

Political science

Government, Capitalism



Political Science Democracy in the Age of Globalisation Clash of Civilizations or a Broken Clock? In his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama argues that the only ideological alternative for post-Cold War nations is a capitalist free market economy, human rights and liberal democracy and that the world had reached 'the end of history'. Samuel P. Huntington on the other hand believed that the world's future primary axis of conflict will be along cultural and religious lines. In his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington claims that 'among civilizations the West has had a major and at times devastating impact on every other civilization' (Huntington, 1996, 183). This claim has been criticised as much as it has been praised, and in this essay I will assess whether Huntington makes a fair argument for his statement. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* offers a new political lens where tensions moved beyond the ideological divisions between 'the Free World' and 'the Communist Bloc'. Huntington presents a perspective where tensions are between civilizations or 'cultural entities'. The fall of the Soviet Union was seen by many as a global triumph for democratic liberalism and the West now believes that 'the rest' should 'commit themselves to the Western values of democracy, free markets, limited government, human rights, individualism and the rule of law' (Huntington, 1996, 184). In the late twentieth century the expansion of the West promoted both modernization and westernization in non-Western societies. These societies responded, according to Huntington, in one of three ways: Embracing both modernization and westernization; Rejecting both; Embracing modernization and rejecting westernization. As a general rule, westernization and

modernization seem to have a correlation. A non western society adopts to certain elements of western culture and makes slow progress towards modernization. As the society gets modernized, however, the indigenous culture goes through a revival as the westernization declines. Modernization then encourages the people of the society to have confidence in their own indigenous culture, leading to crisis of identity. In many cases this will lead to division between different fundamentalist groups, causing persecution, violence and in the worst case: fault line conflict. As Huntington pictures the western civilization as a steamroller or a tidal wave, crushing everything it touches, he proposes a solution where different civilizations, including the West, learn to coexist: By modernizing and developing economic and military power while preserving their own values and institutions will create strong non-Western civilizations, forcing the west to develop a bigger understanding of other cultures. Japan and Singapore are two examples of societies that have become modern and at the same time kept their cultural heritage. One of the problems with Huntington's theory is that he presents the different civilizations as a very homogeneous group with little diversity. He has a tendency to generalize cultural unity and understate the self interest of individual nation-states and tends to tie the views of different nations into the perspective of one unified civilization. Huntington seems to overlook the fact that diversity is a feature of most cultures in the world, and the West is no exception. Multiculturalism has forced the liberal west to adapt to satisfy the demands of an increasingly ethnic diverse population. As people from all around the world are affected and adopt to the western culture and way of living, the western societies at the same time accept and

adapt to other cultures. Historically one may certainly agree that 'the West has had a devastating impact on other civilizations' (Huntington, 1996, 183). The Spanish and Portuguese Conquistadors extermination of the Inca and Aztec civilizations, the French and American persecution of the Indians in North-America and the segregation and omitting of Jews and Gypsies in Europe are among the examples. There is no doubt that the West has a bloody history, but one does not have to look far to find examples of other civilizations clashing. The Nanking Massacre and the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent are examples of bloody clashes of civilizations not motivated by western imperialism. Furthermore, a serious flaw with Huntingtons theory is that he seems to neglect the fact that different civilizations not necessarily will clash upon contact, but learn from each other, leading to a revitalization of at least one of the parties. Depending on the maturity of the civilizations and the intensity of the encounter, history have given us divergent consequences. The isolated Japanese civilization, severed from the rest of Asia by sea water was able to develop a unique culture and even absorbing the entire Chinese civilization for an extended period of time. One may also argue that the Renaissance, which in many ways were the initial stage of the modern Western civilization, would not have been born without the West's contact with the Islamic civilization. One can definitely though argue that the West have been and is overplaying its role in the world community. The general western assumption that liberal democracy is the 'end of history' are used as justification and making many of the hostile actions especially in the Middle East legitimate and acceptable in the eyes of the world community. The recent 'Arab Spring'

shows western hypocrisy at its finest, encouraging uprising, strike actions and different forms of civil disobedience, followed by failed efforts to aid and rebuild. Especially visible in the cases of Bahraini, Moroccan, and Syrian protest the western response have been inconsistent and disorienting, only leading to escalating violence and chaos, especially in the case of Syria. Huntington definitely makes a strong statement saying that the West has had a devastating effect on other civilizations. There is no doubt that the West have a bloody history, causing genocide and persecution when in contact with different civilizations. Huntington presents an unique view of the situation in the world today, and social science models and prediction like the ones he presents are vital to advance our understanding of the world, with emphasis on government and science. The problem with Huntingtons thesis is his oversimplification of a very complex study. His generalisation and overstatement of cultural unity and led to a massive critique as he fails to acknowledge the diversity of today's society. One may argue that since the Clash of Civilizations was published there have been serious tension between the West and the Islamic world and rapid economic growth in the Chinese civilization, giving Huntingtons argument momentum, but as the saying goes: even a broken clock is right twice a day, and his oversimplification of central terms like culture, ethnicity and civilization makes his argument vague enough to be accurate. Bibliography: The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, Samuel P. Huntington, 1996, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks