A Humanistic Critique of Cultural Essentialism

by Chika Mba, Ph.D.

They consider us as animals; they target us with unconventional weapons; they think we are animals.

___An unknown Bahraini teenage boy wounded and traumatised during the series of protests staged by the youth and people of Bahrain; aimed at toppling the oppressive regime of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa in February, 2011.1

[The Arab’s]... inflamed power of imagination presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images, and even the spread of his religion was a great adventure. The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. [The Negro is lazy, soft and trifling. But the Germans, the English, and the Spaniards [are] those who are most distinguished from all others in the feeling of the sublime.

_____ Immanuel Kant2

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1 A brutal crackdown on the protesting opposition was organised by the al-Khalifa regime forces in conjunction with invited troops from three other Arab states: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and much later a South Asian country, Pakistan. The al-Khalifa family has been ruling the oil rich Persian Gulf sheikhdom since mid-18th century, over 200 years ago. The al-Khalifa Dynasty has been effectively backed and sustained for decades by the United States of America and UK governments, up to the present. The sheikhdom is also home to the strategic American Fifth Fleet (comprising about 4,500 troops) or what Hillary Rodham Clinton calls “our Central Command Naval Forces” in the Persian Gulf (from 1947 to the present). No attempt was made by the American government under President Barack Obama or the Fifth Fleet to stop or curtail the enforced disappearances, torture, rapes and killings of protesters by regime and invited forces.

Abstract

The article introduces a new way of thinking about the problem of cultural essentialism and, simultaneously, models a new framework for understanding the ethics and politics of identity in a global world order. It proceeds to develop a theory of global culture it calls *cultural humanism*, asserting that a universal cultural mix has become a reality, such that a particular putative culture is neither the basis of any individual or group identity, nor the grounds for treating anyone unjustly.

**Keywords:** Cultural humanism, Fanon, Global culture, Identity, Inter-cultural equality

Introduction

This article is basically a critique of the cultural essentialists’ view that a particular putative culture – a people’s putative culture – forms the basis of the identity of each individual born of that society, in an immutable, irrevocable manner. If it is impossible to understand human beings – individual persons, groups, societies or nations – as free moral agents possessing plural identities, the article argues, then, justice and freedom will continue to elude those thought to possess the ‘wrong’ cultural identity and on the wrong side of the power equation. We find that persons have been allowed or even forced to die or to suffer grave harm based on the rather weighty accusation that they are inferior humans because they allegedly belong to an inferior culture, a culture of laziness or a culture of weak rational capacity, or that they belong to a culture of savagery or to no culture at all. Enslavements, colonialism, apartheid, xenophobia, ethnic and religious bigotry, *cultural racism* and nativism are some historical and existing examples wherein cultural prejudice arising from the tendency to essentialise culture have at least constituted a major rationalising factor for entrenched denial of justice and the subversion of human rights. Cultural prejudice is defined here as any view that at first assumes that culture is an insular analytic and teleological category that interpretes the action and behaviour as well as the progress or the lack of it of human groups. In addition, a view is culturally prejudiced if it purports to deny that any human being has a culture; or if it casts or has the tendency to cast a particular putative culture in a bad light based on insufficient evidence or stereotyping. It would also amount to cultural prejudice to imply that we can predict *a priori* how each member of a
human group would act in any given situation; or that we can predetermine the extent of their abilities in all circumstances based on the putative culture they were presumably born into or necessarily belong. Thus, cultural essentialism evidently leads to cultural prejudice. To be sure, unwarranted cultural divisions and cultural sentiments have often meant that certain minorities suffer egregious injustice because of what they purportedly are and how others perceive them. Socio-cultural discrimination is even more rampant on the international stage, especially in the contemporary world where every society seems to harbour at least a minute percentage of persons from other climes. Immigrants in many countries are viewed with some suspicion and very often face disproportionately harsher punishments when accused or convicted of a crime. Certain groups are always-already excluded from social cooperation within the same state they live in because of perceived cultural differences.

To highlight the inherent weaknesses of the cultural essentialists’ position, the article relies on the writings of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Nigel Gibson, Emmanuel Levinas, Amartya Sen, and several others, to develop a theory of (global) culture it calls cultural humanism. Cultural humanism states that a universal cultural mix has become a reality, such that a particular culture is neither the basis of any individual or group identity, nor the grounds for treating anyone unjustly. It further holds that in our world of interdependencies, cultural differences, pluralisms and multi-formed identities, we ought to recognise the very fact that even though we all have a culture, no one belongs to a particular putative culture. We must also keep in mind the very fact that no particular culture is the source of the truth. In clear terms, cultural humanism denies that it is possible to describe or identify an individual in terms of a particular putative culture. It further denies that the world is made up of human beings – peoples and groups – that can be calibrated into quantised cultures. In addition, the essay contends that humanity, understood in Fanonian-Patočkan terms as free beings “living in problematicity” of truth is more important than culture. Consequently, the article seeks to develop a consistent framework for conceiving culture wherein human interest trumps culture in our general consideration of how we ought to treat others who are unlike us. In this sense, we can speak of global culture.

3 In the whole of this analysis, we use “belong” and “have” deliberately.
Problematising Global Culture

Global culture is a way of conceiving culture such that culture is understood as the ever-changing framework – principles, ideas, agreements, practices and values – through which human experience is enriched and the world made sense of. Global culture is not the outcome of universalising a particular putative culture or the allegedly core values of one or two civilisations; it is the aggregate outcome of inter-cultural or cultural freedom. Here, human beings are allowed what this article calls multiple costumes of identity and suffer no harm as a result of cultural mutation or cultural prejudice. This does not necessarily mean the loss of what some people might understand as their cultural identity. As a matter of fact, an individual is capable of, and often embraces cultural values other than those within which he or she is born. People may also and often do repudiate or reject customs, traditions, beliefs or practices embedded in the paraphernalia of the putative culture they were born into. Sanya Osha is right in arguing that identity can be maintained even in the face of multi-cultural dialogue. This is also the line of thinking that we believe Richard Shweder had in mind when he argued that

My version of cultural pluralism begins with a universal truth, which I refer to as the principle of “confusionism.” A “confusionist” believes that the knowable world is incomplete if seen from any one point of view, incoherent if seen from all points of view at once, and empty if seen from “nowhere in particular.” Given the choice between incompleteness, incoherence, and emptiness, I opt for incompleteness while

5 Undoubtedly, the idea of global culture is galvanised by globalisation; or the growing interdependence of all human societies as a result of advancements in (information) technology. But, to isolate IT (information technology) or globalisation as the sole driver of the shrinking of our contemporary world along cultural lines, and the consequent desire for a global culture is mistaken. Historically, travel, commerce, religion, enslavement, immigration, wars/conflicts, constituted the organic drivers of world cultural mix. IT rose to become both an organic factor and a catalyst of inter-culturality – in that it simultaneously expanded the scope of these other organic drivers of human diversity.


7 My general argument here is that I do not see that unique cultural identities exist. But if unique cultures or cultural identities are thought to exist, then, they are perpetually in a flux. More importantly, culture must never serve as the only criterion or label for identifying any person, group or nation for that matter, under any circumstance.

