

## ***Clash of Civilizations* – a book of racist propaganda**

by Dr Robin-Edward Poulton<sup>1</sup>

I am a peacemaker, but I offer no apology for my aggressive title: Samuel P. Huntington's book "The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of world order" is a truly dishonest book and a travesty of scholarship. Worse, I have come to the conclusion, after several years of reading the book, that it was deliberately conceived as political propaganda dressed up as scholarship. Africa was conquered by Europeans preaching racist propaganda, and I am easily upset by such infamy. Huntington sets out to create a racist and religious divide that justify American imperialism. It is disgraceful!

My objections start with the very concept of 'civilization'. Samuel P. Huntington defines it (wrongly) as civilization = religion. None of my English or French dictionaries mentions religion as a component of civilization. Collins talks about a "high level of human and cultural development" and my Collins thesaurus doesn't even list religion among a dozen words relating to 'civilization'. The list includes: culture, advancement, development, education, enlightenment, progress, refinement, sophistication ....

It seems amazing that any serious scholar would confuse 'civilization' with 'religion'. What of language, literature, art and music? What of Africa's powerful Empires and rich patchwork of civilizations? Huntington's World of Civilizations map divides Africa into two parts: an 'Islamic' part, and an 'African' part. He splits the Manding languages equally between 'Islam' and "Africa'. Huntington's ignorance of African history suits his desire to define 'Islam' as a 'civilization' and never mind the Mali Empire! In that way he can create the 'clash' of his book title, and define 'Islamism' as the new enemy.

Huntingdon's map divides Nigeria in two, ostentatiously ignoring the civilizations of Yoruba, Hausa, Ibo, Benin and a dozen others. It becomes quickly evident from reading his book that this White Harvard Professor knows virtually nothing about Africa; unless he realizes that this continent of 1000 languages will never fit his bad definition of 'civilization' but he assumes that no one in America will know, or notice! Following the logic of Huntington, a Christian Yoruba would be part of a different 'civilization' from a Yoruba who is a follower of Mohammed the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon Him and upon all the prophets, including the Prophet Isa who is the second most important Prophet mentioned in the Holy Koran and whose English name is Jesus). I know Mandingos who have left Islam to become Christians and I know Fulanis who have changed their religion from Christianity to Islam. Did they therefore change their culture? Of course not! Does their religion make them more or less 'civilized'? ABSURD!

Is the whole of Professor Huntington's argument absurd? Yes.

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What is his objective? Huntington may not know that Nigeria is Africa's largest nation and that West Africa is filled with ancient civilizations. He probably doesn't know that the ancient Egyptian Pharaohs were Black Africans who had a rich cultural history. His hypothesis that 'Africa' may one day emerge as a 'civilization' built around South Africa seems so ridiculous as to be laughable, until the reader realizes that it is also profoundly racist.

### **Huntingdon's book is profoundly racist but it is malicious, not stupid**

To each objection, Huntington would reply that this is NOT WHAT HIS BOOK WAS MEANT TO SHOW. He can dress up his argument as cleverly as he likes, it matters not because the real danger of his book is not in its text, but in its title. Though I know hardly anyone who has actually read the book (including my students!), nearly everyone I know has heard the clever title.

"The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of world order" – how plausible it sounds! The title sounds so convincing, it is almost self-evident. Written by a Harvard Professor, who would challenge it? How do I even dare to challenge a Harvard Professor? But reading the book will show that I am right! Huntington's obsession with Western Civilization, his ignorance of African cultures and his distorted view of religion will shock any educated reader. The book provides an ethnocentric view of the world that reminds me of the White Christian Missionaries whose theological justifications about "saving the souls of pagan African savages" supported the slave trade. Africans had been 'civilized' for thousands of years before White Europeans had even heard of them. Africans were monotheists when Europeans were still worshipping fifty gods like Bacchus, the God of drunken orgies and multiple sex parties. Abraham was an African, and he was the Prophet who took God to the heathen Jews and barbaric Europeans.

### **His maps show that Huntington is both ethnocentric and ignorant**

**My first targets are the four ethnocentric maps** that illustrate Huntington's book. Simply the title of Huntington's first map '**The West and the Rest: 1920**' is enough to disgust any Nigerian! This ethnocentric world map shows the British Empire joined to the United States of America (independent since 1776) and to all European colonial conquests: it is the map of The Superior Order of European White People. Latin America is excluded with the Soviet Union, Japan and China (but Vietnam is firmly in the Western camp as part of French Indo-China). From Huntington's point of view, most of the world is 'ours'. The rest is ... well ... The Rest.

Huntingdon's next map '**The Cold War World: 1960s**' reveals him – unsurprisingly – as an American Cold War warrior. Here the Soviet Union and China are firmly in the 'other' camp while Portugal's African colonies, I am happy to report, and *apartheid* South Africa are firmly inside Huntington's racist and evidently favored part of the Cold War World.

