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A Clash of Civilizations or of Paradigms? : Theorizing Progress and Social Change

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What is This?

A Clash of Civilizations or of Paradigms?

Theorizing Progress and Social Change

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abstract: What is perceived by Huntington and many who think like him as an inevitable clash of civilizations is actually produced by the uneven modernization that has caused some parts of the world to lag behind others. Despite the serious resentment and conflict this has produced, social evolutionary pressures will force all societies to modernize, so that the major technological and cultural gaps between various parts of the world will greatly diminish in the future. Anti-modernizing policies that are rooted in poor social theory, and that feed on the resentment of people in societies whose modernization has lagged can, however, greatly retard modernization and increase human suffering and conflict. It is therefore a useful task for social scientists to consider what theories best explain social change in order to guide policies in the most beneficial direction. Classical functionalist-evolutionary theories do this far better than more recent theories such as those proposed by Huntington, by world system theorists, or by postmodernists.

keywords: anti-modernism ✦ civilization ✦ culture ✦ Enlightenment ✦ functionalist-evolutionary theory ✦ modernization ✦ postmodernism

Cultural anthropologists have largely given up on the notion that there has been social evolution, despite the uncomfortable fact that their archeological colleagues are faced with the reality of evolutionary stages all the time. Most cultural anthropologists now favor a multicultural perspective that pronounces all cultures more or less equal (Kuper, 1999). It might seem strange to equate this methodological approach with the one favored

by Samuel Huntington's (1996) famous book about the inevitable clash of civilizations caused by the near immutability of boundaries between major cultural traditions, but both follow a common logic. (Though Huntington's book is a call for a more isolationist American foreign policy disguised as an interpretative historical essay, it is the historical aspect of his thesis that has become influential rather than the policy recommendations.) Huntington's 'civilizations' are far broader than what most anthropologists would call 'cultures'; and for Huntington there is a clear value hierarchy, with the West seen as a morally superior, if presently endangered civilization. Contemporary anthropologists reject such a hierarchy, and if anything, tend to reverse it (Marcus and Fischer, 1986). Both approaches, however, deny the validity of the old functionalist-evolutionary theory that sees humanity's history as a long march toward a common, modern type of society, first reached by the West but accessible to all other humans.

The history of how cultural anthropology shifted from its functional-evolutionary base in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century to an increasingly postmodernist rejection of any such notions is an interesting one but need not detain us here. What is important, rather, is to see how much this shift was produced by an ideological change that began in the late 1960s. It was not new knowledge as such that caused the old theory to be abandoned but a political reinterpretation that increasingly viewed Western European and American culture as imperialistic, mechanistic, alienating, and somehow inauthentic. This was not a new phenomenon in intellectual life, as it had its roots in the anti-Enlightenment, anti-universalistic and anti-modernist thought of Rousseau and especially Herder, who believed that each culture has its own unique virtue and could only decay from being polluted by the arrogant French (Gellner, 1992: 26–7; Chirot, 1996).

The 'civilizational' approach is equally ideological but much older. Long ago the Greeks consigned the Persians to an irremediably despotic and obscurantist but menacing Asian civilization, and most other non-Greeks (including the Macedonians) to the status of barbarians (Aeschylus, 1996; Green, 1991: 6–7). The Greeks were hardly unique, however, as all the great classical agrarian cultures and religions, or at least their elites, were quite certain that they possessed the one true way of organizing societies and leading the proper life (Lewis, 1995).

In the end, then as now, it amounts to a question of one's taste. If it is the western way, or now, the American way, that one despises, then multicultural anthropology which privileges everything non-western, non-modern and anti-capitalist offers the theory of choice. If, on the other hand, one appreciates western, especially American, individualism, progress and democracy as well as the material success brought by capitalism, then

those parts of the world that have not adopted, perhaps can never adopt, the western ways are either barbarians or hopelessly despotic 'Asiatics'. Underneath much of the rhetoric about such issues that is all there is – taste. The master ideologues on both sides of the discussion accuse the others of bad faith, bigotry, hypocrisy, or just plain blindness, but both Huntingtonians and multiculturalists in all their varieties agree that human societies are not, *cannot* evolve toward a roughly similar, single modern type of social structure with a broadly common modern culture.

How good a representation of the world does either side of this ideological divide offer? Neither does a very satisfactory job, though for opposite reasons.

The multiculturalists have to pretend that there has been no progress, and more than that, they have to deny the nearly universal desire for a better material life and more personal freedom. Intellectual critics (including religious ones) may rail against crass American tastes and low-brow culture, as romantic anti-modernists decried industrial England in the 19th century, but most people everywhere want to be as free, as rich, as mobile and as easily able to enjoy carefree sex (or so it seems from American films, television and popular music) as Americans. More than a century ago, Nietzsche's deep hatred of his own increasingly bourgeois world, and his contempt of all things English, captured the anti-modern intellectual's aristocratic disdain for industrial civilization and the way it spread material benefits as well as democratic privileges to the vulgar masses. He even called on Germany to unite with autocratic Russia to become masters of the world, to give up 'the English principle of the people's right of representation', and above all, he added, 'No American future' (Nietzsche, 1954: 565–7, 802).

On the other hand, to insist that only westerners can enjoy the fruits of modernization also misleads. It may have been that Greek and Roman notions of individual freedom and private property for a small elite ultimately gave Western Europe a head start in the race to modernity, as many, including David Landes, have suggested (Landes, 1998: 31–2). Or, more likely, it may be that the rationalizing ethic of some western Christians was the key to the early commercial, scientific and finally industrial and political revolutions of the West, as Max Weber would have it (M. Weber, 1998). But to be first has never meant that followers cannot do as well or better. We are long past thinking that only Japan seems able to imitate the West because of the dubious proposition that its mixture of Shinto and Buddhism is somehow 'Protestant' (Bellah, 1957). Now, as the pages of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* regularly attest, some substantial portions of China, not only Taiwan and Hong Kong but also the coastal cities from Canton to Shanghai, have become some of the most dynamic economic parts of the globe, while the area around Bangalore in India has

become one of the world's main software exporting centers. Malaysia, Turkey, Mexico and Brazil have become major industrial economies with per capita GNPs that place them in the upper middle income ranks of countries in the world (World Bank, 2000: 10–13, Table 1.1). A restrictive thesis that maintains that only a small number of European nations can become modern has come to seem silly. This does not even include the transformation of some of the most Catholic, previously backward, parts of Europe that were once considered hopelessly unprogressive, Spain, Ireland and Portugal, into advanced modern economies.

Nor are democracy and an increasing respect for individual rights exclusively western. People all over the world, from Iran to Indonesia to Mexico, are demanding political and legal rights that go far beyond those that were available to the vast majority of Western Europeans in the 19th century but are now part of the continuing liberal revolution that has been the ideological foundation of modernization for two centuries.[1]

All of the world may not be on the verge of adopting a single cultural model, but many of the key elements of what has come to be defined as the modern, liberal, western, democratic, individualistic, capitalist way of life have spread very widely, and continue to do so. That is the true meaning of what is commonly called 'globalization', and that is why globalization appals those who want to resist this trend (T. Friedman, 1999). If this is so, and if the denials of this trend are largely ideological, is it worth debating an issue that boils down to a matter of willful distortions of fact and misunderstanding about the nature of modern social change? The answer is unequivocally yes, if only because policy decisions are made on the basis of such ideological tastes and misunderstandings. The debate itself shapes our understanding of what is taking place, and often distorts our perceptions of reality.

After the publication of Samuel Huntington's (1996) book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, for example, some Turkish intellectuals took the position that since the West was consigning them to eternal Muslim backwardness and obscurantism, they might as well abandon all efforts to join Europe and move closer to Iran and the Arab world. Fortunately, this tendency has lost ground in Turkey. As a demonstration of how wrong it is to classify groups by their seemingly deep cultural predispositions, in Turkey many Islamists now want to join Europe, which they see as protecting religious and civil rights, while the supposedly westernizing, hard-line Kemalists in the army are increasingly nationalistic and turning away from Europe for precisely the same reason, they want to maintain an authoritarian, militaristic system in place. In the 1970s, the socialist prime minister Bulent Ecevit was fervently opposed to joining Europe because it was too capitalist and exploitative. Now, again as prime minister, the same Ecevit is fervently in favor of joining Europe.[2]

Similar doubts about joining Europe have been voiced by many Russian intellectuals, who have long believed that the West will always use the supposed barbarism of Christian Orthodoxy as an excuse to marginalize Russia. The fierce nationalist resentment this has provoked over the past two centuries promoted anti-modern, anti-capitalist, anti-democratic and anti-western Slavophilism. Russia was bound to fail and be rejected by the West anyway if it tried to take a westernizing approach, so it should develop its own, uniquely pure, communitarian and native version of modernization. It was Communism's adoption of this position that gave it considerable legitimacy among Russian nationalists, but the failure of Communism left this 'Russian idea' in limbo from which it is only slowly recovering (McDaniel, 1996). Now, there are voices in Russia claiming that it is happening all over again – the West is rejecting Russia, so Russia must find its own solution by rejecting western modernization and going back to its genuine roots (Ziuganov, 1996; Khazanov, 1997). Unfortunately, if such an attitude prevails, it will bring another century of backwardness and misery to Russia.