8 For example, it would be erroneous to move from the very fact that many Brazilians have a football culture, to say that all Brazilians belong to a Brazilian footballing culture or as a matter of necessity, that all Brazilians are lovers of the round leather game.

staying on the move between different ways of seeing and valuing the world. This version of cultural pluralism is not opposed to universalism. […] I strongly believe in “universalism,” but the type of universalism I believe in is “universalism without… uniformity”…

To develop a theory of global culture along the above template and vision, the study posits the notion of cultural humanism, as providing a theory of global culture in which an acceptable theory of global justice should be anchored. Cultural humanism is capable of engendering a world where human beings live in non-homogeneous but mutually enriching cultural milieux. Given the fact of global interdependence, realising cultural humanism may take some time, but it is not impossible. But what really is culture?

Many people – scholars and commentators alike – have used the term “culture” to refer to a large number of unrelated categories. But there is at least one thing everyone seems to be in agreement about human culture: culture is not “nature”, even though it may be said to augment the latter; it is something learned. The article affirms that culture is not a natural phenomenon. It is as Fanon would say the product of human interaction with nature and our relationship with fellow humans. Also, a people’s culture does not exist in the same way a people’s arts, music, dance and idioms may be said to exist. All the items in the preceding list may constitute the components of culture, but it is a mistake to think that we can point to an independent entity called “culture”. Instead, culture “refers to customary behaviour and beliefs that are passed on through enculturation [or] cultural learning.” It is supposed to help individuals to make sense of their environment and thus be able to live the good life. This is because cultural resources are required, even unavoidable, for creating a sense of entitlement and self-love. “But equally,” in the words of the renowned anti-colonial writer and postcolonial activist, Amilcar Cabral, “in some respects, culture is very much a source of obstacles and difficulties, of erroneous conceptions about reality, of deviation in carrying out duty, arid of limitations on the tempo and efficiency of a struggle that is confronted with the political, technical and scientific

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11 For a good book that attempts to unravel the myriad of complexities in the word “culture”, see Williams, R. 1983, Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society, Revised Ed., especially p. 87 – 93.
But some people believe that culture fundamentally controls economic and political development in every human society, in every epoch and civilisation. Yet, curiously, no one knows where culture comes from. What may be regarded as the contents of culture and its relationship with religion, politics and ideology, for example, have also remained controversial.\(^\text{15}\)

**Essentialising Culture: the Cultural Nationalist Point of View**

For the cultural essentialist, a culture and its practices are not merely emblematic of a people’s identity; every individual member of any given society possesses a uniquely shared “cultural identity”. In this hard essentialist thinking, culture becomes an ontologically primary entity, capable of determining and gauging a society’s political, economic and social futures. The essentialists also regard culture as a *sui generis* factor capable of determining the futures of every single individual member of a society that allegedly belong to a given culture, despite their disparate experiences and exposures. If the cultural essentialist is right, then it would almost be uncontroversial to argue that culture determines what we are and what we are likely to become. But the critical question is: should culture really matter? If yes, to what extent? Could a person be correctly defined in terms of a unique, immutable and irrevocable cultural identity? Do we currently need a theory of global culture as this essay suggests? How best should we formulate a theory of global culture, if there is a need? Before we return to this set of questions for the last time, we must look back to some older and contemporary uses of culture. We begin with cultural essentialists of an earlier period.

Apart from the contemporary proponents of cultural nationalism that we discuss later, there are a number of theoretical and historical avowals of the essentialist view of culture or at any rate, efforts to imply that we can have a unique criterion or criteria for predicting how every member of a society behaves or is likely to behave in specific situations. Those criteria would also, under this view, help us to determine the overall capabilities or values of a people.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{16}\) Even though I will be quoting the most shocking, denigrating views about “other cultures,” I do not want to be understood as suggesting that we should all have kinder impressions of “other cultures.” The problem, as I will show, is the very notion of “other cultures” – of groups of people who uniformly possess cultures that are absolutely different from “our culture.” In other words, I want to question the framework, not its application.
Essentialists have often backed infamous causes arising from their inevitable prejudicial view of certain peoples because of their culture, or a supposed lack of one. Examples of ugly incidents and attitudes that have been backed or could be sustained using an essentialist view include enslavement, colonialism, apartheid, nativist-nationalism, xenophobia, ethnic bigotry and ethnic cleansings as well as certain forms of intolerance.

The writings of some “reputable” European scholars like David Hume, Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel represent some well-known products of cultural essentialism originating from the act of telling a single story about human groups and societies. Interestingly, as we have noted, the accounts of some cultural essentialists begin from denying certain peoples even of having a culture altogether. Quite clearly, we probably can do very little about the very (historical) fact of the transatlantic slave trade and Auschwitz, but we certainly can learn critical lessons from such events, vis-à-vis the need for a global culture. For these events did not occur spontaneously; they were the logical output of the thoughts of some cultural essentialists as much as such events were propelled by politico-economic ideologues and hegemons.

The German philosopher widely regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of all time, Immanuel Kant and some other scholars of his time unarguably sowed the seeds of cultural prejudices that showed clearly through racism and Nazism in Germany and Europe. The Kantian-Hegelian kind of cultural essentialism/prejudice is the type that says Europe and whatever comes from it is superior to those of other climes (that is, Eurocentricism).

In four separate essays published within as many decades (1764 to 1798), as well as in a series of lectures he began in the early 1770s, Kant attempted to demonstrate that somehow, based on the writings of a few hearsay-anthropologists (David Hume and Comte de Buffon), he could prove that some human societies have no culture. He could also, presumably, prove that there is such thing as “races”, and that these “races” could be placed in a hierarchical order according to which societies, groups of human beings and countries possess a comparatively or

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17Cultural essentialism tends to go hand-in-hand with cultural prejudice; but the cultural essentialist would rather proclaim culture as the basis of his/prejudice rather than refer directly to race, religion or language, for example.
18It can be argued that together with Hegel, Kant laid the groundwork for Hitler's Mein Kampf and the plagues and horrors of World War II.
even sometimes, ontologically higher cultures.\(^\text{19}\) Similarly, it seemed easy for Kant to order countries and societies according to those that could be said to have a “national character” and those that could not; those whose civilisations are the most advanced, and those that could never hope to escape a subaltern civilisational status.\(^\text{20}\) In this respect, in a subsection he titled “The Character of the Peoples” in his lectures on Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View; England and France emerged “the two most civilized peoples” of the world.\(^\text{21}\) “Also, because of their innate character, of which the acquired and artificial character is only the result, England and France are perhaps the only peoples to which one can assign a definite and – as long as they do not mix… unchangeable character.”\(^\text{22}\) On the other hand, Kant is sure that, “Russia has not yet developed what is necessary for a definite concept of natural predispositions which lie ready in it … European Turkey never have attained and never will attain what is necessary for the acquisition of a definite national character, the sketch of them [Kant assures us] may rightly be passed over here.”\(^\text{23}\)

In the last of the four infamous essays published in 1788 (curiously about the same time as the ‘Critical Period’ in Kant’s literature), titled “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy”, Kant re-inscribes his hierarchical theory of “race”, claiming that people from Africa and India lack a “drive to activity”, and as a result, do not have the mental capacities to be self-motivated and successful in northern climates, never becoming anything more than drifters.\(^\text{24}\) In praising Nature’s wisdom in discouraging migration as a result of human discordant adaptive capacities; especially from warmer to colder regions of the world, Kant laboured to

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\(^\text{19}\) Notably, Kant almost never left his hometown Konigsberg throughout the period of his lengthy career. The four articles are: Kant, I. 2007a [1764], Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime; Kant, I. 2007b [1775], Of the different races of human beings; Kant, I. 2007c [1785], Determination of the concept of human race; and Kant, I. 2007d [1788] On the use of teleological principles; most of the lectures are published in one volume: Kant, I. 2007e [1798], Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view.

