

## **ARE WE EXPERIENCING A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS OR A CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES?**

**Emilia Tomescu**

**Assist. Prof., PhD, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu**

*Abstract: Was Samuel Huntington right when he wrote that clashes between civilizations would become the greatest threat to world peace and the instrument to create a new world order? Since September 11, this thesis has proved to be a warning in an increasingly uncertain world. The clash of different traditions, which resulted in civilizations characterized by different perspectives, has been shaping our times and lives.*

*Our understanding of international affairs is to improve itself if we really want to see clearer what is going on around us and what can happen with us, too. What do we mean by civilization, in fact? Is it something which, being based on mutual respect, enlarges our perspective, making us open-minded people or, on the contrary, something which, by the force of rigid traditions and prejudices, keeps us in a circle, insulating us? Was Huntington right? Shall we translate his vision with the idea of a possible clash of ideologies or even fundamentalisms?*

*In order to have a dialogue, which represents a trait of "civilized" people, citizens of the 21st century, we should broaden our horizons, historically, geographically and even politically. We should also remember Peter Singer's encouraging plea for a global ethic rather than an approach which supports expansionistic nationalism. This attitude can provide illuminating answers to vital problems and also a contribution to the development of a common consciousness, which is vital in these times.*

**Keywords:** clash, civilization, threat, peace, open-mindedness, global ethic, consciousness.

In his famous book from 1996, Samuel Huntington considered the clash between Western civilization and the Islamic one as inevitable in the future. This conflict he said would replace the one represented by the Cold War and would be *a violent and disorderly clash of civilizations, as*

*the Islamic world reacts to the global transfer of Western attitudes, Western technology and Western secularization.*<sup>1</sup>We have already started to see it happening.

In his very important book from 2002, entitled "Who We Are?", Huntington refers to the American identity and the American nationalism. His argument focuses on what he calls the *American Creed*, which he believes to derive from the Anglo-Protestant culture of the original settlers.<sup>2</sup> He considers that the development of the American society, led by its political institutions, and the whole process of the forging of the American national idea to be part as well as a result of *the Protestant 'Awakening' that repeatedly swept across the continent. To separate the religious inheritance from the idea of America, to reconstitute as a purely secular body politic what began life as a sacred pledge, would be to deny the most vigorous input into the American experience*<sup>3</sup>. This second valuable book contains the answer to the problem with which we are dealing today but with which, in fact, we have been dealing for a long time. I said **we** but this **we** has not been **we** until recently. Why not? Because not all of us have experienced what means to be humiliated in your own country and be treated as inferior or second hand people, or even unimportant and good only to be killed. Today, the people of Syria is experiencing this and it is not the first time. Let's just remember a short episode from the process of the forging of the American nation, process which *swept across the continent*, and during which too many Native Americans, too many to be known, were pushed westward and killed because the authorities treated *the tribes as barriers to progress, either to be removed to some distant reservation or killed. Under the presidency of Andrew Jackson some ninety-four removal treaties were negotiated, and by 1840 most of the Indians in the more settled states and territories had in fact been sent west*<sup>4</sup> or killed. *Not until the twentieth century, after the United States had spread across the continent and had restricted the tribes to reservations, did the federal government attempt to seek a different policy.*<sup>5</sup> This too was a moment when two civilizations clashed and, according to Power Politics and its way to solve problems, the goals and desires of the

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, London, 2007, p.312

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>4</sup> Melvin I. Urofsky (ed.), *Basic Readings in U.S. Democracy*, United States Information Agency, Washington, D.C.205447, published 1994, p.77

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*

Europeans (colonization, land exploitation and religious conversions), which were in sharp conflict with the cultural values of the natives, prevailed. There are scholars who consider that *both Native American tribes and English settlers were in the process of nation-building, processes that unfortunately collided*<sup>6</sup> and the result was that the Native American Civilization was destroyed while the values of many surviving natives were perverted. In his Surrender Speech, delivered in 1832, Chief Black Hawk said: *Black Hawk is an Indian. He has done nothing for which an Indian ought to be ashamed... You know the cause of our making war. It is known to all white men. They ought to be ashamed of it. The white men despise the Indians, and drive them from their homes. But the Indians are not deceitful. The white men speak bad of the Indian, and look at him spitefully. But the Indian does not tell lies; Indians do not steal. An Indian, who is as bad as the white men, could not live in our nation; he would be put to death, and eat up by the wolves.*<sup>7</sup>

The concept of civilization has played an important role in the process of defining the events of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries' politics. American neoconservatists, whose ideology on international relations makes them to consider they are entitled to overuse the right to interfere, have pushed to the limit the idea that Western values are universal and should be promoted, 'if necessary', even through a direct intervention. As such, *the American intervention in Iraq did not oppose the European realists to the American dogmatic ideologists. In fact, 'everybody' counted on its great ideas, its prejudices and its ideological references.*<sup>8</sup> Great empires have used pan-ideas as psychological and ideological weapons in order to impose their power and values and to dominate. Thus, the world is being organized and re-organized through these pan-ideas.<sup>9</sup>

