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THE REVENGE OF GEOPOLITICS: THE SPACE AS A METAPHOR OF FEAR IN THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

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Abstract

One of the works that forged the Western geopolitical imagination was *The Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel P. Huntington. This book, which has been dealt with primarily as a political, sociological work, is imbued by schemes and categories coming from the geographical and geopolitical. My contribution shows that Huntington's geopolitical approach, that enjoyed a huge success in the world, has an origin in USA imperialism and that it has a much stronger impact than usually noticed. Here I will argue that the Clash of civilizations thesis is based on a conscious blindness with regard to the nature of contemporary societies and by a strong internal contradiction between its description of the world market and its interpretation of culture. These blind spots reveal the main focus of Huntington's approach: the celebration of homogeneity inside each civilization – and in particular the protection of the West against any de-westernization.

My contribution's aim is therefore: firstly, to show that his geopolitical model comes from a solid tradition in the American hegemonic history; secondly, that its main target is to recreate a stable internal order and homogeneity inside the western civilization, and finally that the growing recent use of this paradigm can lead to increasing tensions between groups and individuals.

Keywords

Geopolitics, civilizations, imperialism, hegemony, multicultural society.

Resumen

Una de las obras que más ha contribuido a forjar el imaginario geopolítico del mundo occidental es el libro de S. P. Huntington *El choque de civilizaciones*. En este artículo pretendo evidenciar que este libro y su tesis son estrictamente geopolíticas, es decir, que entran en el marco de los análisis que adoptan un enfoque de ciencia geográfica aplicada, útil para los políticos y para orientar y movilizar a los lectores. De acuerdo con mi lectura, la interpretación de Huntington se encuentra alineada con el imperialismo de Estados Unidos y tiene un impacto insospechado en la política interna de los países occidentales; Por otra parte, la tesis del choque de civilizaciones se basa en una ceguera consciente de la naturaleza de la sociedad contemporánea y los efectos de la globalización. Esta “zona oscura” de la teoría de Huntington revela la preocupación principal del trabajo, a saber, la defensa de Occidente frente a la des-occidentalización. El objetivo de este artículo, por lo tanto, es demostrar en primer lugar que el modelo geopolítico de Huntington se deriva de una fuerte tradición de la historia de la hegemonía estadounidense; en segundo lugar, que su principal objetivo es reconstruir un orden y homogeneidad estables dentro de la civilización occidental; por último, que el incremento reciente en el uso de este modelo puede dar lugar a un aumento de las tensiones entre grupos y los individuos.

Palabras clave

Geopolítica, civilizaciones, imperialismo, hegemonía, sociedad multicultural.

In the political sciences, in public debates as well as in political discourses we are witnessing a growing interest in the definition of the category of “space” and in geography. Some recent best sellers, like *The Revenge of Geography* (2012) by the famous political analyst Robert Kaplan or *Why Geography Matters More Than Ever* (2012) by Harm De Blij, have attracted the attention of mass media and of the public. What is meant under geography by these publications is not the physical science that primary students learn in their classes, but geopolitics, i.e., that science that explains the political events and behavior of a state or a political actor using geographical descriptions and analyses.¹ Geopolitics was from the turn of the 20th century onwards a well-established discipline, that declined in the ‘50s. Now, after a period of “amnesia” or even of censorship, the “practical science” of geopolitics, promoted during the Second World War by many national-socialist officials – and even by the American and English elites – comes on the stage again.

Geopolitics re-emerges nowadays as a discourse, an issue and a strategy at three levels: in the popular culture; i.e., in the mostly read mass-media, at the practical and formal political level and at the structural academic level.² The geopolitical approach is, therefore, not only spread as a popular discourse in mass media and tabloids, but also used as a method to analyze and represent political conflicts and as a frame in order to describe political phenomena in the international arena and a criterium for political decisions. In the political praxis, for example, a vast literature showed the use of geopolitical categories by the EU institutions and by new members: quite all Eastern European countries showed proudly their cultural belonging to Mitteleuropa in order to demonstrate their previous European cultural identity and the following right to be accepted as European.³ At the academic level, the so-called “spatial turn” in historical sciences at the beginning of the ‘90s shed light on the relation between history and geography, between the way scholars reconstruct history and the places and landscapes, that are normally seen as only the “background” of human action. Places began to be

1. The literature on geopolitics is very rich. I will just give here some hints: J. Agnew, *Geopolitics. Re-visioning world-politics*, Routledge, London, 1998; J. Agnew, S. Corbridge, *Mastering space*, Routledge, London, 1995; P. Chiantera-Stutte, *Il pensiero geopolitico*, Carocci, Roma, 2014; C. Jean, *Geopolitica*, Laterza, Roma, 1996, R. J. Johnston, *Geography and geographers. Anglo-American Human Geography since 1945*, Arnold, London, 1979; G. Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009; M. Korinman, *Quand l'Allemagne pensait le monde*, Payard, Paris, 1990; Y. Lacoste, *La géographie ça sert d'abord à faire la guerre*, Maspero, Paris, 1976; G. Ó. Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, G. Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the 20th century*, Croom Helm, London, 1985.

2. G. O'Tuathail, *Critical geopolitics*, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

3. M Kuus, “Multiple Europes. Boundaries and Margins in EU Enlargement”, in *Geopolitics*, 2005, 10, 3, pp. 567-70; J. Clark, A. Jones, “The spatialities of Europeanisation: Territory, Government and Power in Europe”, in *Transactions*, 2008, 33, pp. 300-18; I. B. Neumann, “European Identity, EU Expansion and the Integration/Exclusion Nexus”, in *Alternatives. Social Transformations and Human Governance*, 1998, 23, 3, pp. 397-416.

investigated as products of human discourse construction and not as a stable backstage⁴ Otherwise, in the geographical and political sciences the current called critical geopolitics has researched the history of the academic geographical tradition in order to grasp the complex relation between the geographical discipline and imperialism from the Nineteenth century onwards.⁵

Geopolitics is clearly referred to in these examples as a discipline, i.e., a way of acquiring some information about the geography of states and of politics and even as “geopolitical imagination”, that is a complex set of representations of our space that enable us to locate our identities and our actions. The latter concept seems more general than the former one; nevertheless, there is a specific relation between literature, politics, mass-media and science and the “geopolitical imagination”, because the way a citizen represents his political, social and cultural “space” is forged also by academic, intellectual public and political discourses. Therefore it seems relevant to deal with some representations of the space that have “made” the history, i.e., that have been famous enough to be widely used in the public opinion, by the intellectuals and the media.

One of the works that “forged” our political space was *The Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel P. Huntington, elaborated from a lecture given in 1992. Even if the book has been dealt with primarily as a political, sociological work, it is imbued by schemes and categories coming from the geographical and geopolitical. The classification and division of the world into different civilizations that is at its core refers to clear geopolitical schemes that simplify the complex relations between economical and political actors. As Bassin noticed, the civilization is conceptualized here as “agglomerations of community [...] as a tangible geographical entity. [...] civilization is identified more specifically as the highest geographical or spatial order of cultural affinity, the broadest level of cultural identity and the biggest ‘we’ within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other ‘them’ out there”⁶ Huntington divides the world into civilization blocs and explains political conflicts as battles between civilizations. Every bloc is led by a hegemonic power, that holds the political and cultural leadership and can make decisions with regard to possible conflicts with other blocs. Huntington’s model follows

4. See for instance: D. Bachman-Medick (ed.), *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen der Kulturwissenschaften*, Rowohlt, Hamburg, 2009; J. Osterhammel, “Die Wiederkehr des Raumes”, in *Neue politische Literatur*, 43, Technische Universität Darmstadt, Darmstadt, 1998, pp. 347-97; K. Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*, Hanser Verlag, München, 2003.

5. See for example J. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003; G. Ó. Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

6. M. Bassin, “Civilizations and their discontents: political geography and geopolitics in the Huntington thesis”, in *Geopolitics*, vol. 12, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p. 355. Quotations in the text from Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996, p. 43.

the realist tradition of International Relation (IR), as it states the situation of anarchy between different civilizational groups and the conflictual nature of international relations. Every bloc fights in order to get power or hegemony over the other competitors. The main tension is, however, between the West and the rest: this division is described in geographical terms as the main fault that breaks the world.⁷

My contribution shows that Huntington's geopolitical approach, that enjoyed a huge success in the world, has an origin in USA imperialism and that it has a much stronger impact than usually noticed. Here I will argue that the Clash of civilizations thesis is based on a conscious blindness with regard to the nature of contemporary societies and by a strong internal contradiction between its description of the world market and its interpretation of culture. These blind spots reveal the main focus of Huntington's approach: the celebration of homogeneity inside each civilization – and in particular the protection of the West against any de-westernization. My aim is therefore: firstly, to show that his geopolitical model comes from a solid tradition in the American hegemonic history, secondly, that its main target is to recreate a stable internal order and homogeneity inside the western civilization, and finally that the growing recent use of this paradigm can lead to increasing tensions between groups and individuals.

Is Huntington's model geopolitical?