\(^\text{20}\) See Kant, I. 2007e [1798], Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view, p. 7: 319.

\(^\text{21}\) Note that the emphases are Kant’s. See Kant, I. 2007e [1798], Anthropology, p. 7: 311.

\(^\text{22}\) Here Kant anticipates Hegel, Hitler and Samuel P. Huntington. More on this below. For the citation, see Kant, I. 2007e [1798], Anthropology, p. 7: 311 – 312.

\(^\text{23}\) Italics are in the original. See Kant, I. 2007e [1798], Anthropology, p. 7: 319.

\(^\text{24}\) The reader should note the parallelism, once more, between Kant’s arguments here and the mainly psychotic drivel of the Mein Kampf. Also, note that Kant published this article and continued to teach his racist Geography and Anthropology in German universities and public space (up to 1798, when he published the entire lectures) against what empirical facts demonstrated. For example, Ignatius Sancho, Qobna Ottobah Cugoano, and Olaudah Equiano, the three best-known Africans in eighteenth-century England became known as significant writers in the 1780s, with the publication of their respective books in 1782, 1787, and 1789. See Palter, R. April 1995, Hume and prejudice, p. 7. The citation from Kant’s essay here is drawn from Kleingeld, P. Oct., 2007, Kant’s second thoughts on race, p. 573.
show that Native Americans (whom he placed below the Africans) are weak, inert and “incapable of any culture” because they “are a race (or rather, a semi-race) stunted in its development because their ancestors migrated to a different climate before they had fully adapted to their own environment.” Ignoring both empirical, anthropological and theoretical illuminations that ran contrary to his theory of “race” (several works existed at that time that rebut “racial” hierarchism), Kant relied on Comte de Buffon’s writings to re-inscribe the “stem species” argument in support of the superiority of the “whites”. The argument has it that there was once a “stem species” (Stammgattung) in one region of the world which possessed the predispositions for all the different “racial” features. The subsequent dispersal of human beings allowed that each “race” went away with the right dispositions to help them survive in the particular region of the world where they would find themselves. This developmental process, Kant tells us, is irreversible. This is why migration and cultural mixing would not in any way present the “weaker races” with any hope of enlightenment or progression. Kant was sure and preached that only the “whites” were bequeathed with the (eugenically) appropriate predispositions of the human race.

At all events, Kant reserved his bitterest prejudices for the “Negroes of Africa”, even though he ranked the native Americans lower than them. According to him,

[T]he Arab [is] …the noblest human being in the Orient …but his …inflamed power of imagination presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images, and even the spread of his religion was a great adventure. The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. But the Germans, the English, and the Spaniards [are] those who are most distinguished from all others in the feeling of the sublime.

25 Again, note that Hitler was to adopt this same argument against migration and the Jews. See Kleingeld, P. Oct., 2007, Kant’s second thoughts on race, p. 573 – 74.
27 However, note the devious implication of Kant’s implicit claim to the effect that there is probably nothing worth talking about the rest of the Orient, since even their best only perceive things in “unnatural and distorted images”. See Kant, I. 2007 [1764], On the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime, P. Guyer, Trans., p. 2:243 – 54.
In yet another notorious passage, in the first of the four essays (published in 1764), *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant observed that the very fact that the “Negro” carpenter was black from head to toe, was a clear proof that what he said was stupid.\(^{28}\) Kant’s only defence for an atrocious comment of this magnitude is an appeal to the following equally disastrous claims by the Scottish philosopher, David Hume:

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\text{I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent in action or specialization. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the Whites such as the ancient GERMANS, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them… such a uniform and constant difference could not happen… if nature had not made original distinction betwixt these breeds of men.}\(^{29}\)
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Kant may have changed his views on race later on, but his earlier writings on this topic have not exactly been committed to flames as “sophistry and illusion”.\(^{30}\)

To be sure, cultural racism of the type espoused by Kant, irredentism, prejudicial theories and actions did not begin or end with Kant, the Germans or any particular civilisation or epoch in human history. More than two centuries before Kant wrote, a London merchant, John Lok kept a curious account of his voyage to the West African coast in 1561. He reportedly described “black” Africans as “beasts who have no houses,” and who are also “people without heads,

\(^{28}\) The entire story from Kant runs thus: “In the lands of the blacks can one expect anything better than what is generally found there, namely the female sex in the deepest slavery? A pusillanimous person is always a strict master over the weaker, just as with us that man always a tyrant in the kitchen who outside of house hardly dares to walk up to anyone. Indeed, Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for haughty treatment of his wives, replied: You whites are real fools, for first you concede so much to your wives, and then you complain when they drive you crazy. [Kant continues]. There might have been something here worth considering, except for the fact that this scoundrel was completely black from head to foot, a distinct proof that what he said was stupid.” The citation in-text is reported in Kleingeld, P. Oct., 2007, Kant’s second thoughts on race, p. 576; and Eze, E. C., 1997, Philosophy and the (post) colonial, p. 7; but the quotation in the footnote is from Kant, I. 2007a [1764], On the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime, P. Guyer, Trans., p. 2:254 – 2: 255.

\(^{29}\) Hume is cited in Eze, E. C., 1997, Philosophy and the (post) colonial, p. 7.

\(^{30}\) To my knowledge, Kant never directly changed the views whose outlines I have been drawing above in any of his later writings. But many people believe that his later cosmopolitan writing would suggest, at least, a change in rhetoric if not a total change of heart.
having their mouth and eyes in their breasts.”31 The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie notes that “what is important about his writing is that it represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are ‘half devil, half child’.32 Adichie couldn’t be more right about how Lok’s writing may have helped to engender a pernicious tradition in Europe and America. Stories of racial/cultural prejudice and implanted animosities do not always end or fade away easily, even if those who implanted them were to recant. If anything, they become more sophisticated, wide ranging and pernicious.

For example, following the culturally racist footsteps of Kant (in spite of belated efforts to blur them), another prominent German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel provided in the 19th century, the ideological basis for the abuse of the peoples of other cultures, Africans in particular. He chose to disconnect the African continent from world history while inscribing a manifesto sanctioning the enslavement of Africans and the colonial experience. His writings provided the immediate tonic for European expansion and the colonial adventure.33 According to Hegel, for any society, culture or civilisation to be seen as such and be treated as important, then it must be part of World History. In the Philosophy of History, after using many denigrating, if not unprintable terms to describe the Africans, Hegel goes on to argue that the continent was in urgent need of “moral education”, citing her primitive and “uncultured” situation. Indeed, colonisation for Hegel became the only way to civilise the Africans, to make them to imbibe human culture and mores and ultimately begin to entertain the hope of the unlikelihood of becoming fully human thereafter.

