



From Tragedy to Policy



Introduction

As the world becomes more globalized, the tangible lines dividing countries and cultures are increasingly blurred. The interconnectedness of the globe brings people thousands of miles away from each other together in a matter of seconds. However, as globalization has proliferated, other theories of dividing the world have arisen. One of the most popular—some may argue it is the most popular—theories of dividing up the world was published in 1993 in *Foreign Affairs* by Samuel Huntington. Originally titled “Clash of Civilizations?”—later on the question mark was removed when the thesis was expounded upon and made into a book—Huntington attempted to provide readers with a new term that described a long-standing, internalized political myth: “The idea of a Clash between Civilizations is a sort of electric spark that sets people’s imagination alight, because it finds fertile soil in which to proliferate” (Bottici & Challand; 2). The popularity behind this essay, later expanded into a book, can partly be attributed to its timing. The Soviet Union had collapsed just two years before, and the public, as well as policy makers, were having difficulty in making sense of the new unipolar/multipolar world. Huntington provided a frame to help make sense of the world. In other words, this book had a large influence on those in political power as well as the general public, providing a very particular lens for Western society at large to look through. My assertion is that the American media adopted the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ theory in its framing of Muslims and Islam after September 11.

Huntington’s core argument/ media framework

Geopolitical

- World is divided into nine civilizations: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese
- “Instead of ‘East and West,’ it is more appropriate to speak of ‘the West and the rest,’ which at least implies the existence of many non-Wests.” --‘The West’ is the locus [apex] of civilizations
- Juxtaposes ‘the West’ and Islam

Micro-political

Part 4) “The West’s universalist pretensions increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China.”

Part 5) “The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners...uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies” (Huntington 20; italics mine).

Three issues within Islamic and Confucian societies that the West must become more involved in:

- (1) to maintain its military superiority through policies of nonproliferation and counterproliferation with respect to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and the means to deliver them
- (2) to promote Western political values and institutions by pressing other societies to respect human rights as conceived in the West and adopt democracy on Western lines
- (3) to protect the cultural, social, and ethnic integrity of Western societies by restricting the number of non-Westerners admitted as immigrants or refugees.”

Methodology

From September 11, 2001 to December 31, 2001 I designed a methodology that proved very effective in my analysis. I examined the Tuesday paper each week in all four of my sources. I chose the Tuesday of every week to assist the systematizing of my research. Additionally, because my media analysis was, in some respects, a comparative study, the material between sources was easier to compare. Fortunately, I was able to find many different books that provided a similar analysis as mine. Due to this, I benefitted from in-depth coverage and interpretation of some articles that were not available because of my date-specific analysis. The lack of time available for analysis due to my short summer research program was another added liability when it came to my in-depth research. In my media analysis, I looked for explicit statements and implicit allusions to the Clash of Civilizations.

Explicit Statements: a ‘clash’ between Islam [Muslim world] and the West; ‘Islam vs. the West; descriptions of the Middle East as backward, archaic, pre-modern, barbaric; Manichean dualism—in other words, good vs. evil; and descriptions of the West, particularly the US, as the pinnacle of civilization—demonstrates the dialectical relationship between the West and Islam.

Implicit allusions: the coverage of the oppressed Afghan woman under the rule of the Taliban—this implies the need for a savior who is also someone civilized to liberate these women; the concept of ‘knowing’ why the enemy hates ‘us’ because of our values alludes to the concept of the Clash of Civilizations because they do not hold our same values, which in this case are implied to be ‘right’—it subordinates the enemy as weak-minded because they are easily understood, and it absolves the US of all responsibility for potentially instigating the actions of others.