Clearly Huntington's model aims at simplifying the complex relations between state powers in order to make them understandable for common people and models used by political strategists for their practical action. It is noteworthy that these were also the main characteristics of the geopolitical discipline, as it was promoted by MacInder in England and Haushofer in Germany: geopolitics had to be a "practical science", that would build a bridge between theory and practice, i.e., science and politics. Its aim was to offer raw material – technical information, visions and pre-visions, etc. – to the policy makers and to give people the possibility to understand international politics – and, I add, to be mobilized in order to fight for it.⁸

7. For a critique on Huntington see A. Panebianco, "Perché Huntigton non si può ignorare", in *La rivista Il Mulino*, n. 2, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2015; M. Graziano, "C'era una volta la civiltà", in *La rivista Il Mulino*, n. 2, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2015.; F. Tuccari, "Huntington e lo scontro delle civiltà. Replica di Francesco Tuccari ad Angelo Panebianco e Manlio Graziano", in *La rivista Il Mulino*, n. 3, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2015, pp. 588-594.

8. See P. Chiantera-Stutte, *Il pensiero geopolitico. Spazio, potere e imperialismo tra Otto e Novecento*, Carocci, Roma, 2014.

Huntington's style is "simplistic and flow"⁹ and the civilizations he describes are primordial and stable: their main qualities are "strength, resilience and viscosity".¹⁰ Huntington's idea of Civilization makes no reference to the most academic studies, that dealt with the distinction between culture and civilization; on the contrary they are described as defined blocs, rather than complex and fluid cultural forms; therefore they are easy to understand for the wider public. Moreover, any complex explanation that uses socio-economical analysis in order to understand the relations between civilizations is suppressed in Huntington's model, as Senghaas rightly points out.¹¹ The interplay between groups of states is based on the classical realistic theory of IR that postulates a state of anarchy between political actors, who are driven by their quest for power: at the end of the game, gaining power is the main reason for the states' behavior.¹²

Huntington's aim is clear: he wants to explain all international relations and give to the reader all the puzzles in order to complete a mental political map. Therefore he firstly identifies the main actors of the world politics – civilizations-, secondly explains the causes of their behavior – power and protection of traditions – and finally gives the reader the tools in order to localize and identify the main game players. As he explains, "finding one's way through unfamiliar terrain ... generally requires a map of some sort. Cartography, like cognition itself, is a necessary simplification that allows us to see where we are, and where we may be going.... World views and causal theories are indispensable guides for international politics"¹³

Not only does Huntington offer new mental maps that are necessary for the – politicians' and the common man's – orientation, but he also admits that some indispensable prejudices and bias guarantee our mental stability. Living in a situation of uncertainty is far worse than having prejudices:

Simplified paradigms or maps are indispensable for human thought and action.

On the one hand, we may explicitly formulate theories or models and consciously use them to guide our behavior. Alternatively, we may deny the need for such guides and assume that we will act only in terms of specific "objective" facts, deal-

9. G. O'Tuathail, "Samuel Huntington and the Civilizing of Global Space", in G. O'Tuathail, S. Dalby, P. Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 173.

10. M. Bassin, "Civilizations and their discontents", p. 354.

11. D. Senghaas, "A Clash of Civilizations. An Idée fixe?", in *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 35, n. 1, Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 127-132.

12. See for this point F. Tuccari, "Huntington e lo scontro delle civiltà. Replica di Francesco Tuccari ad Angelo Panebianco e Manlio Graziano", pp. 588-594.

13. S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 30.

ing with each case 'on its merits'. If we assume this, however, we delude ourselves, for in the back of our mind are hidden assumptions, biases, and prejudices that determine how we perceive reality... We need explicit or implicit models so as to be able to: 1) order and generalize about reality; 2) understand causal relationship among phenomena; 3) anticipate and, if we are lucky, predict future developments; 4) distinguish what is important from what is unimportant and 4) show us what paths we should take to achieve our goals.¹⁴

Huntington's paradigm aims at proving to us such a model of conduct and prevision. In so doing he gives the reader not only a simple cartography of the world and of the diffusion of global power: he offers pre-vision and a new paradigm to the political scientists and to the political actors in order to classify all events. And this is a new model, capable of explaining much more the international political reality. This is the reason why he quotes Kuhnian's idea of paradigm in the scientific revolutions: the clash of civilization thesis should be the new scientific paradigm that is going to change all interpretation models of scientific theories on IR and, moreover, explain all phenomena inside a logical scheme, or rather, a cartography of civilizations. But, is Huntington's idea so new?

What is new in Huntington?