Here we can see that the Huntingtonian approach has much in common with what the multiculturalists are demanding. It is among intellectuals in India with postmodernist ideas (Chakrabarty, 1992) that one finds the same kind of anti-modernist response as among the neo-Slavophiles in Russia and Islamic fundamentalists in the Muslim world, though they would naturally deny this heatedly. That substantial portions of the population feel threatened by modernization means that these intellectuals have an audience and that policy errors could stop the recent rapid economic growth in India by returning it to the autarkic, failed policy that guided Congress during the first four decades of Indian independence.

In non-western societies, both those who accept a Huntingtonian interpretation and multiculturalists turn their backs on modernization as a western import that does not fit their conception of the good society, and both are sure that the western model is wrong for them.

What is the reality, and what theoretical stance best explains the nature of progressive social change in the modern world? Strangely enough, it is the very functionalist-evolutionary perspective abandoned first by cultural anthropology, and subsequently by sociology in the 1970s.

Taking an evolutionary-functionalist perspective on change alters the debate about the 'clash of civilizations' because it suggests that seemingly irreconcilable cultural differences are more a product of different rates of modernization than of permanent cultural divisions.

Cultures are codes – like genetic codes, sets of rules that guide social organization and personal behavior. They may be less precise than genetic codes, and they certainly can be subjected to willful human change, so the analogy with biological evolution is only that, an analogy.

345

Nevertheless, the similarities are important. Over generations people work out codes of conduct that are enshrined as customs and laws, tastes and preferences, and guiding concepts of how to react to various exigencies. New rules, tastes and customs constantly enter into cultures, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. These may have little or no significant effect on a society, they may be beneficial and contribute to survival, or they may be harmful. The key to understanding social change is that the circumstances in which any society lives, even the most isolated and remote, are never permanently fixed. It turns out, more or less by accident, that certain cultural patterns are more flexible and allow for easier adaptation as climates, social environments, technologies and population densities change. Cultural patterns that are too inflexible, or that fail to provide successful solutions to serious new problems faced by a society provoke crises. These may be fatal, or they may lead to greater flexibility. As with biological evolution, the rate of change is almost certainly not constant, but irregular, a matter of 'punctuated equilibrium' as periods of relatively slow change are followed by sudden clumps of serious new challenges (Sahlins and Service, 1960; Boserup, 1981).

Long ago, Shmuel Eisenstadt tried to show that there were strong commonalties between all the classical agrarian empires of the past, though he later fell into the error of insisting that at some time each of the major world religions set its sphere of influence on a path from which deviation was almost impossible (Eisenstadt, 1963, 1986). Indeed, agrarian kingdoms and empires all developed warrior aristocracies at one time or another because this was an efficient way to fight wars, and because those who became professional war lords possessed the physical strength to grab a surplus from their peasants. Only in remote mountains or otherwise protected regions did more democratic, tribal cultures survive. This was such a universal development that it overrode all the supposedly enormous cultural differences between the classical civilizations.

Similarly, urban merchants arose everywhere and they were more likely to quantify and rationalize their surroundings than lords or peasants. In the long run, religious elites everywhere tended to downplay the virtues of military bravura and the calculating greed of merchants, and the official clerks who served ruling dynasties emphasized the role of learning and administrative rationality. These combinations of classes and value-predispositions arose over and over again with startling regularity because these types of occupations and attitudes were in demand and were best able to keep advanced agrarian societies functioning (M. Weber, 1968: 1351–2).

What have been called big cultural barriers between the major cultural clumps called civilizations were largely produced by accidental differences in the distributions of power between the same sets of competing

346

kings, warrior aristocrats, merchants, clerks, priests, peasants and neighboring hill or desert tribes hovering on the edges of established agrarian states. Geography, the accident of being on a migratory or trade route, the quality of the land and the frequency with which it was subjected to natural catastrophes such as floods or droughts, the nearness or distance from nomadic and less civilized border tribes – these determined different outcomes. There were cultural differences, to be sure, but the basics were very similar in all agrarian states, except that accidents made some groups relatively more powerful in some places and not in others.

To give a major example, it was the accidental independence of merchant cities in Western Europe combined with the fact that the best lands of Western Europe were not subject to frequent climatic extremes or exposed to nomadic raids that lay behind the 'European miracle' (Jones, 1981). The greater independence of towns and merchants allowed the greater flowering of a rationalizing ethic, and the long-term stability in agricultural production without too many interruptions built up a capital base unmatched elsewhere, except to some extent in China. Finally, the failure to unite Europe (unlike China, which kept on coming back together), allowed more stimulating technological, economic, intellectual competition to push evolutionary change faster. But the cultural elements that made up western civilization in the Middle Ages were the same as those elsewhere, and only small differences in the relative weight of each determined a different outcome (Chirot, 1986).