Media Analysis

Morrow’s Priming

Time magazine, like many other print media sources, ran a special on September 11. However, one article stands out to be quite unlike the rest of the issue. The kicker of the special edition is an article called “The Case for Rage and Retribution” by Lance Morrow. As mentioned in the essay’s title, Morrow attempts to make a logical argument for rage among the American people. Who we should use our rage towards is never specifically mentioned, although many of his statements are descriptive enough for one to formulate for his or herself who the enemy is that Morrow refers to. He writes, “What’s needed is a unified, unifying, Pearl Harbor sort of purple American fury—a ruthless indignation that doesn’t leak away in a week or two...into a corruptly thoughtful relativism (as has happened in the recent past, when, for example, you might hear someone say, ‘Terrible what he did, of course, but, you know, the Unabomber does have a point, doesn’t he, about modern technology?’ (Morrow no page #) In other words, what Morrow argues in this statement is the idea of not logically assessing the attacks and rather just becoming angry at an enemy without a state that one cannot pick out of a crowd. Applying this logic to the rest of the article creates in one’s understanding of who the true enemy is. Morrow goes on to write, “Let America explore the rich reciprocal possibilities of the *fatwa*. A policy of focused brutality does not come easily to a self-conscious, self-indulgent, contradictory, diverse, humane nation with a short attention span.” The wrongful use of the term *fatwa* in the aforementioned sentence misrepresents Islam and Muslims as ‘brutal’ and incorporates the geopolitical effect of the Clash of Civilizations theory. It differentiates Islam and the West, arguing that the West should take up the barbaric qualities of the Islamic world. But Morrow does not stop here. He continues, writing, “Anyone who does not loathe the people who did these things, and the people who cheer them on, is too philosophical for decent company.” The use of ‘people’ here calls to mind an ethnic group or ‘civilization’ of people cheering on crazed terrorists. Morrow concludes his essay with this statement: “The worst times, as we see, separate the civilized of the world from the uncivilized. This is the moment of clarity. Let the civilized toughen up, and let the uncivilized take their chances in the game they started.” One should keep in mind, that this is the kicker of the kicker of one of the most important issues of *Time* ever.

The Collective Muslim Mind

In the same *New York Times* issue, in the article *America the Vulnerable Meets a Ruthless Enemy*, the author uses the same kind of rhetoric as a writer for the *Wall Street Journal* does two days later. Burns writes, “On the tape, Mr. bin Laden read a chilling poem with themes that have a powerful resonance among Muslims with the grievances against America.” The subsequent article in the *Wall Street Journal* titled *Moving Target: Bin Laden’s Network, Far-Flung and Fanatic, Challenges Retaliation* reads, “Above all, the network’s [al Qaeda] ‘great strength is his [bin Laden] ability to pick up people, especially Muslims in Western countries at a loose end, looking for a cause,’ Mr. Randal says.” Both of these articles employ the Orientalist concept of ‘knowing’ the Orient, which is in this case the Muslim. The universalist language present in both articles—the former refers to all Muslims, while the latter refers to those only in Western countries—subordinates the Muslim into a more primitive, single-minded being. The root cause of Muslims joining al Qaeda, according to both of these articles, is the feeling of disenfranchisement and animosity towards the United States. What is constructed in both of these articles is the concept of the ‘bad’ Muslim. The phrase ‘grievance against America’ is vague, producing images ranging from the Muslim who hates the values of the United States to the Muslim who dislikes the service at a restaurant. In other words, the statement leaves the interpretation up to the reader. The *Wall Street Journal* article takes it a step further and says that al Qaeda is able to garner recruits from any Muslim who is ‘looking for a cause.’ This concept lumps all Muslims who are looking to become politically active in with potential terrorists. In addition to the sweeping generalizations both of these articles commit, they also create a ‘good’ Muslim to serve as the antithesis to the ‘bad.’ The ‘good’ Muslim is one who is not looking for a cause and lacks any ‘grievance’ toward the United States because he or she supports the country.

