

## PREJUDICE AS SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY

### SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON'S VISION OF THE FUTURE

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The Cold War ended, as T. S. Eliot might have put it, both with a bang and a whimper. The bang did not result, as many had predicted, from the final clash of ideologies and nuclear weapons. Rather it was the sound of both surprise and satisfaction over the triumph of democracy, the free market, and consumerism. The whimper, on the other hand, followed the recognition that just when the Soviet Empire had collapsed on its own, ethnic and religious conflicts were now becoming a major threat to world peace. Included in the whimpering was perhaps the lament, by many, that the enemy was no longer recognizable. With the Gulf War, the confusion ended: Hollywood's next film would be called "The Muslims are Coming."

Samuel P. Huntington's article, "The Clash of Civilisations?" (Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49), must have provided relief to scapegoat hunters. Professor Huntington tells us that world politics is entering a new phase which will be dominated by the conflict of major civilisations. The question mark in his title must have been added with the sense of humility social scientists generally have towards prediction. Otherwise, the article makes it clear that Huntington has not only made up his mind that conflict in the future will be "the West versus the Rest", as he puts it, but he also wants to ensure that his prophecy turns into a self-fulfilling one by giving advice to Western policy makers: cooperate with countries which fall within Western civilisation, maintain military superiority over "the Rest", and exploit conflicts between them.

Huntington transforms prejudice against the "non-West" into social science theorizing in his article. What is especially objectionable about this 'theory' is its attempted value-neutral tone which verges on the rationalization of future violence. For example, Huntington points out that the Muslims accused (the word he uses is "alleged") the West of double standards in the Bosnian tragedy. What the Muslims (as well as many Westerners and non-Muslims) failed to see, if we follow Huntington's logic, is that "a world of clashing civilisations... is inevitably a world of double standards," and that, "people apply one standard to their kin-countries and a different standard to others." Hence, we are to excuse what he himself calls "ethnic cleansing" as a conflict of civilisations if we view it in terms of realpolitik. What Huntington appears not to appreciate is that the West's resort to double standards is not new and pre-dates Huntington's new era of conflict between civilisations. The argument that clashes of civilisations inevitably bring double standards contradicts the very rationale of the defence of civilisations. A civilisation cannot defend itself by contradicting in its actions the very premises on which it rests -such fundamental ideas as human dignity and human rights.

Huntington's examples of conflicts in the contemporary world which are precursors of the future clash between civilisations are, in fact, examples of what he considers to be an older and therefore no longer valid cause of conflict, namely, economic interest. He points out that the US forces were sent to the Gulf, "to defend some Arab countries against aggression by another." This presumably is an example of a conflict of civilisations because US involvement in the Gulf had the altruistic motive of defending a Western value, i.e. a nation's right to sovereignty, although, even the most apolitical among the world's public knew that the US forces were there to defend oil interests. The French involvement in Algeria, the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, and the Arab-Israeli wars are regarded as examples of conflict between the West and Islam. Thus, Algeria's struggle against colonial domination, a military operation to defend the economic interests of the Anglo-French-owned Suez Canal Company when it was nationalized by Nasser in 1956, and a prolonged conflict over a new state built on the land of displaced populations, in this curious rereading of history, turn into examples of conflict generated by differences between civilisations. The similar contention that American reaction to Japanese investment is due

to the difference between the two civilisations is outright absurd, especially since the Japanese seem to be interested only in exporting their goods rather than their codes of civilisation and the goods seem to scare American businessmen more than the geishas. Nor does the fight between Armenians and Azeris have anything to do with the "bloody borders" of Islam, as anyone who has visited Azerbaijan can tell, since the Azeris have been totally secularized under Soviet rule. It is not an example of "la revanche de Dieu," as Huntington quotes from Gilles Kepel, but the revenge of history from Lenin's unresolved and postponed nationalities question.

The world of the future is becoming much more complex than new theories of bipolarity would have us believe. A bipolar world is a comfortable world for both the social scientist and the policy maker. It is a world neatly divided into 'us' versus 'them'. The emerging complexity, however, is precisely over the definitions of the 'us' and the 'them'. It may be true, as Huntington argues, that a villager in southern Italy shares a common culture with a villager in northern Italy, which distinguishes them both from German villagers. But an intellectual in Italy shares a 'common culture' with an intellectual in Germany which distinguishes both from Italian or German peasants. The traditional villages or small towns in the Mediterranean basin, whether Turkish, Greek, southern Italian or Spanish, share in a common Mediterranean civilisation of olive trees, bay leaves, the fish, the sea, family honour, and shame, and patriarchy -a Braudelian world of 'la Mediterranee'- which cuts across differences between civilisations based on Islam, the Greek Orthodox and the Catholic faiths.

The problem with Huntington's vision of civilisations is that he takes the 'us' within one civilisation to be homogeneous. Although it is no longer fashionable to talk about class differences, they do persist. So do regional differences and differences of world view and gender, not to mention education. Throughout history, it was these differences which separated the interest of the lord from the peasant, the city dweller from the rural population, the bourgeois from the worker, the literati from the illiterate, the conservative from the progressive, the colonizer from the colonized. They still do. In fact, the complexity of understanding the world today is precisely because these differences are all the more crystallized now that there is unprecedented interaction between civilisations. At no time in history has there been such a division as there is now between the urban educated who base their lives on modern techno-structures on one hand and, what we may term, 'the rest'. This bipolarity, if we should search for one, cuts across differences of religion, culture, and civilisation. It also includes the division between people who advocate a universal vision of commitment to democracy, human rights, and peace and those who seek their identity in parochial definitions of kin.

The latter group's search for identity within a tribe, a religious community, or an ethnic group would draw no sympathy from Huntington's Westerner who is fearful of the "Confucian-Islamic Connection." But Huntington's prototype Westerner whose sole concern seems to be to define existence vis-à-vis membership of Western civilisation, paradoxically meets at the same threshold with the former. Both are intolerant of those outside the kin-group. This is the threshold where the Serb who is busy 'cleaning', the Muslim fanatic issuing death fetwas, the Hindu militant destroying monument-mosques, the German skinhead burning the homes of the gasterbeiter, the white American who wants no Blacks in the neighbourhood, and the follower of Le Pen who yearns for a 'France pour les Français' meet.