**Map number three ‘The World of Civilizations: Post-1990’** identifies nine contiguous human spaces: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, Japanese. Why is ‘civilization’ limited to a period after 1990? Civilizations evolve over millennia and Africa’s were the first. Has Huntington heard of Ancient Egypt and the Black Pharaohs? His ‘World of Civilizations’ is a political construct. Now that the Cold War is over, America needs to find a pole around which to hang its foreign policy. If Communism is gone, where is the enemy? The USA likes a bipolar world, a world where ‘we’ have to defend ourselves against ‘them’. Map 3 shows ‘them’ – pick your enemy! We know that Dick Cheney and Co. have picked ‘Islam’.

**Map four** shows a line that runs down the middle of Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean, ‘**The Eastern Boundary of Western Civilization.**’ This magical line is invented by Samuel P. Huntington to justify the Cold War, showing that Orthodox Christians do not belong to the same ‘civilization’ as Roman Catholics and Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Calvinists and Quakers, Congregationalists, Baptists and Anabaptists, Plymouth Brethren, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Presbyterians, Free Presbyterians, and the multitude of private Christian churches that spring up across Nigeria and Ghana and the United States of America.

Huntington’s arbitrary division of Christianity makes no sense. His map of Western Civilization is so remarkable that it excludes Greece – universally recognized as the birthplace of Western Civilization – because Greeks the Orthodox branch of Christianity. Absurd? Yes, Huntington’s confusion of religion with ‘civilization’ is totally absurd!

**Huntington’s identification of ‘Islamic Civilization’ shows that his ignorance does not stop in Africa:** it distorts history by transforming 1.2 billion people on four continents into one ‘civilization’. This is so nonsensical that it can only have been done for the specific purpose of creating a US political movement against Islam. Huntington has created an Islamic monster, so that Americans can fear it. And hate it. And fight against it.

The civilization of Pakistan did not begin with the partition of British India in 1947. The Indian sub-Continent has existed as a cultural entity for thousands of years. Buddhism reached China and Japan through Afghanistan during the early part of the current era, at a time when the region was run as an empire by the Kushans from their base in what is now Pakistan. The Kushans were successors to the Mauryan Empire whose famous emperor Ashoka ruled the Indian subcontinent. So did the Moghul Emperors 1600 years later, the Muslim builders of the Taj Mahal and a thousand other mosques, palaces and fortresses. Their empire fell to the British in the 1700s, who also ruled the whole continent.

Pakistan has been politically separate from India for just 58 years. The Moghuls were Muslims, yet Huntington places India in a ‘Hindu civilization’ and Pakistan in an ‘Islamic’ civilization that is a travesty of reality and only makes sense if you are defining ‘civilization’ with some ulterior political motive in mind. It makes even less sense if you consult a list of the world’s largest Muslim populations: Indonesia is first, and India is

second. Pakistan has the third largest Muslim population. Why then are India and Pakistan in separate ‘civilizations’? The answer is, of course, that they are not.

I have lived most of my life in Islamic countries. The concept of an ‘Islamic’ civilization is nonsense, just as the concept of a ‘Christian’ civilization would be nonsense. You can talk about Greco-Roman or Russian or French civilization if you must, or Hausa or Manding or Akan or Swahili civilization, or Persian, Arabic, Indian or Indonesian civilization ... but not “Christian’ or ‘Islamic’ civilization. There is no doubt at all that Christianity has profoundly influenced the cultures of Europe and Latin America, China and India, but they are not all part of a single ‘civilization’.

Muslims are not all the same. What have nomadic Mauritians in common with the Hausas of Northern Nigeria, or the Swahilis of Kenyan coastline several thousand miles away, except that they live on the same continent? Only that they all believe in God and pray facing East in the direction of Mecca. If you ask the same question about Turkish-speaking, cotton-growing Uzbeks in the plains of Central Asia, and Indonesian-speaking fishermen on the coast of Java, the only things they have in common is that they believe in God, and they pray facing West towards Mecca, and they have probably learned by heart a few sentences of 7<sup>th</sup> century classical Arabic prayer. I am not qualified to know how many different ‘civilizations’ there may be among the 250 million people of Indonesia, but I have enough knowledge of Uzbekistan, Mauritania, Northern Nigeria and Kenya to know that the people there do not form part of any coherent ‘civilization’ with Somalis or Pakistanis or Afghans or Indonesians.

My conclusion: Huntington has written a dangerous piece of political propaganda dressed up as scholarship. More dangerous still, people believe it. Even Professors from Harvard apparently write nonsense, but we had better not believe that this book was written by chance. It was written with a purpose, and one of these was apparently to justify the War on Terror.

We are peacemakers. We do not agree with the concept of a ‘war’ on terrorism, which not a group of people but simply a method of political action. The War on Terror is a slogan of political propaganda to justify imperial aggression.