The end of the Cold War led to a situation of uncertainty not only for the political parties, who held on the ideological main division between communism and capitalism, and not only in the international arena, where the two main blocs were trapped in the main ideological dichotomy. This phase has been described as "a condition of geopolitical vertigo, a state of confusion where the old nostrums of the Cold War were redundant and new ones had not yet been invented, issued and approved".¹⁵ In spite of the end of the Cold War, American institutions and think-tanks, born out of the necessity to feed a state of tension between the two blocs were not dismantled. They found the way out of an institutional crisis, by legitimating their work, finding new models and schemes of political action, and therefore new sources of international tension. In this context the main American intellectuals who dealt with international relation theories, constructed

14. Ibid.

15. G. O'Tuathail, "Introduction", in G. O'Tuathail et al., *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 103.

their “world map” that could fill the “intellectual vacuum after containment”.¹⁶ As Emad El-Din Aisha states,

the faith of the foreign policy establishment in the persistence of conflict soon reasserted itself and placed demands on the academic community to produce an adequate analysis of the nature of future threats and how best to deal with them; hence the significance of the timing of his thesis. Up to and until Huntington developed his thesis “at least four major candidates for the definition of the post – Cold War central axis of international conflict” – trade wars, religious wars, ethnic wars, renewed Cold Wars – had emerged which subsequently were “subsumed” by Huntington into the clash of civilizations.¹⁷

The most famous of all intellectual answers to the crisis were produced by Francis Fukuyama, Edward Luttwak and Samuel P. Huntington. Apparently the three main responses to the post Cold War ideological “vertigo” seem very different: in particular Huntington seems to re-introduce geopolitical considerations and a geopolitical map in the IR discussions, whereas Fukuyama and Luttwak show overtly their “antipathy to geography”.¹⁸ On the contrary, at a deeper investigation, there are many similarities in their models, that, at their turn, can be explained by their references to the Wilsonian idea of democracy and liberalism. In fact, even if Fukuyama seems to claim the universality of post-ideological community, freed from every ideal burden, and the end of history, the process that would eventually lead to a worldly liberalism has a precise geographical source and a clear direction. It emanates from the West and expands globally. This is why Fukuyama asserts that “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy” is “the final form of human government”¹⁹. As we will see, this aim, i.e. the “diffusion of the democratic model”, is a constant point of reference of the American politics, since Wilson.

Contrary to the abstract and a-geographical world depicted by Fukuyama, Luttwak clearly distinguishes geopolitics and geoeconomics and decrees the obsolescence of the first: “*as bureaucracies writ large, states are themselves impelled by the bureaucratic urges of role-preservation and role-enhancement to acquire a ‘geo-economic’ substitute for their*

16. E. E.-D. Aisha, “Samuel Huntington and Geopolitics of American Identity: the Function of Foreign Policy in America’s domestic Clash of Civilisations”, in *International Studies Perspective*, 4, Oxford, 2003, p. 114.

17. Ibid., footnote. The quotation is from J. Kurth, “The Real Clash”, in *The National Interest*, vol. 37, 1994, p. 4.

18. G. O’Thuathail, “Introduction”, p. 105.

19. F. Fukuyama, “The End of History?” (1998), in G. Ó. Tuathail et al., *Geopolitics Reader*, p. 114.

decaying geopolitical role”.²⁰ In this perspective, conflicts have to be fought not only in order to acquire the economic hegemony, but also by using economic tools and means: states have to renounce their geopolitical ambitions and leave the game for territorial competition. They should focus on the economic domination and adopt economic means of coercion. Geopolitics and geoeconomics are therefore juxtaposed: the former is the old model of interpretation of states’ conflict, the latter is the new one.

Huntington aims at leading a revolution in this literature, i.e. in the analysis of international conflicts, when he re-introduces a strongly territorial and historical concept: the civilization.²¹ Civilizations are, according to him, the real motors of history. Geoeconomics, namely the belief that states behave as actors in the market, is apparently put aside as well as the naive belief in a world united in an universal Western liberal capitalistic community. In so doing Huntington concerts to a line of thinking which is in opposition to his first writings.²² The main points of his scientific revolution are apparently the re-emergence of a geographical analysis, the distinction between the geoeconomic hegemony and the geopolitical one and the impact of civilizations on the international relations.

Nevertheless, at a deeper look no one of the three American intellectuals that have been discussed – including Huntington – have ever cast doubt on the economic hegemony of America over the world: this is clear in Fukuyama’s and Luttwak’s approach, but even Huntington never hesitates to affirm that the economic world is Americanized. Only cultures are different – but economy is the only modern capitalistic one. He presupposes that modernization and Islam – for example – do not clash at all and that all societies are going to evolve and abandon their economic primordial techniques in order to modernize. Otherwise, he writes, “modernization (...) does not necessarily mean westernization. Non Western societies can modernize and have modernized without abandoning their own culture and adopting wholesale Western values, institutions and practices”.²³ Huntington leaves out here the possibility of questioning the supremacy of the Western economic model, whereas the Western cultural values are

20. E. Luttwak, “From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce” (1990), in G. O’Tuathail et al., *Geopolitics Reader*, p. 126.