In his book on *Orientalism*, Edward Said focused on the process of domination of the Oriental colonies by the great powers of the West. Knowing the colonies from the linguistic and cultural point of view was just an instrument of these powers to dominate the East: knowledge is power,

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p.78

<sup>8</sup> Olivier Roy, *Semiluna și haosul*, Nemira, București, 2010, p.7

<sup>9</sup> Veronica Dumitrașcu, *Frontiere și civilizații*, RAO, București, 2013, pp.88-89

more knowledge is more power.<sup>10</sup> As Said quotes from a French author (Leroy-Beaulieu), he concludes *that the space of weaker or underdeveloped regions like the Orient was viewed as something inviting French interest, penetration, insemination-in short, colonization: Colonization is the expansive force of a people; it is its power of reproduction; it is its enlargement and its multiplication through space; it is the subjection of the universe or a vast part of it to that people's language, customs, ideas, and laws.*<sup>11</sup> Continuing his analysis of the concept of Orientalism, both culturally and historically, Said mentions that in the early twentieth century the fate of Near Orient *was being decided between the Powers, the native dynasties, the various nationalists parties and movements, and the Zionists.*<sup>12</sup> He added that what was more important was represented by *the peculiar epistemological framework through which the Orient was seen, and out of which the Powers acted. For despite their differences, the British and the French saw the Orient as a geographical-and cultural, political, demographical, sociological, and historical-entity over whose destiny they believed themselves to have traditional entitlement*<sup>13</sup>. Edward Said also mentioned that the Wilsonian Program for national self-determination was perceived as irritant by the Powers as it *seemed to invalidate the whole skeleton of colonial and partitionary schemes arrived at jointly between the powers*<sup>14</sup>. The American author born in Jerusalem underlined the essence of the European vision on the East that he defined as the *ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority.*<sup>15</sup> He then warned us about the necessity to be prepared to note that, in its historical development, this vision on the Eastern World *deepened and even hardened the distinction.*<sup>16</sup> Said became even more direct as he declared that *Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them'). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived .Orientals lived in their world, 'we' lived in ours .The vision and material reality propped each other up, kept each other going. A certain freedom of intercourse*

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p120

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London, 2003, p.219

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p.221

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*,p.42

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*

*was always the Westerner's privilege; because his was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery, as Disraeli once called it. Yet what has, I think, been previously overlooked is the constricted vocabulary of such a privilege, and the comparative limitations of such a vision. My argument takes it that the Orientalist reality is both antihuman and persistent. Its scope, as much as its institutions and all-pervasive influence, lasts up to the present.*<sup>17</sup>

As the Western European powers have built empires all over the world, it was this lesson of the imperialists themselves and their models that gave rise to the nationalist movements, springing up as a response to colonial rule. There is a huge controversy surrounding the concept of nationalism. Some interpret it as a positive concept, one which is associated with progress and self-determination, aiming to get unity and statehood while others interpret it as being irrational, extremist, allowing political or religious leaders to promote expansionist policies, even wars in the name of one nation. Cultural or political dominant criteria are decisive in defining one nation and also the type of nationalism promoted by it. The character of the nationalism promoted by a certain nation is influenced by the circumstances in which nationalist aspirations appear as well as by the political goals to which nationalism is attached. Nationalism is indeed extremely complex as it could be used to liberate but also to conquer and dominate. Because it is defined as a cross-cutting ideology, it has been used by liberals, conservatives, socialists, fascists and even by communists or fundamentalists. The most aggressive form of nationalism is the expansionist one, which has been used to promote imperialism. This form of nationalism is the opposite of the modern belief in equal rights and self-determination. *The aggressive face of nationalism first appeared in the late nineteenth century as European powers indulged in 'the scramble' of Africa in the name of national glory and their 'place in the sun'. Nineteenth-century European imperialism differed from the colonial expansion of earlier periods in that it was fuelled by a climate of popular nationalism in which national prestige was increasingly linked to the possession of an empire, and each colonial victory was greeted by demonstrations of popular enthusiasm, or jingoism. To a large extent, both world wars of the twentieth century resulted*

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.43-44

*from this expansionist form of nationalism.*<sup>18</sup> This type of nationalism can take an extreme form which promotes a sentiment of intense, even hysterical enthusiasm, referred to as integral nationalism. Its message says that the nation has a meaning beyond the life of any single individual so, the individual existence values only when it is dedicated to the unity and survival of the nation. Integral nationalism, that was coined by the French nationalist Charles Maurras (1868-1952), leader of the right-wing Action Française, thus becomes a vehicle through which pride and self-respect can be regained.<sup>19</sup>