No agrarian civilization solved the problem of population cycles. In good times, population growth outstripped technological progress and caused declining per capita returns in food production as well as the overproduction of grasping nobles. Wars, disease and famines then erupted until the situation was redressed. This endless cycle made up much of the drama of classical history, from China to India to the Middle East to Europe and even to the Mesoamerican classical civilizations. This is why from the time when agrarian states first established themselves in antiquity until the late Middle Ages the human population grew slowly (McEvedy and Jones, 1978: 342–51).

The story of how the West broke out of this pattern was a mainstay of social science theorizing throughout the 19th and well into the middle of the 20th century. Only in recent decades has this problem ceased to be the single most important one posed by the social sciences. Then, at least in sociology, world systems theorists came along to sneer at the problem by claiming that Western Europeans were only better thieves and not cultural innovators, and postmodernists began to deny that the West had invented anything other than its own mythological narratives (Wallerstein, 1974; Abu-Lughod, 1989; Lyotard, 1979). Yet, something did happen in the West and it transformed the world as much as did the much earlier agrarian

347

revolution that occurred in the several millennia before 3000 BC. As in the earlier revolution, the human population again began to grow very rapidly, and human societies were dramatically altered. The biggest difference is that this second great transformation has taken place in, at most, 300 or 400 years rather than 3000 or 4000 (Diamond, 1997: 176–91, 215–92).

Now, once again, humanity is faced with a new set of unprecedented challenges and it has been obliged to adapt to the new circumstances by creating new types of social organizations, new cultures. As in the agrarian past, however, only a fairly narrow set of workable options exist, though all sorts of experiments have been and will continue to be tried everywhere as people struggle to combine old habits with new requirements. In the modern transformation it turns out that the set of possible solutions are narrower than ever before because of the emergence of a single world market and because of the fantastic progress in the speed of communications. Societies and systems that do not adapt will fall behind, their people will become restless and rebellious, and they will fail.

One difference now may be that evolutionary pressures exposing failures no longer need to manifest themselves mostly through military conquests, enslavements, famines or forced expulsions as they did in the past. The customs, laws, ideologies and forms of organization that block free exchanges of ideas and technologies, of goods and capital, of labor and skills have only to produce slower economic growth for people to become discontented. Those hostile to the new requirements may think that the rich capitalist powers, now led by the USA, are plotting their destruction. But no plot or direct intervention is really necessary. Fundamentalist Muslim regimes, right-wing corporatist autocracies, corrupt, closed plutocracies, or other such holdovers from the late agrarian age hurt their societies by insisting on maintaining poorly adapted social and economic systems. Typically, their leaders understand this but hold onto power desperately, afraid that adaptation to the new requirements will sweep them away. That is why they are so afraid of the free exchange of ideas and information, as that will make their failures all the more apparent to the people they rule.

Where does this leave the 'clash of civilizations'? An evolutionary-functionalist line of theorizing suggests that the 'clash' is largely a function of uneven modernization, and is therefore unlikely to last very much longer, certainly not much more than through the present century. It is not fixed eternally in either the historical past or the future. One way of verifying this is to look at situations in which civilizations, complex cultural patterns shared by many similar and usually adjoining societies, really did clash in the past in irreconcilable ways, and then to see if any parallels exist today.

Three major types of conflicts between cultures and societies existed during the long agrarian age. One was between essentially equal, highly

adapted empires, kingdoms and other state structures. Romans and Persians, or many Christian and Muslim political entities, fought countless wars along their borders. They claimed to be very different from each other, but were not, and in fact understood each other well enough to form alliances that cut across religion and cultures very easily. These conflicts were similar to those that occurred within each 'civilization', between and within Christian and Muslim polities or within the boundaries of the Roman and Persian spheres of influence.[3]

Somewhat different and more genuinely 'civilizational' were the conflicts between advanced agrarian societies and the less politically sophisticated mountain, desert and forest people around them. When the more advanced agrarian state societies were divided, or exhausted from recent wars and plagues caused largely by the population cycle that periodically devastated them, the surrounding 'barbarians' might gain military victories. But in the long run it was almost always the established agrarian civilizations that won by either vanquishing the tribes or converting them to their way of life and usually their religions as well.