Similarly, “[J. S.] Mill, made it clear in On Liberty and Representative Government that his views there could not be applied to India. (He was an India Office functionary for a good deal of his life, after all) because the Indians were civilisationally, if not racially, inferior.”34 The North American Indians were, for Mill, a people who lacked the requisite cultural and psychosocial dispositions to adopt a system of government based on the ideals of liberty or orderly

31 For this quote, see the transcript of Chimamanda Adichie’s Ted Talk 2012: The danger of a single story. http://dotsub.com/view/63ef5d28-6607-4fec-b906-aaa6c0f7f05a/viewTranscript/eng
representation. “Nothing but foreign force would induce a tribe of North American Indians to submit to the restraints of a regular and civilized government.”\textsuperscript{35} To be sure, Mill continues, “The same might have been said, though somewhat less absolutely, of the barbarians who overran the Roman Empire. It required centuries of time, and an entire change of circumstances, to discipline them into regular obedience even to their own leaders.”\textsuperscript{36} In this way, Mill justified England’s colonial misadventure in India, and other parts of the world. The recurring argument, for him, is that the colonial peoples were in desperate need of cultural education and civilisational exposure.

However, the authors cited above are not the only cultural essentialists history has produced. Contemporary cultural nationalists led by scholars like Samuel P. Huntington, David S. Landes and Lawrence Harrison argue that a culturally just world is achieved when every country, nation or nation-state is able to preserve and, perhaps, develop the pristine ingredients of its culture, unadulterated by alien influences. In addition, cultural nationalists hold the view that a nation’s culture defines, symbolises and authenticates their identity. On the basis of this claim, they arrive at other far-reaching theoretical consequences; (a) since some societies are more successful than others, it follows that some people – their cultures and/or their values – are better than others.\textsuperscript{37} As a result, (b) the “highly advanced” and successful cultures of the Global North should be protected from alien corruption. Thus, in Huntington’s view, if “Western civilization” is to be preserved, America and its culture in particular, should be protected from “alien corruption”. As he attempts to provide plausible answers to the issues and problems surrounding an emerging world order of the kind he envisages, Huntington develops arguments that make his book a manifesto of contemporary “cultural nationalism”.\textsuperscript{38} Huntington admits that even the currently most “successful” representative culture of the Global North (that is, the

\textsuperscript{35} Mill, J. S. 2009 [1861], Considerations on representative government, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{36} Mill, J. S. 2009 [1861], Representative government, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{37} For an anthology representing this view, or views largely similar to it, see for example, Harrison, L. E. and Huntington, S. P. Eds., 2000, Culture matters: how values shape human progress.
\textsuperscript{38} At all events, the world Huntington envisages, that is, a world where culture plays a significant, if not overriding role in human relations both locally and internationally coincides in large parts with the world Frantz Fanon lived in and tried to change. Whereas Huntington tells the story of human divisions along cultural lines, Fanon tells the story of an Open Universal. In this respect, the one is a cultural essentialist, the other a humanist. For Huntington, culture becomes a tool – the compass of world politics – always dividing people into clashing civilisations; while for Fanon, culture is an ambivalent (positive and negative) category requiring dynamic humanisation to serve the purpose of justice, human interaction and political peace.
American culture) ought not to be regarded or be implanted internationally as the universal/global culture. Nonetheless, he argues memorably to the conclusion that Americans cannot avoid the issue: Are we a Western people or are we something else? The futures of the United States and the West depend upon Americans reaffirming their commitment to Western civilization. Domestically, this means rejecting the divisive siren calls of multiculturalism. Internationally it means rejecting the elusive and illusory calls to identify the United States with Asia. Whatever economic connections may exist between them, the fundamental cultural gap between Asian and American societies precludes their joining together in a common home.  

To further crystallize the standpoint of cultural nationalism, Huntington celebrates what (in citing Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. approvingly) he refers to as the “distinctive character” of “Western” values and institutions. These values include (“Western”) Christianity, pluralism, individualism and rule of law, whose natural output is modernity. In reiterating his disapproval for any attempt to universalise the culture of the Global North, he insists that “what makes Western civilisation valuable is not because it is universal but because it is unique.”  

The roots of the ideas that set the culture of the Global North (the “West”) aside from and on top of other cultures and civilisations, Huntington hastens to educate us, cannot be traced to Asia, Africa or the Middle East; they are simply European and better than others. It ought to be the distinctive role of the United States as the most powerful nation of the Global North to renew and sustain these extraordinary qualities. For Huntington, one way of beginning to step into this historic role of no minor significance, would be for the United States of America to resuscitate the

41 Huntington’s views here are unpersuasive. Anyone with basic knowledge about the evolution of the so-called “Western values”, would be aware that most of what Huntington claimed are distinctively “Western”/European values have origins elsewhere or at least were not (classically) exclusively Western. We will return to this topic below. See for example, Kies, B. 1953. The contribution of Non-European peoples to world civilization.  
42 Huntington stresses the significant interface between culture and power, 1996, *The clash of civilizations*, passim.
founding fathers’ wish that it emerges inexorably as a strong and viable nation, protected against degenerating into “a tangle of squabbling nationalities.”

Huntington has one final warning for the deviant multiculturalists (who are merely a coterie of “influential intellectuals and publicists”): “History shows that no [multicultural] country … can long endure as a coherent society. A multicivilizational United States will not be the United States; it will be the United Nations.” Writing in a different book, but expressing his unequivocal anti-multicultural view in similar words, Huntington reiterates that “America cannot be the world and still be America. Other people cannot become American and still be themselves.” The most important “civilized” pursuit of the American people ought to be in the area of preserving those “qualities” that make America “different”.

It is curious that Professor Huntington reaches the kind of conclusions set before us. For even by his admission, we should expect a more desirable, peaceful and stable world order once world leaders accept and cooperate to “maintain the multicivilizational character of global politics.” Doesn’t it seem that even on Huntington’s account; the “dilution” of American “cultural greatness” would produce a more peaceful and flourishing global order? So why is he worried about a United States without a “cultural core”? Why exactly can he hardly bear the thought of a United States divorced from “Western culture”? The answer to these questions is not altogether unexpected: Huntington and many conservatives of the Global North worry that if the United States becomes “de-Westernised”, it might mean the collapse of the (political and cultural) hegemony of the Global North on the one hand, and the “loss” of the United States to a coreless (or should one say a “boundless”) world of “unrecognisable” peoples. Even if such “de-Westernising” brings an end to the undesirable world of clashing civilisations, that would not help Huntington to see anything good about a committee of nations (United Nations) living within the United States of America. For him, it would be better if the United States of America preserved those elements of European culture that have presumably made it great.

