity conflict. In order to show themselves as emotionally connected with these Islamic countries, they demonstrated as such. Huntington writes as:

> On April 18, 1994 two thousand people rallied in Sarajevo waving the flags of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. By flying those banners, instead of U.N., NATO, or American flags, these Sarajevans identified themselves with their fellow Muslims and told the world who were their real and not-so-real friends. (p.19)

He further builds his argument by referring to the protest in Los Angeles in which people stood for the rights of the immigrants under the flags of Mexico.

> On October 16, 1994 in Los Angeles 70,000 people marched beneath "a sea of Mexican flags" protesting Proposition 187, a referendum measure which would deny many state benefits to illegal immigrants and their children. (p.19)

However, the point what Huntington misses in the argument is the denial of the benefits, the monetary benefits to the illegal immigrants and their children which inversely establishes the counter argument that the protests were not religiously motivated, rather, the protest for the rights of the immigrants and their children was staged for the economic benefits of these people. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and American Civil Liberties Union won their stance for the immigrants. Gathering under the flags is not the reflection of standing for common ancestry, common culture or common brotherhood, instead it is the reflection of the common consciousness of economic benefits for all marginalized communities. Huntington further writes:

> In the post-Cold War world flags count and so do other symbols of cultural identity, including crosses, crescents, and even head coverings, because culture counts, and cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people. People are discovering

new but often old identities and marching under new but often old flags which lead to wars with new but often old enemies. (p.20)

Ironically Huntington's thesis contradicts itself, by juxtaposing new identities with the older ones, such as expressed in the aforementioned content, "new but often old identities", "marching under new but old flags", "which lead to new but often old enemies". He himself provides the loopholes through which his argument can be deconstructed such as proposed by the Derridian deconstruction, which means that Huntington, too, tries to sell the proverbial old wine in a new bottle.

While talking about culture and cultural identities he writes as such:

The central theme of this book is that culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world. (p.20)

In the same line of thought, he attributes the post-cold war scenario as the reflection of cultural conflicts, however, recent scholarship of Cold War politics is of the view that it too, was fought on economic and regional rivalry between the superpowers. Huntington writes:

In the late 1980s the communist world collapsed, and the Cold War international system became history. In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and, at the broadest level, civilization. People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against. (p.21)

However, people only use politics to advance their interests, be it in the name of one identity or another, of ancestry, of religion, of language, history or culture. Huntington writes:

In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities. Tribal wars and ethnic conflicts will occur within civilizations. Violence between states and groups from different civilizations, however, carries with it the potential for escalation as other states and groups from these civilizations rally to the support of their "kin countries."(p.28)

The inter-civilization clashes among the 'kin countries' mentioned by Huntington, is an oversimplified idea which otherwise carries the burden of global world politics in which the US is playing a major part. Be the wars are in Kashmir, Afghanistan, or in Bosnia in each case study is involved the US power politics which is trying to hagemonize the whole world. The purpose behind such power politics is to maintain its geo-political hegemony on strategic parts of the world.

> The bloody clash of clans in Somalia poses no threat of broader conflict. The bloody clash of tribes in Rwanda has consequences for Uganda, Zaire, and Burundi but not much further. The bloody clashes of civilizations in Bosnia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, or Kashmir could become bigger wars. In the Yugoslav conflicts, Russia provided diplomatic support to the Serbs, and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Libya provided funds and arms to the Bosnians, not for reasons of ideology or power politics or economic interest but because of cultural kinship. (p.28)

In the postcolonial world each identity group constructed in the name of ethnicity, language, or culture, is basically contesting for power over the regions, important geographical areas and over economic resources. Hence, it is important to highlight the geopolitical rivalry of major powers in the world. It is significant to highlight at this point that each of the mentioned conflicts are connected to power politics, e.g. the mentioning of the Serbian conflict and the help provided by Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Huntington's thesis of the Clash of Civilizations is more a strategic work to create pretext for the promotion of his national interests.

While studying the hidden connections among the crises of Bosnia, Kashmir and Afghanistan, Majeed (1995) connects different events that happened in international history. Instead of connecting the unrest in the mentioned states with the ideological causes as Huntington proposes, he ascribes them to the geopolitical rivalry among the contesting groups. The jihad in Afghanistan, the unrest in the Indian occupied Kashmir and the crisis in Bosnia all have their roots in geopolitical causes. Afghanistan occupies a meaningful place in the region. Although Kashmir has had its dispute with India since 1947, it is naive that the Kashmiris started the liberation movement only around 1980. Still strange is the unrest in Bosnia.

Bosnian liberation movement started as soon as the Soviet empire collapsed. Majeed wants to communicate that it is the American imperial power that is creating unrest in the mentioned states. After smashing the Soviet empire it intended to create unrest in the Russian empire. Therefore, jihad in Bosnia is the reflection of that power politics; that means that the US tried to dismantle Russia even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He noted that although American foreign policy would not publicly confess her hands behind this unrest, the strategic doctrine in US foreign policy proves the US involvement.

The Muslim minority in the Soviet Empire was exploited by spreading the translation of Koran in the Uzbek language. By invoking their religious emotions, the US manipulated the events to let the people revolt against the Soviets, hence, smashing the Empire. Creating the civil war in Russia, it played the politics of Muslim identity construction which ultimately resulted in the succession of these states. However, it is important to note that the territorial conflicts between

these states and seemingly ethnic issues have been turned into religious conflicts, which again serves as a counter- discourse to Huntington's thesis.

In connection to this scenario, Sinno (2010) notes how religion has been exploited by the US in containing the influence of the Soviet Union in its Muslim majority states. He notes that the KGB, the Soviets spy agency, publicly claimed the involvement of the CIA in exploiting Islam in the Muslim Soviet republics. While using the territory of Afghanistan and employing the Mujahidden's force, the US penetrated into the Muslim region of Russia. In fact, t Mujahideen's potential threat to the Muslim region of the USSR compelled the Soviets to stay in Kabul. From the arguments mentioned above, it can be stated that each identity conflict is directly connected with power politics.

CONCLUSION

Huntington's thesis, "The Clash of Civilizations" is a remarkable expression of contemporary world politics. His thesis, as a counter-discourse to *The End of History,* stands as reply to Fukuyama's analysis. It is evident that contemporary world politics revolve around cultural identities. It is also a well-established fact that people are seeking identities in terms of their ethnicity, ancestry, religion and culture. However, what Huntington misses in his argument is that the concept of identity as proposed by Said (1978) is always associated with power politics. Whether the identities are of religion, culture or ethnicity, they are the expression of vested interests of the people contesting for them. People are seeking their identities in the name of various identity markers, however, the exclusive purpose is not to promote one's civilization; instead, it is the protection of their vested interests that is the driving force behind such cultural conflicts.

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