Ibn Khaldun, observing this process in North African history, explained the phenomenon as one in which hard desert nomads conquered soft city dynasties, installed themselves as rulers, and in turn became soft and lost their ability to push back new nomadic tribes (Ibn Khaldun, 1969). Demographic pressures and internal divisions within coastal Arab elites who, like most elites, overreproduced themselves, probably had more to do with this cycle than urban corruption. Ecologically fragile dry areas on the edge of deserts in the Middle East and North Africa were also most likely to suffer from periodic ecological degradation that weakened agrarian economies. But even here, aside from the original Muslim conquest in the 7th century, nomadic invaders always wound up adopting the culture and religion of those they conquered. Later conquerors – Arab or Berber nomads, Turks and Mongols –who came into the Islamic sphere all converted to Islam and adopted the way of life of those they had conquered (Ashtor, 1976).

This was true everywhere, whether in China, whose dynastic cycles resemble the pattern observed by Ibn Khaldun, in Europe where waves of invading barbarian tribes were Romanized (or in the East, Byzantinized) and Christianized, in India, or in Persia. In the end the style of life and organization of the established agrarian states triumphed because that was the only way to sustain elite cultures on the backs of local peasants and to fight off enemies.[4]

With the perfection of guns after the 17th century, these kinds of tribal invasions of agrarian states became impossible because it was no longer possible to make up with endurance and good horsemanship the overwhelming military superiority of established states (Keegan, 1994: 207–17).

The third and even more fundamentally civilizational type of conflict in the agrarian world occurred when established states pushed out into significantly more backward tribal areas that were geographically suited for colonization. This happened untold numbers of times, which is precisely how 'civilizations' came to occupy such large areas as tribe after tribe was conquered and either absorbed, destroyed, or forced to flee into ever more remote and inaccessible regions. We know some of the stories. Caesar's legions penetrating into Gaul far from the old Roman border overwhelmed the Celtic tribes. Combined with subsequent colonization, Gallic culture as such had almost ceased to exist by the time Gaul was conquered by the Franks (Bloch, 1968: 155, 434). The Chinese were masters of this kind of overwhelming cultural extinction, as Han immigrants pushed into southern China and absorbed, destroyed, or expelled the local tribes. In China, the process continues to this day around the 'barbarian' edges of Han civilization (Diamond, 1997: 332–3).[5]

It did not always require strong state structures to do this. Whenever people at a higher technological stage moved into areas peopled by cultures at a lower stage, the result was similar. Expanding Bantu populations with iron-working technology, for example, eliminated the prior cultures that had lived in eastern and southern Africa, reducing them to increasingly fragmented Khoisan remnants (Diamond, 1997: 378–401; Iliffe, 1995: 35–6).

In the early modern age, as West European technology advanced rapidly, the westerners gained an advantage over the rest of the world. When people with guns and efficient military organization ran into slightly more backward agrarian states, however, both sides understood quite well what was happening. They recognized what kings, aristocrats, long-distance traders, gold, slaves and mercantile greed were all about (Cipolla, 1965).

But when early modern Europeans ran into pre-state, even pre-agrarian peoples, there occurred the most tragic of all 'civilizational' clashes. Without fixed state structures, kings, or landed aristocrats, and generally without strong notions of private property in land, pre-agrarian people could hardly understand what it was that the Europeans wanted. Their technologies allowed only very low population densities, especially if they were still primarily hunters and gatherers, as in Australia and large parts of North America. Even if they were slash and burn agriculturists, such people needed vast amounts of land to survive. Nor could Europeans understand why this was so, or why it was that treaties signed meant nothing.[6] Then there was the matter of biological evolution as people who had lived in societies with much lower population densities tended to have been exposed to far fewer diseases than those who had lived in densely packed human environments. The native peoples were

therefore subjected to terrible epidemics when they came into contact with immunologically more sophisticated Europeans. There ensued the most genuine, irresolvable and tragic 'clashes of civilization' and cultural as well as physical exterminations (Thornton, 1987; Diamond, 1997: 210–14).

These kinds of tragic conflicts between societies at very different evolutionary stages are drawing to a close as few such extreme gaps remain today. Where they still exist, however, the tragedies continue, whether in West New Guinea since the arrival of Indonesian power, or in the Amazon as gold prospectors and lumbermen move in (Sims, 2000; Cleary, 1990).

Today what are called 'civilizational' conflicts are, by and large, between societies that are at different, but not so enormously different stages of sociocultural evolution. Two types of cultural conflicts dominate the contemporary world. One is between people who are essentially similar as, say, the Germans and French were at the start of the 20th century, or as Indians and Pakistanis are today. There may be religious or ideological differences between them, as there were between the capitalist West and the socialist USSR until 1989, but these are no more immutable than the Franco-German conflicts from 1870 to 1945. We should remember that in the early 20th century, differences between nation-states within Western Europe were seen as deeply ingrained, based on centuries of culturally divergent histories, even millennia, and perhaps even due to basic racial, biological differences (E. Weber, 1986: 105–6, 130–41). This now looks like a very bad joke that unfortunately produced two world wars and enormous suffering. Driving from Madrid to Stockholm today one can note changing scenery and languages, some different foods, but no obvious 'civilizational' differences except rather trivial ones.