21. For a precise critique on Huntington’s idea of civilisation see M. Graziano, “C’era una volta la civiltà”, and M. Graziano, *Guerra Santa e santa alleanza*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2014.

22. S. P. Huntington, “Political Development and Political Decay”, in *World Politics*, vol. 17, n. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp. 386-430; S. P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1968. On the comparison between the first and the last Huntington see H. Kreutzmann, “From modernization theory towards the ‘clash of civilizations’: directions and paradigm shifts in Samuel Huntington’s analysis and prognosis of global development”, in *GeoJournal*, vol. 46, Springer, 1998, pp. 255-265.

23. S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 78.

“localized” or rather territorialized into the western bloc of States. We are confronted to two parallel worlds: the universal world of (Western) economy, and the fragmented cultural world of different civilizations. How can these two visions co-exist? The question here is probably if according to this vision civilizations are more determinant than economy in order to explain history. Let’s take, for example, democracy – which is a typical civilizational acquis – and economics. Which force is leading? It is interesting to notice what Huntington takes for granted, which is economy. In other words, following Huntington’s reconstruction of the conflicts around the world, it seems that what he leaves out of his reconstruction, the possible transformation of capitalistic economy, is the economic basis for all civilizations, and therefore is what we should call the main leading force. The reference to the capitalistic market as the obvious reality is not new: following the history of American politics, it is possible to see how the statement of the supremacy of capitalism has worked and therefore understand the ways how economy was conceptualized as the main motor of the international relations. By doing so, it is possible to locate Huntington’s work inside the American political tradition.

At least from Wilson onwards, the USA left the typical geopolitical form of imperialism and focused on getting the economic hegemony.²⁴ After the First World War, when America intervened in European politics and guaranteed the European balance of power,

Wilson’s genius was to have figured out that the future of US power in the world was not dependent, as European power had been, on direct territorial control. It could rather be organized through the market [...] he did perceive that the most central achievement in Paris did not concern any particular territory, but rather the creation of a political system that would absorb territorial conflicts while allowing economic business to proceed as usual.²⁵

In other words, since USA intervention in the First World War and the following geopolitical reassessment of the global balance of power that enforced the American role as the universal peace-keeper, democracy had to follow economic liberalism.

24. See for instance: L. Hartz, *The liberal tradition in America*, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1955; W. Appleman Williams, *The contours of American History*, Norton, New York, 1989; A. Negri, M. Hardt, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma), 2000; J. Agnew, *Hegemony. The new Shape of Global Power*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2005; D. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003; N. Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*, Routledge, London, 2005.

25. N. Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*, Routledge, New York and London, 2005, p. 69.

Wilson's plea to "make the world safe for democracy" in the Paris conference implied the Open Door Policy and "reconfigured the relationship between geography, economics and politics":²⁶ instead of controlling directly the colonial territory, and therefore determine the power politics and the use of economic resources, Wilson insisted that the USA should control the global flow of finance capital out of places that were apparently independent, but under the American hegemony. Democracy was, therefore, the best political frame in order to guarantee a global liberal economy, because it could assure the peace between small states which could not afford to struggle against the main economic hegemonic power. That hegemonic power legitimated itself through the idea of American exceptionalism and was based on the defense of the Monroe Doctrine as the military/economic protection of a particular geographical area and on the faith in the worldly expansion of liberalism.²⁷

Therefore, America played two contrasting roles, being "an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history",²⁸ ergo basing its identity on its separation and difference from Europe and, at the same time, on the possibility to spread its faith in liberalism and "mission" in the world. As Hartz sees it, the contradiction between USA defense of its particular institutions and traditions and its global role as the heart of global affairs could become the main driving force of American hegemony, while American liberalism – and the request for an Open Door Policy – was read as the only natural and universal way of leading economy and politics.²⁹ The Monroe Doctrine, that was elaborated in 1823, in order to protect America from the European geopolitical control, could therefore become the statement of the American hegemony, free to politically control the States belonging to the American continent, but also free to intervene in the global politics in order to assert its economic universal power. "Liberal thought generalized and at the same time flattered itself as universal. It represented itself as an abstraction above the geographical and historical specificities of European imperial expansion".³⁰ The "abstraction" of the universal imperialism was also clear in the definition of American politics as "idealist", and its juxtaposition to the realism of the authoritarian European powers: idealism, i.e. asserting universal peace, global liberalism and therefore the free flow of goods and persons across state boundaries meant

26. Ibid., p. 72.

27. See on America exceptionalism D. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998; T. McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: US Foreign Policy since 1974*, Palgrave, Hampshire, 2003.

28. A. K. Weinberg, *Manifest destiny: a study of nationalist expansion in American history*, Baltimore, Hopkins, 2003, p. 41 ff.

29. L. Hartz, *The liberal tradition in America*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1955.

30. N. Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*, p. 44.

controlling the global market and fighting the geopolitical old colonial powers, that aimed at aggrandizing their territories.³¹

Coming back to the distinction between geoeconomics and geopolitics, outlined by Luttwak and Huntington, it is then necessary to see its origins in the difference between economic hegemony and political control by the Anglo-Saxon geopolitical thinking already after the First World War. Paradoxically the abstraction from any desire of a territorial-political expansion implied by American idealism/liberalism does not mean a refusal of international power, nor does it lead to a “lost geography”. On the contrary, as Smith declares, “America was a geographical project par excellence”³² because it anchored American hegemony on the depoliticization of global imperialism – that became economic hegemony – and on the deterritorialization of power – that was based on global financial capitalism. In other words, if America has an economic leadership and control all over the world, its power lies in the priority given to liberal economy and on the flow of capital and goods, that have to be freed from any political power and territorial control, which could eventually oppose the status quo.

The “going concerns”³³, i.e. the states have a function, in this perspective, in order to create the best conditions for the business: in this sense democracy follows economy. Otherwise power is not really deterritorialized: it emanates from a centre and from political and economic decisions, that find their source in the USA power. Therefore geopolitics – the traditional power over a territory – and geoeconomics – economic hegemony on flows of capitals – do not really contradict themselves in the American power politics, but play with each other in order to reinforce a global balance controlled by the main financial and capitalist power.³⁴ The dichotomy between geopolitics and geoeconomics does not work for American exceptionalism, following which democracy is the condition for a free liberal economy.

After considering the genesis of the juxtaposition between geopolitics and geoeconomics and of the dichotomy between political and economic power, it is clear that Huntington’s work shows its continuities with the American traditional imperialist

31. P. Chiantera-Stutte, “Realisti, ma anche idealisti: la geopolitica e le Relazioni Internazionali prima di Morgenthau”, in A. Campi, S. de Luca (eds.), *Il realismo politico*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli, pp. 247-62.

32. N. Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*, p. 45.

33. The expression “going concern” referred to states was widely used by the main powerful geographer of Roosevelt, Isaiah Bowman, who believed in the necessity of the hegemony of USA after the Second World War. See for a biography of Bowman N. Smith, *American Empire, Roosevelt’s Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003.

34. On the relation between geopolitics and geoeconomics see also: M. Sparke, “Geopolitical Fears, Geoeconomical Hopes and the Responsibility of Geography”, in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 97, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, pp. 338-49.

politics. He reasserts the main global role of American power, by showing the existing hegemony of capitalism and economic liberalism. The main difference with the traditional American idea of hegemony has rather to do with his refusal of the export of democracy: contrary to Wilson's vision, Huntington does not presuppose democracy as the condition for liberalism. He gets rid of democracy and of its universal ambitions and reinforces the gap between the western culture, whose values are liberal and individualistic – therefore eventually able to be universally adopted – and the “Rest”. All in all, his main innovation is the obsolescence of democracy as a universal model, necessary for the liberal economy. Capitalism can work without democracy. In this vision, in which the world of global economy, that is “hybridized”, or even dominated by the western capitalistic model, the universe of cultures is fragmented and conflictual. This contradiction lies at the heart of Huntington's interpretation and is never elaborated. The economic global supremacy of capitalism is never challenged in his view – “no other world is possible” – while he focuses his attention only on the possible conflicts between cultures and regimes.

Civilizations at home

The contradiction between the economic worldly power of capitalism, that is spread all over the main cultures and nations, and the fragmentation between different civilizations, must be read in a different perspective, showing the possible relations not between states and groups of states in the future, but rather the interactions of ethnicities and cultures inside societies. Actually, if we translate the clash of civilizations into the domestic politics, as Emad Ed-Din does³⁵, its meaning changes: its claim to represent a tolerant solution with regards to cultural and ethnical conflicts vanishes. The map of a world divided into civilizations means that in every civilization there must be a homogeneous, or at least a dominant civilization. The “suggestive maps” show different continents and groups of different colors: inside them, however, there are no differences.