Integral nationalism also breaks the link that can exist between nationalism and democracy as the 'integral nation' should be an exclusive ethnic community, bound together by old loyalties rather than by political allegiances. *National unity does not demand free debate and an open and competitive struggle for power; it requires discipline and obedience to a single, supreme leader. This led Maurras to portray democracy as a source of weakness and corruption, and to call instead for the reestablishment of monarchical absolutism.*<sup>20</sup> This extreme form of nationalism is quite often associated with chauvinistic beliefs and doctrines. Chauvinism is itself derived from the name of a French soldier (Nicholas Chauvin), who became famous for his fanatical devotion to Napoleon and the cause of France. Chauvinism is now perceived as an irrational belief in the superiority or right of dominance of one's own group or people. Thus national chauvinism, like other forms of imperialism which along centuries have treated the natives disrespectfully, rejects the idea, shared by all of us today, that all nations are equal, favouring the belief or the prejudice, long time supported even by racist theories, that, as long as nations have different characteristics or qualities, they should have different destinies. The normal consequence is that some nations have been suited to rule while others have been suited to be ruled. The chauvinist's own nation is seen to be unique and special, a real 'chosen people'.<sup>21</sup> Chauvinistic nationalism therefore establishes a clear distinction between 'them'(the others), the inferior and 'us', the superior people.

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2007, p.119

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p.120

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*

A recurrent theme of expansionist nationalism is the idea of national rebirth or regeneration. This form of nationalism commonly draws upon myths of past greatness or national glory. Such myths plainly give expansionist nationalism a backward-looking character, but they also look to the future in that they mark out the nation's identity. At the heart of integral nationalism there often lies an imperial project: a quest for expansion or a search for colonies. This can be seen in forms of pan-nationalism.<sup>22</sup>

As we know, colonialism generates repression and loss of dignity and violence underpins the repression of colonial rule. Colonialism is violence in its natural state that's why, sometimes, it is necessary to respond to violence of colonialism with armed struggle. Such ideas represent the thinking of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a French-Algerian personality whose work deals with the effects of colonialism, and the response of oppressed peoples to the end of European rule.<sup>23</sup> Robert Pape, a present American political scientist, published in 2005: "Dying To Win" in which he considers that suicide terrorism is not the result of an existing supply of fanatics, but represents a "demand-driven phenomenon". He also mentions that suicide terrorism is in fact a secular tactic rather than a religious one, and forms part of a broader campaign to remove an occupying force. Suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation.<sup>24</sup>

Even if we can understand there are deep causes that motivate many such violent acts, there is too much violence around us and fundamentalism is, for sure, not the solution for the many problems with which most of us are being confronted. Today, the most prominent face of confusion is fundamentalism, namely Islamic Fundamentalism, based on the distortion of the concept of Jihad. Dumitru Chican, a Romanian specialist in Islamic Culture and Civilization, wrote a book, published in 2011, that focuses on the concept of Jihad (Jihad or the way towards Djanna). In this book, the author makes a deep and complex analysis of the concept which is so much in use today. Those who consider themselves motivated to fight for the ideal of their holy book seem to forget that there are two dimensions or levels of the concept: the big jihad and the small jihad. The big jihad means in fact the effort towards ethical and moral self development. It

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p.121

<sup>23</sup> *The Politics Book*, DK, Penguin, London, 2013, pp.304-307

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p.329

is an interior process. The small jihad, which is an exterior process, means the effort to defend and protect your faith and spread it, even by force.<sup>25</sup>

According to Islam as a missionary religion, the world is divided into three parts (abode of Islam, abode of the Truce-tribute, abode of War), with the expectation that, in due course, all of them will be unified in the single community ('umma) of God's intent.<sup>26</sup> Islamism emerged out of the reform (islah) project of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>27</sup> The modern Islamist movement is usually associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928. Its original aims were moral as much as political, as it tried to reform society and oppose Western cultural influence. In time, the Brotherhood radicalized itself so that, in 1954, it was suppressed while its members were imprisoned, exiled or driven underground. Today they are still extremely active. The most important ideologist of the movement was Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966), who got part of his ideas from Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979), an Indian reformer, journalist, political philosopher and theologian. *One of Maududi's doctrines, in particular, would have a major impact on Islamic political movement. He believed that the struggle for Islam was not for the restoration of an ideal past, but for a principle vital to here and now: the vice-regency of man under God's sovereignty. The Jihad was not just a defensive war for the protection of the islamic territory. It might be waged against governments which prevented the spreading of true Islam (i.e., the Islamist version of Islam).*<sup>28</sup>

In most Sunni countries, the Brotherhood and its offshoots can be divided into: a mainstream tendency, functioning within the frame of present governmental systems, even engaged in social work and a radical or extremist tendency that uses violence in order to achieve its goals. Since those who belong to this second variant see Western financial and military support as a primary

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<sup>25</sup> Dumitru Chican, *Jihad sau drumul spre Djanna*, Corint, București, 2011, pp.20-21

<sup>26</sup> John Bowker, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp.275-276

<sup>27</sup> Iain Mc Lean, Alistair McMillan, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp.275-277

<sup>28</sup> Malise Ruthven, Azim Nanji, *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, pp.194-195



factor in the survival of "non-Islamic" regimes, they have not hesitated to take their Jihad into the heart of Western power.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *ibidem*