The other, more fundamental kind of cultural conflict is the difference between societies at different evolutionary-technological stages. If the extreme differences between hunter-gatherers and modernizing societies is almost a thing of the past, what are called 'third world' or just frankly less advanced, poorer societies are still much closer to their agrarian past than are those societies that have industrialized and are moving into a postindustrial age. There are now almost no purely agrarian societies any more, but there are certainly many where a large portion, often even majorities of the population are unable to benefit from the skills and technologies widely available in the most advanced economies.

It was to address the reasons for such lags, and to offer solutions for redressing them that modernization theory, based on evolutionary-functionalist thinking, was developed in the 1940s and 1950s. Unfortunately, the abandonment of this approach in the 1970s left sociology bereft of any theoretical basis for explaining why such lags existed or what could be done about them. That left us open to the fallacies proposed by postmodernists, who simply deny that differences are explained by lags, and

351

those proposed by Huntingtonians, who suggest that they are irremediable.

It is politically incorrect and unpopular to say, but nevertheless true, that the technological stage in which societies found themselves at the start of the 20th century has made a big difference in how well they have adapted to modernizing pressures. Societies farthest on the scale from the West at the start of the industrial age have found the leap to modernity most difficult (Lenski and Nolan, 1985). Thus, the highly sophisticated, literate states in 1800 with very advanced agricultural techniques and an already developed sense of nationalism such as China, Korea and Japan have been able to catch up to the West and in some instances surpass it fairly quickly in the late 20th century. Indeed, most of China would probably be as well off today as Taiwan and the Hong Kong to Canton complex if it had not suffered the misfortunes of almost 30 years of Maoism (Vogel, 1989, 1991).

Quite the contrary situation exists in parts of the world that had very low literacy rates or none at all, rudimentary state structures without a bureaucratic-service tradition, and backward agricultural technologies. This is most obvious in sub-Saharan Africa (Diamond, 1997: 398–401). Of course the slave trade and the internal wars it engendered until the very end of the 19th century in parts of Africa made things all the worse, and so did early 20th-century colonialism by the Europeans, particularly in its most brutal forms (Curtin, 1969; Hochschild, 1999; Pakenham, 1991). Nevertheless, it is sheer delusion to ascribe all the difficulties Africa has had in modernizing to the colonial legacy. Sub-Sahara's economic development has lagged so far behind other parts of the world, including other formerly colonized and war-ravaged societies, that external exploitation provides insufficient explanation. Nor is it simply a matter of a technological lag, as better technologies are widely available, and there have been cases elsewhere in the world of relatively backward economies adopting new technologies and modernizing very rapidly (Lancaster, 1999: 18–35).

The almost complete absence of effective bureaucratic institutions, at both the private and governmental level, and the lack of loyalty to any social institution larger than an individual's family and immediate circle of clients have probably been even bigger barriers to Africa's development than technological backwardness (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; *The Economist*, 2000: 22–4). But this is also the function of a lag in social evolution. Sociocultural modernization is more than mere technological progress, and it is impossible to separate the material from the social and political consequences of backwardness.

Africa can modernize, but only by adopting an institutional and social structure that more closely resembles that which evolved over centuries

in the capitalist early modernizers. This means establishing a legal frame-work for protecting private property rights, strengthening impartial judicial systems, permitting private businesses to flourish without either overregulating them or overtaxing them, remedying the extreme gender inequality that exists in most African societies and wastes enormous amounts of human capital, and concentrating government efforts on building adequate infrastructures (African Development Bank, 2000: 39–42). None of this is easy, but a good first step is to recognize that the ills from which Africa suffers are not the inevitable consequences of fixed civilizational differences. The most advanced western societies of today once had social structures that were as clientelistic, as corrupt, as hostile to private property rights and as unfair to women as African societies. Today, progress can actually be faster because the changes necessary for sound modernization are well understood; but that means abandoning the specious reasoning that either condemns modernity as an evil or somehow makes it seem unreachable for those in the world who have not yet achieved it.