What Huntington implicitly denies is the existence of multicultural societies: he does not acknowledge that America, Europe and other continents are no more homogeneous stable civilizations, but are composed by various and different ethnic and cultural groups – and even economic strata.³⁶ As a matter of fact, contrary to Hunting-

35. E. E. -D. Aisha, “Samuel Huntington and Geopolitics of American Identity”.

36. For this point see also F. Tuccari, “Huntington e lo scontro delle civiltà. Replica di Francesco Tuccari ad Angelo Pane-

ton's view, the fragmentation is inside our societies, not "only" outside. The clash of civilization thesis, in this case, shows the strongest impact on politics, when it denies the multicultural nature of our societies and separates what is already mixed up, i.e., cultures, ethnicities and traditions. As many authors outlined, our world is a period of transition from an order formed by a mosaic of state territories towards an interplay and network of interactions of political and economic actors within a set of global city regions.³⁷ Moreover, this lack of a stable and defined international order, that cannot be explained by referring to fixed sets of actors – nations, states, civilizations, and so on – is interrelated to a deep transformation of the main models of political and social identities. Political identities are no longer linked to territorial and national traditions nor to a defined sets of beliefs: political identities are linked to areas of meanings that are difficult to locate on a map, but can rather be grasped as "nested identities".³⁸ Not only are they interrelated to various sets of national, class and community identifications, and to different geographic scales but they are also "compartmental", i.e., they change with regard to different issues and to different situations. "Identities are unevenly nested and viewed separately by various people"³⁹, that means that political identities are not "located" in one spatial or national dimension, nor are they related to civilizations that refer to some specific territories or nations, but are interrelated inside national boundaries and even sometimes result from the interplay between various roles and functions. Someone can share an oriental religion with a group, but identify with a Western nation, eat African food and follow Jewish traditions. Huntington's clash thesis ignores and simplifies the complexity of contemporary nested identities, therefore territorializing processes of identification that are fluid and uncertain. Instead of acknowledging this fact, Huntington "exports" the plurality and variety of contemporary political identities "outside", by territorializing cultures that are inextricably interwoven, dividing and classifying civilizations that are already mixed up.

His main target is therefore to deny the conditions for a plural and multicultural society, that de facto shows the impossibility of any homogeneous civilization bloc. This is clear in his attack against the de-westernization of western elites and in his plea for the American cultural leadership in the Western civilization: "whether the West comes to-

bianco e Manlio Graziano".

37. G. O'Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*; J. Agnew, "Global Political Geography Beyond Geopolitics", in *International Studies Review*, vol. 2, 1, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 91- 99; A. J. Scott, *Regions and the World Economy: The Coming Shape of Global Production, Competition, and Political Order*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

38. G. H. Herb and D. H. Kaplan (eds.), *Nested Identities: Nationalism, Territory, and Scale*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 1999.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

gether politically and economically – he affirms – depends overwhelmingly on whether the United States reaffirms its identity as a Western nation and defines its global role as the leader of Western civilization”.⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, the Western civilization is not a reality in Huntington’s interpretation: it is rather a task to be fulfilled by the American elites, which implies that Western elites should possibly “westernize” their civilizational bloc. At the same time, the common opposition against an enemy is the best way to achieve this sort of mobilization and homogenization of a culture against another culture, that is supposed to be homogeneous and united. Huntington argues here for a typical realistic conservative approach in domestic policy and for new Atlanticism in international relations: “only an appreciation of power politics can counter business drift towards East Asia, while Americanization counters the de-Westernizing threat of multiculturalism. Both are aspects of an internal ideological-cultural project driven by an external dynamic – the so-called civilizational threats. Only a foreign threat can prevent these corrosive forces combining to pull apart the country”.⁴¹

The resulting “culturalization of politics”, prompted by this approach, leads to a paradox, i.e., the naturalization and neutralization of political differences into “cultural differences, that is into different ‘ways of life’ in which are something given, something that cannot be overcome”.⁴² This naturalization is, at its turn, made possible through the use of geopolitical schemes, aiming at transforming the fluid reality and the unpredictable individual and states’ behavior into a stable grid of possibilities and necessities of stiff cultural entities, whose conduct is explained through their civilizational classification. Therefore, despite the fact that Huntington deals with culture, and therefore with historical developments, the “clash of civilization” thesis reduces history to geography, or better, geopolitics. The underlying geopolitical approach entraps the flux of events into a rigid scheme, made of predictable geopolitical entities – the civilizations – characterized by a “sense of primordial permanence”.⁴³

The real clash

It seems that Huntington’s visions are tragically real nowadays. I will suggest, following the argumentation developed in these pages, that they should be tragically false and

40. S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 308.

41. E. E.-D. Aisha, “Samuel Huntington and Geopolitics of American Identity”, p. 123.

42. S. Žižek, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2008, p. 119.

43. M. Bassin, “Civilizations and their discontents”, p. 354.

misleading and that their impact is well spread far beyond the IR theory. Huntington's ideas are therefore a part of the main "geopolitical imagination" that is shared in the Western countries. I will just take two examples from the popular and the intellectual/structural level: the interpretation of terrorist attacks by the media and the geopolitics of emotions.