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44 Huntington holds the protagonists of multiculturalism beneath contempt, refusing them even the barest polite academic virtue of fair hearing and proper citation due for even one’s bitterest intellectual foes. See Huntington, S. P. 1996, *The clash of civilizations*, p. 305 – 06.
Pointing out the shortcomings of Huntington’s conclusions shortly after the publication of The Clash of Civilizations, Edward Said questioned rhetorically,

How can one today speak of “Western civilization” except as in large measure an ideological fiction, implying a sort of detached superiority for a handful of values and ideas, none of which has much meaning outside the history of conquest, immigration, travel and the mingling of peoples that gave the Western nations their present mixed identities? This is especially true of the United States, which today can only be described as an enormous palimpsest of different races and cultures sharing a problematic history of conquests, exterminations, and of course major cultural and political achievements.\(^{48}\)

But, Huntington derives his conclusions about the United States of America and the Global North (the “West”) from his reading of the current (emerging) world order. As he states at the outset, the “fundamental source of conflict in this new world order will not be primarily ideological,” but will instead be “cultural.” He enjoins us to recall that in ideological conflicts, the key question was ‘which side are you on?’ and people could and did choose sides and changed sides. One can be born in a capitalist country/society but learn about and root for communism and vice versa. But cultural conflicts, for him, are of a very different mould. “In conflicts between civilizations, the question is ‘What are you?’ not ‘which side are you on?’”\(^{48}\) And what you are, is an irreducible primary entity, “a given that can’t be changed” about your identity.\(^{49}\) In the very unlikely event that what you are gets altered, what is being changed is not your mind or beliefs, but something more fundamental, your self, your cultural identity.\(^{50}\) Stated in this way, it would now be a lot easier to understand and appreciate Huntington’s worries. He is worried that the United States of America – his beloved country – might somehow be lost in

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an amorphous world of cultural pluralism. But the question we must ask the publicist of cultural nationalism is: what really may be wrong with this possible outcome?

Backing, but apparently softening the cultural nationalists’ position, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. urges us to choose national identity against narrow (and indefensible) “ethnic and racial pride”. The superior morality embedded in defending our national identity and culture lies in the very (comforting?) fact that “we don’t have to believe that our values are absolutely better than the next fellow’s or the next country’s, but we have no doubt that they are better for us… and that they are worth living and dying for.” But if that is all cultural nationalism says and if a world order of cultural nationalism emerges, then we are stuck with a world of moral relativism and suspended ethical judgments. Quite clearly, certain values are good for us, yet may not turn out completely harmless to others. For example, building large industrial complexes run on gas may be a laudable aspect of American culture; but could in the long run develop highly toxic consequences for both the next generation of Americans and other people outside the American nation. Yet cultural nationalism seems to enjoy a certain appeal. It helps to keep things simple: members of any nation or state are free to think anything, believe in any value or act in any way they deem fit, provided that they neither harm others nor seek to impose such values or beliefs on others in any overt or forceful manner.

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51 One is not but a little disturbed by the sharp continuities between some of the views expressed by Huntington as reported above and most of the convictions of Adolf Hitler in Mein Kampf. The man regarded by the whole world as insane had written: “All that we admire in the world to-day, its science, its art, its technical developments and discoveries, are the products of the creative activities of a few peoples, and it may be true that their first beginnings must be attributed to one race. The maintenance of civilization is wholly dependent on such peoples. Should they perish, all that makes this earth beautiful will descend with them into the grave.

However great, for example, be the influence which the soil exerts on men, this influence will always vary according to the race in which it produces its effect. Dearth of soil may stimulate one race to the most strenuous efforts and highest achievement; while, for another race, the poverty of the soil may be the cause of misery and finally of undernourishment, with all its consequences. The internal characteristics of a people are always the causes which determine the nature of the effect that outer circumstances have on them. What reduces one race to starvation trains another race to harder work.

All the great civilizations of the past became decadent because the originally creative race died out, as a result of contamination of the blood. The most profound cause of such a decline is to be found in the fact that the people ignored the principle that... in order to preserve a certain culture, the type of manhood that creates such a culture must be preserved. But such a preservation goes hand-in-hand with the inexorable law that it is the strongest and the best who must triumph and that they have the right to endure.

He who would live must fight. He who does not wish to fight in this world, where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist.” Emphasis added. I quote Hitler’s Mein Kampf here from an excerpt from http://www.nazi.org.uk/hitler-aryan.htm.

The above proposition can hardly be realised, however, in our current world situation. In the currently interdependent world order, it is difficult to see how we can live our lives the way we choose without generating consequences, first for others who may belong to the same nation/state with us, but do not share our values, and second, those whose lands lie well beyond our borders, but may not be free from the consequences of our actions and lifestyle. Our choices, if they have any negative rebounds, often harm those who we assume should not have a say over how we live. Moreover, like colonialism and the Cold War eminently revealed, it is not just true that a people, especially if they are powerful enough, would never try to impose their national values on others by sundry subtle means, or sometimes by applying the extreme measure of warfare. A people – nations and states – are often willing to die for their cultural beliefs and societal values; especially when these cultural values are deemed as imbuing every individual member of that society with a unique, immutable and trans-generational identity. It must then be seen that Fanon correctly understood that cultural nationalism breeds tribalism/sectionalism and other forms of intolerance. When a people hold their culture and its values as essential and monolithic in this way, history has revealed their willingness to fight and die for such cultural beliefs and values.

In the last chapter of an influential book, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor*, published two years after Huntington’s by yet another self-confessed cultural essentialist, David S. Landes reinvigorates the cultural essentialists’ point of view, directly attacking the globalists whom he describes as “simply anti-intellectual”, and wallowing in the blatant contradiction of facts and the denial of actual historical events. Landes further complains that

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53 For example, Nathan Suhr-Sytsma has revealed that the historical irony behind the drive for autonomy by members of the foremost Nigerian literary association, the Mbari Club is that as they “sought to escape the orbit of the colonial university, the local publication venues to which they turned were surreptitiously funded by another global power: the United States. Both *Black Orpheus* and Mbari Publications unwittingly received substantial monies from the Central Intelligence Agency through grants from the Farfield Foundation and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which has been described as the “centrepiece” of the CIA’s “secret programme of cultural propaganda in western Europe” Whatever autonomy Mbari enjoyed was at least partly enabled by an American agency that apparently saw such “freedom” as preferable to African acceptance of Soviet support.” See Suhr-Sytsma, N. 2013, Ibadan modernism: poetry and the literary present in mid-century Nigeria, esp. p. 44 – 45.