One can find other parts of the world that demonstrate the validity of the proposition that greater contact with and adoption of the ways of more advanced economies and societies accelerate modernization, for example, Eastern Europe. There, those societies long exposed to Western Europe, influenced by western urban merchants, and possessing superior western agricultural techniques such as the three-field system and the moldboard plow by the late Middle Ages were able to modernize more quickly than their less advantaged neighbors. As it was mostly geographical proximity to Western Europe that determined how advanced these parts of Eastern Europe became, and the regions closest to the West were also more exposed to western markets during the 19th century, these most west-ernized societies have done far better in the 20th century than the more remote and technologically backward parts of Eastern Europe. The argument put forward by dependency theorists and world system theorists that contact with the capitalist West made places like Poland or Hungary backward is completely wrong. Closer contacts dating back to the late Middle Ages have made Poland and Hungary better able to adapt to the modern world, and even to move faster than most other post-Communist societies in overcoming the negative consequences of 40 years of socialism (Chirot, 1989).

Where does this leave the discussion about the 'clash of civilizations'? It suggests that the real problem is one of modernization. But that is not what most opponents of westernization choose to believe. When Iran's religious leaders overthrew the Shah in 1979 and pronounced America to be the fount of all evil, they were rejecting many aspects of moderniz-ation, including increasing freedom of thought, the liberation of women

and mass consumerism. Yet, they too have had to compromise to keep Iran strong and to satisfy their people's demands.[7] An absolute rejection of modernization consigns a society to a lower evolutionary stage, and in the modern world, that means that its people will feel increasingly unfree, poor and weak.

Unfortunately, this does not begin to settle the problem as some optimists have suggested.[8] It does not mean that all those who try to modernize in a non-capitalist, non-democratic, non-consumerist fashion must always succumb to the lures of the West and reform their ways. It does not make cultural differences caused by evolutionary lags any less profoundly felt. Most of all, it does not eliminate extreme dissension within every contemporary society about the value and morality of modernization as it has been practiced most successfully by West Europeans and Americans. This becomes evident by looking at the location of the most bitter conflicts about modernization and westernization, because these do not occur between different societies but rather within almost every society.

In every Islamic society there are westernizers as well as anti-westernizers, those who want to modernize following an open, democratic, more liberal path and those who think it is more desirable to reject the liberal western path. Not all Iranians really believe that the way of the reactionary Imams is the right way; those who do not may well be a strong majority. But this kind of division exists everywhere, even in the USA, and it persists as well within many individuals who have conflicting emotions about which is the best way to cope with the modern, increasingly globalized world.

The Middle East contains many of the best, but far from the only examples of the many contradictory forces at work. For example, the Kemalist tradition in Turkey is westernizing, anti-clerical, and has fostered substantial democratization, but this has allowed a strong Islamist party to grow. Because of this, and because of the Kurdish problem, the Turkish military cannot easily reconcile itself to a genuinely open, entirely free, democratic political system; but Turkey is too closely tied to Europe, and has too strong a democratic past to revert to simple military authoritarianism (Kasaba and Bozdogan, 2000). On the other hand, equally westernizing and secularizing Tunisia under Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali has remained strongly anti-democratic, but this has given a covert Islamic radical movement the opportunity to attract opposition forces who are actually much more of a menace to westernization and democracy than Turkey's Islamists. To this day, the complicated interplay of Islam, westernization, democracy and autocracy leaves room for many different political and social outcomes (Angrist, 1999). In Iran, the Imam Khomeini bitterly assailed westernization but oversaw the writing of a

constitution that is full of contradictions because it tries to promote Shiite theocracy while also establishing a rational-legal modern state that admits the possibility of democratization and some measure of free thought (Arjomand, 2000, 2001).

Such contradictions are by no means limited to Islamic societies. In France there are intellectuals whose rejection of American globalization borders on what might seem to be an utter rejection of the modern world (Besset, 2000), and in the USA significant segments of the population believe that Darwinian evolutionary theory should not be taught in schools (Glanz, 1999). It was only a little over a half century ago that the European nation most advanced in science and technology was ruled by Nazis who rejected capitalism and democracy as degenerate Jewish perversions of modernity and who sought to recreate a mythical medieval *Volksgemeinschaft*. Only in 1991 did a Soviet Communist regime that had reverted to a kind of primitive, anti-democratic, anti-market, anti-liberal and deeply anti-western Slavophilism, finally collapse because of its inefficiencies and failure to keep Russian modernization moving forward (Arendt, 1951; McDaniel, 1996).