The main difference between war and terrorism is often neglected in many interpretations of the current political crisis. Western countries are not really only challenged by fundamentalistic movements outside them, they are not at war: they are fought against and opposed from terrorists, namely their citizens who revolt against their "homelands". This is radically new about terrorism – therefore the expression "terroristic war" is often misleading and refuses to acknowledge that many terrorists are Western citizens. Their recent "conversion" to Islamic fundamentalism, as Matthew Tracy shows, is read as a complete change of identity, as a radical transformation due to external/foreign agents who represent "the evil" of Islamism and a sort of change of citizenship. Therefore they are seen as belonging to an ill-defined "transnational Muslim identity".⁴⁴ In this way, the terror inside the society and its citizens is externalized and ascribed to another civilization. The separation of what was a Western citizen into a betrayal of Western civilization and a religious fundamentalist belonging to the Islamic state, refuses the contradictions and the ambiguities that are at the core of our multicultural societies.

As Tracy shows, according to the British media and even the Islamic representations of the terrorist attacks in Britain in 2005, terrorists and citizens are divided into two opposed fronts. Their nested identities are reduced to "one", exactly to the religious one, that is translated into a moral one. This means that terrorists, even if they have a European citizenship are "located" outside Europe, as they culturally belong to a different civilization and to a fundamentalistic religion. "The ambiguity of contemporary terrorism is territorialized as a bounded danger and sustained by a geopolitics of displacement when identity is scaled across a geopolitical imagery of fear".⁴⁵ The – impossible – reterritorialization of terrorism produced by mass-media and political discourses creates the illusion of controlling threats by closing the boundaries and rejecting Islamic people. The clash of civilization thesis works here as a powerful theory in order to legit-

44. M. J. Tracy, *Bounding Danger: Geopolitics, Territoriality and the Displacement of Terror*, PhD Dissertation, Arizona State University, 2008, pp. 5-6. See C. Flint, "Political Geography II: terrorism, modernity governance and governmentality", in *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 27, n. 1, Sage Publications, London, 2003, pp. 97-106; O. Roy, *Globalized Islam, the Search for a New Ummah*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004.

45. M. J. Tracy, *Bounding Danger*, p. 29; see also J. Debrix, *Tabloid Terror, War, Culture and Geopolitics*, Routledge, London, 2008.

imize the simplification and the externalization of threats: it makes it possible to interpret terrorism as a war, an external fight between cultures that hegemonic powers can control, instead of acknowledging the failure of any possible classification and control. Terrorists are therefore seen as foreigners inside our country, as people belonging to other civilizations, independently of their citizenship or their real life career. Therefore, every attention is given to the “potential” terrorist, to the hidden member of other cultures who lives amongst us, instead of casting doubt on our models of integration and welfare. Terrorists are therefore “territorialized”, classified as citizens who were secretly belonging to an imaginary “Islamic fundamentalist civilization”, whereas western States are mobilized in order to unite internally, become homogeneous and fight against their internal and external enemies.⁴⁶ As Smith states

where liberal accounts, from right to left, struggle to explain the raise of Islamic fundamentalism as a profound clash of civilizations ... or a softer instance of “Jihad versus McWorld” [...] we should instead see a story of McJihad [...] an intricate wave of political Islam and the political economy of oil that was for decades mutually beneficial to the Saudi ruling elite.⁴⁷

Another example of the power of the clash of civilizations thesis can be found in the contemporary literature on the geopolitics of emotions. The book by Moisi,⁴⁸ for instance, territorializes emotions; it relates every emotion to a particular space and therefore civilization: the map of emotions shows main areas corresponding to hope (India and China), fear (Western) and humiliation (Arab-Islam). This could be seen as a radical way of separating all different and mixed elements of cultures and individual characters into spatial areas and territories, relating to civilizations. Civilizations, emotions and territories mirror each other in the furious need to find an order and a meaning into a crisis of our civilization.

Why try to separate and territorialize cultures, emotions and rational or economic performances? Is it not hidden in the act of division and classification, a will to control social and political phenomena that are themselves out of control? Is the order given to or rather through the categories of populations, civilizations, emotions, not the last attempt to create a hierarchy, from the most liberal to the most intolerant? These are

46. See S. Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009.

47. N. Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*, p. 187.

48. D. Moisi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion*, First Anchor Books, New York, 2010.

questions that are left here unanswered. However, it is clear that relating a civilization or even an emotion to a territory and dividing the world into different and separate territories which host specific civilizations or emotions have different performative functions: they seem to offer the possibility of controlling something that is hard even to imagine (terrorism), they externalize the problems and crisis inside a society, they allow to leave relevant questions about the sustainability of our economy unquestioned, they reinforce the mobilization against a common enemy, seen as “total evil”, they simplify political responsibilities and complex interactions between economic and political powers. The resulting map, as Huntington affirms, can be a guarantee and orient us in a strange and fluid world, even if it is based on biases and fears. But what happens if the map creates prejudices and erects walls? Can this map orient us then?