54 Note once more, Landes’ determined effort to hold the globalists he is referring to beneath contempt. Like Huntington, he refuses to name the “globalists” or the “multiculturalists.” See. Landes, D. S. 1998, *The wealth and poverty of nations: why some are so rich and some so poor*, p. 514.
Above all, say the globalists, we must not account for European priority by “essentializing” it, that is, by tying it to European institutions and civilization—explaining it by European “presences” as against non-European “absences.” Thus the manifest asymmetry between Europe’s systematic curiosity about foreign civilizations and cultures and the relative indifference of these “others” is denied a priori by apologists who unknowingly reaffirm the contrast. The new globalists, not liking the message, want to kill the messenger—as though history hadn’t happened. The fact of Western technological precedence is there. We should want to know why, all of us, because the why may help us understand today and anticipate tomorrow.55

Landes invites the “anti-intellectual” globalist to look to history to find out the truth behind “Western” victories, and the reason why Eurocentricism is true and “anti-Eurocentric thought” delusional. He writes: “If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference. (Here Max Weber was right on).”56 Culture, or more precisely, cultural inequality, for Landes, is currently the most important, if not the only reason why some societies (mainly Europeans) have succeeded in the quest for economic and social progress, while some others (mainly non-Europeans) have underachieved and are “so poor.” How about slavery, colonisation and dependency? They no longer matter; the trio are now obsolete explanatory categories of human progress and economic prosperity.57 If anything, the trio are unassailable evidence of the triumphs of European technical superiority. And it is not as if, Landes coolly informs us, there is any society where people owned slaves that has ever prospered! But the collage of contradictions here is rather pitiable. As one reviewer observed, in Landes’ desperation to prove his thesis,

He becomes like the lawyer who, in order to defend his client from allegations about the theft of a vase from his neighbor, argues that (1) the vase never existed; (2) the

vase is still in possession of the plaintiff; and (3) the vase belonged to his client in the first place.\textsuperscript{58}

Be that as it may, cultural nationalists and essentialists, unfortunately, are not to be found only in theoretical writings. Once the seeds of prejudice are sown especially by highly influential persons like those we have pointed out above, there could be no way to determine the extent of the damaging consequences. As recent as 2010, a Nigerian PhD student studying philosophy in an Irish university reported the following anecdote:

I was returning from the library one evening when I was accosted by a boy – ten years old, maybe eleven – and he said, “Is it true that back in Nigeria your people live on trees as you have no houses?” My first thinking was to ignore the urchin and move on, but on a second thought, I paused and replied, “Yes my boy, including your (Irish) ambassador to Nigeria; everyone lives on tree tops in my country.” The boy rolled his eyes, hesitated briefly and disappeared in the streets.\textsuperscript{59}

A humorous ad hominen riposte may have been enough for the Nigerian student to force the Irish child to begin to appreciate what Adichie would call the “danger of a single story”, but stories of cultural prejudice and implanted animosities do not always end that way.\textsuperscript{60} If anything, they become more sophisticated and wide ranging. No one can say for sure how far a prejudicial comment could live on, to say nothing of how it might affect future generations. Kant has warned, in spite of himself, that “so harmful is it to implant prejudices for they later take vengeance on their cultivators or on their descendants.”\textsuperscript{61} The truism immanent in Kant’s sober

\textsuperscript{58} Continuing, Jack Goldstone points out, “Here is Landes on slavery and climate: ‘It is no accident that slave labor has historically been associated with tropical and semitropical climes.’ This is to buttress his argument that in the tropics, it is too hot to work, so people do not labor if they can help it; thus they rely on slaves. And where people depend on slaves, there can be no initiative, no labor-saving devices, no great civilizations. How absurd! Slavery has abounded in all societies where the strong could prey on the weak. The word itself comes from the Slavic peoples of the Black Sea region….” See Goldstone, J. Spring, 2000, Book review: the wealth and poverty of nations: why some are so rich and others so poor by David S. Landes, p. 106.

\textsuperscript{59} The anecdote was reported in a private conversation.

\textsuperscript{60} See Chimamanda Adichie, The danger of a single story, passim.

\textsuperscript{61} Kant wrote some time after his works in support of racism. For the quote, see Kant, I. 2003, What is enlightenment?, p. 55.
reflection here can hardly be confuted by any keen observer of human history, including the history of Kant’s Germany where he himself ironically implanted prejudices that obviously yielded highly disastrous consequences (the Shoah being a good example).

Amartya Sen has extended Kant’s warning, arguing that: “When there is an accidental correlation between cultural prejudice and social observation (no matter how casual), a theory is born, and it may refuse to die after the chance correlation has vanished without a trace.” As he further demonstrates, London’s treatment of the Irish famine of the 1840s was a clear case in history where the theory or ideology that determined the fate of a people was in large parts rooted in a deep-seated cultural prejudice anchored in a “chance correlation”. Sen writes that while poverty in Britain was typically explained in terms of the vagaries of economic factors, Irish poverty was widely viewed in England as being caused by the Irish culture of “laziness, indifference and ineptitude”. To make a very bad situation even worse, the Irish were blamed for their centuries-old taste for potatoes – as this was considered one of the calamities which the natives had, in the English view, brought on themselves. In the end, the ultimate victory for cultural prejudice in this case, was that while the Irish died in their thousands, Britain’s mission was not seen as one to alleviate Irish distress but “‘to civilize her people and to lead them to feel and act like human beings’.”

The above worrisome reports are not, of course, the only instances in history where cultural prejudices have carried the day and beclouded human reason, leading to very disastrous consequences and the denial of both humanity and justice. Prior to Pearl Harbour and the United States of America’s eventual entry into World War II, a Japanese Prime Minister had to resign from office because the then President of the United States of America, Franklin D. Roosevelt would not deign to negotiate a peaceful resolution of the escalating conflict with the lowly rated Japanese “animals”. Similarly, Harry Truman (who took over from the deceased Roosevelt) after publicly describing the Germans and the Japanese as barbarians and beasts that needed to be treated as such, proceeded to unleash the gratuitous terrors of fire-bombing major Japanese

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cities. This was followed with the equally unnecessary invasion of Japan and the ultimate horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 6 and 8 1945.64

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, former American president, George Bush, Sr. when tasked by representatives of developing nations to put on the agenda the over-consumption of resources by developed nations had retorted: “the American lifestyle is not up for negotiations.”65 The simple point being made by Bush here is that he couldn’t care less if any cultural pattern of his country or others like his were a serious obstacle to global environmental security and international stability. What mattered most to him was that the American culture and that of the Global North, which he construed as completely distinct from the rest of the world, be protected and preserved at all cost.66 United States’ House Representative, Curry Todd’s recent reference to children of undocumented immigrants as “rats” that “multiply” is but one more example of how far prejudice arising from cultural nationalism can go:

Program Administrator: [We] do not provide pregnant women coverage.

We provide unborn coverage. According to the federal government we cannot ask for immigration documents or verify that information because we are providing coverage to the unborn. The unborn child will be classified as [a] US citizen.

Rep. Todd: I understand unborn child. I understand that provision. I’m talking about others. Adults. These are pregnant women.

Program Administrator: ... under guidance that was provided to states under the previous administration ... for covering the unborn child we are not permitted to determine citizenship because the child, once born, is a US citizen.

Rep. Todd: Well they can go out there like rats and multiply then, I guess.

65 To be sure, as at 2013, New York City consumes more energy than the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa put together. For Singer’s views cited, see Singer, P. 2004, One world: the ethics of globalization, 2nd Ed., p. 2.
66 I agree with Peter Singer that the United States of America has constituted a formidable obstacle to forming a global community (an argument that runs through his book One World), but it is not the only country or the only people in the world today that places big road blocks in the way of global culture and or global justice. Most countries of the world may be equally indicted of cultural prejudice both locally and internationally.
For Natalie Cisneros, Representative Todd’s comments are the very manifestation of “backwards-uncitizenizing”, that is, a scenario where there is always-already a normative dichotomy between the sexually pure citizen on the one hand, and on the other hand, the “alien” subject functions as the perverse anticitizen, sexually deviant and threatening to the wellbeing of the state. Thus, cultural nationalism of the type valued by Huntington and his supporters is not different from racism and proto-nationalism. Fanon’s words have remained historically prophetic: “from [cultural] nationalism we have passed to ultranationalism, to chauvinism and finally to racism.”