Social evolutionary pressures do not guarantee that the most efficient solution will always win in the short or even medium run. This is the paradox that led Douglass North to wonder why, when it is so clear which of all economic systems works best, there are so many societies that reject it (North, 1990). His answer was that ruling classes do not necessarily seek to maximize the general well-being, only their own hold on power. But to this he should have added that ideology, religious faith and just plain uncertainty mean that there is always room for inefficient, even harmful solutions. Once these are in place and legitimize a particular set of elites, they will hold on as long as possible, and only fall when their failures lead to military weakness, popular revolt, or changes by members of the elite who realize that they need to modernize to survive. Before that point is reached a society may be led into catastrophe as Germany and Russia were, and as is happening right now in a diverse set of societies from Afghanistan to the Congo to Burma and North Korea. In some cases, only the most dramatic sorts of failures finally lead people to understand that the solutions they are trying cannot work.

The determined loyalty of so many western intellectuals, including many sociologists, to socialist ideals long after it had become obvious that this was also an evolutionary dead end shows that we all have the capacity to pick wrong solutions and hold them against all evidence. The 'clash of civilizations' is in that sense within all of us, dividing all societies and even individual minds. Western nations retain the capacity to make the wrong choices, to struggle against liberal modernization and lead themselves into disaster. After all, it was not a despotic Asiatic culture that

devised the 20th century's most viciously anti-liberal, and ultimately self-destructive and dysfunctional regime, but the highly westernized, advanced Germans in the 1930s. Today it is not a wild-eyed imam from a dusty *madrasa* who most eloquently preaches against the modern corporation and free-flowing international trade but an American named Ralph Nader backed by the supposedly most progressive activists in the USA.

It is necessary to remember all this if we are to speak about the resistance to modernization that is the hallmark of the most intense cultural clashes in the contemporary world. We have no way of knowing what forms of social organization will prove to be the most adaptable in the 22nd or 23rd centuries. We do know, however, that in the future, just as in the past, there will be contentious debates about which way to go, how to adapt to change, and how to direct it. We know, also, that the most bitter clashes of competing cultures will not be mostly between cultures at different evolutionary stages of development, because existing gaps can be closed, as they have been in many cases in the past. Rather, we can predict that both the Huntingtonians and postmodernists are wrong, and that the most severe, irreconcilable cultural clashes will be within societies, between different ideas about how to continue modernization, what to reject and what to accept. We also know that within any society, when the wrong side wins, tragedy will ensue.

Notes

1. A look at the Document section of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (www.unhch.ch/) only begins to indicate how seriously the issue of basic human rights is taken in a growing number of countries in the world, if only to satisfy international opinion and avoid condemnation.

2. That is not to say that the Islamists would maintain a pro-European position if they were in power, of course, but that political competition forces people to reconsider their ideological positions and may, over time, produce real shifts. See the Turkish newspapers *Radikal* and *Yeni Safak* to follow the twists and turns of these debates. Also, see Kasaba and Watts (2001) and Yavuz (1999).

3. See, for example, the many references to the wars and treaties between Rome and the Parthian Empire in Mattern (1999). Rome's relations with Sassanid Persia and the degree to which their perceptions of each other were rather similar, despite their cultural differences, are discussed by Christensen (1971: especially 126–37). There is a huge literature on Christian–Muslim relations in the Middle Ages, but a good example of how closely intertwined relations between these hostile 'civilizations' really became can be seen in Ostrogorsky's descriptions of relations between the rising Ottoman state and the late Byzantine Empire (Ostrogorsky, 1957: 475–509).

4. Owen Lattimore once wrote a provocative article suggesting that Chingiz Khan deliberately did not launch an invasion of China as soon as possible to avoid this pattern of leaving the steppe open to new tribes able to start the cycle all over again (Lattimore, 1963). In the long run, however, the Mongols followed the old pattern of becoming partly Sinicized, eventually losing their comparative advantage, and being overthrown (Morgan, 1986: 198–205).

5. Edward Friedman sees some hope for the reassertion of ethnic diversity in a post-Leninist China, but he also explains how the Communists were even more ruthless assimilationists than their imperial predecessors (Friedman, 1995: 54–8).

6. Though it is only one of hundreds of such stories, and one of the most extreme examples, the case of the extermination of the Tasmanians described by Robert Hughes captures the essence of such tragedies (Hughes, 1988: 414–24).

7. That, presumably, is what lies behind the continuing struggle in Iran between the majority of the population that seems to be backing the reformist efforts of President Khatami, and the more anti-western religious establishment. See Arjomand (2000).

8. The best known 'optimist' in that sense is Francis Fukuyama (1992), or at least, that is the way his well-known book about the 'end of history' has been interpreted. Even if his central argument is accepted, of course, it has become evident over the past decade that the forces of anti-capitalism, anti-democracy and anti-liberalism remain active and are vigorously counterattacking the trend toward westernizing modernization. See Ken Jowitt's (1992: 249–331) accurate prediction that this would happen.

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