“The president seemed to assure Americans that ‘good Muslims’ were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support ‘us’ in a war against ‘them.’ But this could not hid the central message of such discourse: unless proved to be ‘good,’ every Muslim was presumed to be ‘bad.’ All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against ‘bad’ Muslims.”—Mahmood Mamdani

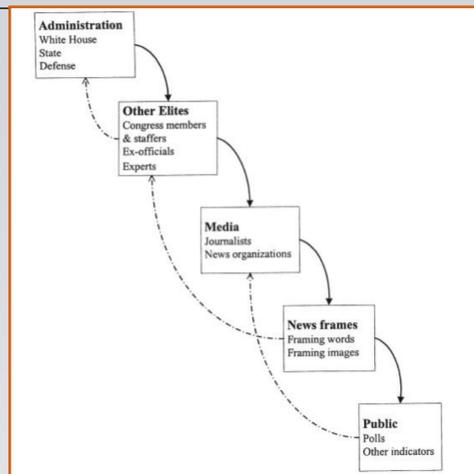


Figure 2. Cascading network activation.

Media analysis (Cont.)

Pseudo-Feminism & Foreign Policy

On November 17, 2001, Laura Bush broadcast nationally over the radio a commemoration of the recent attack on Afghanistan from the concept of liberating the Afghan woman. For example, in one instance she says, “Only the terrorists and the Taliban threaten to pull out women’s fingernails for wearing nail polish. The plight of women and children in Afghanistan is a matter of deliberate human cruelty, carried out by those who seek to intimidate and control”. In its entirety, Laura Bush’s speech was essentially a pseudo-feminist appeal to garner more support for the war in Afghanistan. And abiding by the cascading activation model in nearly an ideal fashion the media seemed to immediately followed suit in its coverage of the oppressed Afghan woman under the rule of the Taliban.

Time adhered strictly to the contents of Laura Bush’s speech in its coverage of the Afghan woman subsequent to her speech. In its December, 3, 2001 issue the concept was a headliner titled, *Lifting the Veil*. In the leading article, *About Face*, Afghanistan is labeled explicitly as being “tribal and conservative;” tribal in this instance used as a term of denunciation rather than descriptive. In the article’s coverage of different women in Afghanistan, those who show that they are content with some, or all, of their standards are denounced in what appears to be a deliberate manner. The author writes, “Many rural women, especially, claim to wear it [burka] willingly, at least when they speak in the presence of their husbands.” The context here insinuates the possibility of these women not wanting to wear the burka, but due to the power exercised on them in this misogynistic society they cannot say so in the presence of men. The article continues, “But nearly any educated woman you may speak to loathes the burka.” This entire claim happens to be an anecdote, as well as the application of cognitive dissonance. An example of how cognitive dissonance could be applied here is this: If one was to ask a woman in Afghanistan if she likes wearing her burka, and in privacy she says yes, one could claim that she is not educated because she does not ‘know’ that she is oppressed. Nonetheless the article still continues to push the topic of the oppressed Afghan woman: [Following the previous sentence] “So do many less educated ones-if you question them where men cannot hear.” Another anecdote here is used, without any support from quotations—i.e. letting the women speak for themselves.

The *New York Times* did not take as headline of an approach to the concept of liberating the ‘Afghan woman’. There was included criticism in the November 20 edition, titled *Women in Afghanistan*, and Here. It argued for the positive portrayal of all Muslims in Afghanistan, as the author felt there was a lack of it from the NYT. The previous day the NYT ran *Behind the Burka[sic]* which documented some of the stories of the liberated Afghan woman

It reads, “The freedom is still too new to completely trust...but for the first time in years, women here say they have hope—that they will be treated like human beings, not wayward cattle.” What this article is able to accomplish is demonstrating how good some Afghan women feel being ‘liberated’ by the United States, and in addition arguing for more intervention.

This, of all the material I found in my research, abides the closest to the Clash of Civilizations theory. It embodies the micro-political framework of the second clause Huntington argued for in the Western defense against Islam and China: “to promote Western political values and institutions by pressing other societies to respect human rights as conceived in the West and adopt democracy on Western lines” (1993).