Yet, as we have been arguing, no culture, in its entirety, need be seen as better or worse than another. Amilcar Cabral has argued convincingly to the conclusion that, “[I]t is important not to lose sight of the fact that no culture is a perfect, finished whole. Culture, like history, is an expanding and developing phenomenon.” In addition, “all culture is composed of essential and secondary elements, of strengths and weaknesses, of virtues and failings, of positive and negative aspects.”

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67 The video tape of this interview can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE237g7KI8Y. But, I was first pointed to it by Natalie Cisneros; see her (Spring) 2013, ‘Alien’ Sexuality: Race, Maternity, and Citizenship, Hypatia, vol. 28, no. 2: p. 291.

68 Cisneros further analysis of Todd’s comments has significant implications for thinking about the possibility of global justice; an implication that is already obvious: “Representative Todd’s comparison of maternal alien bodies to ‘rats that multiply’ and other discourses surrounding the ‘anchor baby’ and ‘alien’ reproduction betray… [indeed] illustrates how racist normalizing power has reconstituted the ‘alien’ subject as a perverse, infesting, and uniquely threatening body. While, in the context of juridical power, the ‘alien’ is seemingly constituted as a neutrally abstract subject, the functioning of discourses and mechanisms of regulatory disciplinary power betray the construction of the ‘alien,’ and as particular, the reproductive maternal ‘alien,’ as always-already threatening to the well-being of the state. In this way, there is no room for the ‘invading’ and ‘infesting’ ‘alien’ subject in the biopolitical constitution of the citizen-subject. This perverse body is not a potential citizen or a noncitizen— the ‘alien’ subject is the perverse ‘anticitizen,’ and the perverse ‘alien anticitizen’ functions as a mirror image and contrast to the ‘virtuous citizen’…” [Thus] the normalizing functions of power that constitute the racialized, criminalized, and perverse ‘alien’ simultaneously reform the borders of citizenship itself.” Cisneros, N. (Spring) 2013, ‘Alien’ Sexuality p. 304; also see p. 290.


70 Continuing with this line of thought, Cabral writes: “[A]s with history, the development of culture proceeds in uneven fashion, whether at the level of a continent, a “race,” or even a society. The coordinates of culture, like those of any developing phenomenon, vary in space and time, whether they be material (physical) or human (biological and social).” See Cabral, A. [1970] 1973, Return to the source: selected speeches by Amilcar Cabral, p. 51 and for the citation in-text, see p. 50.
negative aspects, of factors of progress and factors of stagnation or regression." All we can say is that certain cultural traits may have better adaptive capacity in specific situations. After all, it is almost incontestable nowadays to say that other factors, including social, geographical, environmental and political situations combine to influence cultural evolution in every human society. For example, according to Orlando Patterson,

Slavery, in which Afro-Americans spent two-thirds of their existence in this country was ... a viciously exploitative institution that severely handicapped Afro-Americans, especially in the way it eroded vital social institutions such as the family and marital relations, in the way it excluded Afro-Americans from the dominant social organizations and, in the process, denied them the chance to learn patterns of behavior fundamental for survival in the emerging industrial society.

Hence, Afro-American culture would have developed along very different patterns if the “vital social institutions” had not been tailored to exclude Afro-Americans from “the dominant social organizations.” The cultural nationalist ought to realise that every national culture is contingent, recumbent upon the vagaries of societal evolution, a product of brute luck and many individual decisions. Fanon offers a more compelling alternative to cultural nationalism when he argues that “culture is the combination of motor and mental behavior patterns, arising from the encounter of man with nature, and with his fellow man ...” which is continually open to change and revision. A national culture is not something inherent and immutable in a people. Individual members of a society need not belong to a particular culture in a hard and fast manner. Culture may form the basis of sometimes saying something generally about a people’s adaptation to nature, but not about every individual’s ability and conduct in the society; culture is definitely not worth killing or dying for.

The merits, if any, of cultural nationalism pale in the face of the very reality of a highly interdependent world order, a world where interdependence characterises and also extends to

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technology and commerce, to permeate the environment, politics and culture itself. In the current world situation, people simply travel; they migrate and mix in large numbers within and between different societies. They also intermarry, learn together and work together on the same jobs and projects from the same or different locations. Consequently, no system of beliefs or aggregate thought is entirely local or unique to any people or civilisation in our world today; what you have is a jambalaya of forms of life continually mixing and intermingling. “This is to say that every domain is linked to every other one, and that nothing that goes on in our world has ever been isolated and pure of any outside influence.”

No cultural habitat is completely closed to others in the current eco-culture. The rival theoretical camp, multiculturalism, has other criticisms to level against the cultural nationalists and we explore the major points here.

The Multiculturalists’ Agenda

Multiculturalists like the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, reject most of the claims of cultural nationalism. The main point of Taylor’s philosophy of multiculturalism is the removal of every obstacle in the way of allowing people of different historical, traditional, and cultural backgrounds to retain their multiple identities while flourishing together peacefully in

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75 The following clarifications by Will Kymlicka prove helpful here: “It is important to put multiculturalism in its historical context. In one sense, it is as old as humanity — different cultures have always found ways of coexisting, and respect for diversity was a familiar feature of many historic empires, such as the Ottoman Empire. But the… [contemporary discourse on] multiculturalism… is a more specific historic phenomenon, emerging first in the Western democracies in the late 1960s. This timing is important, for it helps us situate multiculturalism in relation to larger social transformations of the postwar era.

More specifically, multiculturalism is part of a larger human-rights revolution involving ethnic and racial diversity. Prior to World War II, ethnocultural and religious diversity in the West was characterized by a range of illiberal and undemocratic relationships of hierarchy, justified by racist ideologies that explicitly propounded the superiority of some peoples and cultures and their right to rule over others. These ideologies were widely accepted throughout the Western world and underpinned both domestic laws (e.g., racially biased immigration and citizenship policies) and foreign policies (e.g., in relation to overseas colonies).

After World War II, however, the world recoiled against Hitler’s fanatical and murderous use of such ideologies, and the United Nations decisively repudiated them in favor of a new ideology of the equality of races and peoples. And this new assumption of human equality generated a series of political movements designed to contest the lingering presence or enduring effects of older hierarchies. We can distinguish three “waves” of such movements: 1) the struggle for decolonization, concentrated in the period 1948–65; 2) the struggle against racial segregation and discrimination, initiated and exemplified by the African-American civil-rights movement from 1955 to 1965; and 3) the struggle for multiculturalism and minority rights, which emerged in the late 1960s.” See Kymlicka, W. 2012, Multiculturalism: success, failure, and the future, p. 5 – 6.
the same country or region, or indeed in any form of human society.\textsuperscript{76} Taylor’s main thesis is anchored in a politics of recognition. Proper recognition of the “holistic individual” who must always be understood as a culturally situated or embedded self is vitally important in the contemporary world because as he reads it,

> a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. …Misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.\textsuperscript{77}

In Taylor’s view, incumbent upon us is not only understanding the beliefs and categories of other cultures, but also working hard to preserve the elements of different cultures. The conclusion that our own culture offers us all we need to know and to survive in our current world is an illusion we should by now have shed. He is convinced that the world is made up of a variety of cultures, not by “mere accident” but in order to bring about “greater harmony.” It would then be reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject.