‘We’ are pressing Afghanistan to respect ‘their’ women as ‘we’ respect ‘our’ women. Due to the fact that not all Afghan women liberated at this point it gives reason to push further until all are saved by the West. The geopolitical framework also functions implicitly with this concept of liberation. As the West impresses its own values on that of an Islamic society a dichotomy is created: the West and Islam appear to be incompatible.

Implications

Social

The social implications affected how Muslims and those that ‘looked’ Muslim were perceived in the American public. As Abrahamian puts it, “By framing the crisis in the context of Islam it made all Muslims suspect—unless they could prove themselves innocent of being terrorists or sympathizing with terrorists” (2003, p. 538). “The Reverend Jerry Falwell, the televangelist who claimed to speak for seventy million Christian fundamentalists, argued that he had studied enough to know that Muhammad, in contrast to the law-abiding Moses, was a ‘terrorist’ who ‘indulged in violence and warfare,’” writes Abrahamian.

Example: “Last week, a cardiologist of East Indian descent from nearby Huntington was trying to go home on a bus after the airports closes, stranding him in Washington. When the bus first arrived in Charleston, he found himself surrounded by police officers who ordered him to the ground at gunpoint. They were responding to a panicky report from his fellow passengers about the man of apparently of ‘Middle Easter descent’ carrying a black bag and asking about a local airport” (Toner, 2001).

Time magazine even included a poll of Americans that showed 67% of Americans supported an ongoing policy of interviews about 5000 people, ages 18-33 within the Arab-American and Islamic community [sic]—the poll combines both of these communities. [CITE, December 10, Just a Few Questions]

Intellectual

“Specialists who did not describe the conflict in the context of Islam and instead asked awkward questions were sidelined, leaving the field wide open to so-called experts on ‘terrorism’, ‘religious extremism’, and ‘Islamic fundamentalism.’”—Abrahamian

An example of this rests in the review of the book *Holy War, Inc.* in the *New York Times* article “21st Century Jihad.”

--“This book contains one significant failing, in my view, and that is Bergen’s analysis of why bin Laden is at war with the United States. Bergen take issue with Samuel Huntington’s widely cited thesis that there is clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. He says bin Laden has a clear and specific political agenda—changing American policy in the Middle East. He opposes the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia, the bombing of Iraq, support for Israel and for regimes, like those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, that he considers apostates from Islam. Bin Laden has never, Bergen notes, railed against Coca-Cola or Madonna or homosexuals.” The reviewer retorts with, “But this seems a cramped, literal parsing of bin Laden’s few public statements and, in the end, simplistic and unsatisfying. You do not have to accept Huntington’s argument entirely to see that the battle is over more than American foreign policy.” Here it is clear that the reviewer accepts all of Huntington’s thesis and view the “war on terror” as the clash between the West and Islam. Not only that, but the concept of bin Laden’s motives being based on US foreign policy are denounced as being too simplistic; yet the reviewer seems satisfied with the Huntingtonian simplistic view of the world.

Political

Framing the September 11 attacks and subsequent ‘war on terror’ solely in the context of Islam and the Clash of Civilizations completely absolves the United States of any responsibility

“No, they [Saudi consultative body] replied; the real motivations for the Sept. 11 attack were Israel and sanctions against Iraq.” ---“It was clear they were trying to deflect the issue. It was a classic case of looking for the outside problem.”

“They want to break down what America stands for. The terrorists actually want to provoke attacks on Arabs or Muslims in the U.S., because if the American communities start going after each other, if we see America fragment, then you destroy that special thing that America stands for.” —King Abdullah

Limited to no discussion of the U.S. role in the Middle East: i.e. Iraq sanctions, question of Palestine, bombing of Al-Shifa in Sudan, support of mujahedeen, etc.

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