\textsuperscript{76} Taylor’s work on multiculturalism has at least some of its roots in his experience living in Quebec, with its complex francophone nationalism, and his foray into politics there. Cf. \url{http://blog.talkingphilosophy.com/?p=324}.

…it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility *a priori*.\(^78\)

He however notes that what the presumption requires of us is not peremptory and inauthentic judgments of equal value, but a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions. What it requires above all is an admission that we are very far away from that ultimate horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures might be evident. This would mean breaking with an illusion that still holds many…\(^79\)

In clear terms, multiculturalism in this particular understanding is a celebration of cultural difference and the promotion of diversity. But like one critic has argued, promoting difference and diversity “tends to favour ‘billiard ball’ representations of cultures as neatly bounded wholes whose contents are given and static – hence mainly to be ‘protected and preserved’.”\(^80\)

Indeed, multiculturalism presented in this way is ironically hand in glove with cultural essentialism and leaves its flanks wide open for various levels of attacks. One main effort to take advantage of those weaknesses is in a book written by Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*. By postulating some revealing definitions of diversity and equality, Michaels demonstrated that multiculturalism or diversity does not really solve the problem of minorities and inequality among human beings in society. “We like the idea of cultural equality,” he writes, “better than we like the idea of economic equality (and we like the idea of culture wars better than the idea of class wars).” Human beings seem to prefer “being nice to each other”, that is,

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\(^78\) Another reason why many customs and institutions seem so mysterious is that we have been taught to value elaborate “spiritualized explanations of cultural phenomenon more than down-to-earth material ones. Each lifestyle comes wrapped in myths and legends that draw attention to impractical or supernatural conditions. These wrappings give people a social identity and a sense of social purpose, but they conceal the naked truths of social life.” See Harris, M. 1974, *Cows, pigs, & witches: the riddles of culture*, p. 2 – 3. For Taylor’s view cited in text, see Taylor, C. 1994 [1992], *The politics of recognition*, p. 72.


diversity to “giving up our money” that is, equality.\textsuperscript{81} For Michaels, in a world where people are much more sincere, protecting a culture or language from extinction need not constitute a moral or social problem; or an egregious wrongdoing; for after all, the loss or eradication of a culture, including the language, is a “victimless crime”.\textsuperscript{82} What does indeed constitute a crime with real victims, Michaels points out, are egregiously unjust class-based inequalities in society. This is because, according to him, a person could choose to abandon certain practices embedded in his culture, or altogether, switch one culture for another without suffering any real harm apart from the illusory pathos of having lost something intrinsically part of him. Indeed, the person may have gained more if his new choice of culture helps him to live a much more fulfilled life; but people can hardly elect to switch affluence with poverty, since it seems rather obvious people are less likely to flourish in abject poverty than when financially capable.\textsuperscript{83}

Thus, we must realise that what the form of multiculturalism espoused by Taylor and some other liberals may well have achieved over time is the aestheticisation of difference through the “cosmetic celebration of cultural diversity” that reifies difference at the expense of “new patterns of interaction which might arise from their mixing and intermingling.”\textsuperscript{84} The greater mistake here, in Tom Sowell’s poetic language, is that “advocates of cultural diversity want to preserve cultures like butterflies preserved in amber.”\textsuperscript{85} Another major critique of multiculturalism is that it tends to talk about oppression without naming any oppressor. After all, Linda M. Alcoff reports Ignatiev and Garvey as having noted that African artistes continue to “suffer through diminished access to and control of means of cultural production.” This is so because “merely acknowledging black influences on dominant cultures does not remedy this [alienation from means of cultural production].”\textsuperscript{86} In clear terms, we must note that (1) pursuing cultural diversity distracts from harder, economic inequalities; (2) pursuing cultural diversity attempts to block the internal processes of social change in many societies or the possibility of “excessive” cultural transformation.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{81} Michaels, W. B. 2006, The trouble with diversity, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{82} Michaels, W. B. 2006, The trouble with diversity, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. Michaels, W. B. 2006, The trouble with diversity, passim.
\textsuperscript{84} Isar, Y. R. 2006, Cultural diversity, p. 374.
\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Neocosmos, M. 2014, Thinking political emancipation and the Social Sciences in Africa: some critical reflections, passim.
At all events, Michaels’ argument sounds persuasive because it does present a plausible counter against multiculturalism as enunciated above. But there is a sense in which multiculturalism translates to *cultural freedom* which this thesis would endorse. Cultural freedom or the individual’s ability to choose from among available alternative cultures is precisely a multiculturalist programme. As explained by Amartya Sen, cultural freedom or cultural diversity includes *inter alia*, “the liberty to question the automatic endorsement of past traditions, when people – particularly young people – see a reason for changing their ways of living;” or in another rendition, allowing and encouraging individuals to see themselves first as human beings and “to live as they would value living (instead of being restrained by ongoing tradition).”\(^88\) In this sense, both Sen and Fanon are multiculturalists or as the article would prefer to say, cultural humanists. Fanon thought correctly, that culture – a national culture – is not a thing to be treasured for its own sake. It is a thing that we must continue to treasure until its elements, or some of them, are no longer useful as matrices or paradigms for making sense of the world we live in. In this understanding of the significance of culture, human beings are never at risk from culture; rather culture is perpetually at the mercy of human beings who no longer live within an essentialist-particularist culture, but live through a plurality of ever-changing cultural agreements and multiple identities. It ought to always stand as a duty of human beings to jettison a culture or aspects of it that no longer serve human interest in favour of other beneficial cultural and human values, regardless of where they are to be found.\(^89\)

Will Kymlicka, another prominent protagonist of multiculturalism, defends views broadly similar to those attributed to Sen and Fanon above. To make clear his position, Kymlicka began by distinguishing between two senses of culture. In one sense, culture becomes the keyword denoting “all manner of groups, from teenage gangs to global civilizations.”\(^90\) But Kymlicka makes it clear that he uses culture only as “*societal culture*”. His explication of societal culture is of great importance to understanding the sense in which this article may or may not view multiculturalism favourably. According to him, societal culture is the structure, the


\(^89\) Of course, in relation to the good life, and along individualistic strictures, views broadly similar to this are sometimes pursued by some liberal theorists in America and Europe, including J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. See Section 6 in Chapter Three of this volume. And for the writings of some liberal theorists referred to, see for example, Dworkin, R. 1983, In defense of equality; Mill, J. S. 1982, *On liberty*, G. Himmelfarb, Ed., p. 122; and Rawls, J. 1980, Kantian constructivism in moral theory, p. 544.

lens through which the individual is taught the various norms of his society, and is led to participate in sundry human activities, viz.; schools, media, economy and government.\textsuperscript{91} When Kymlicka is properly understood, it will come to the fore that for him,

\begin{quote}
It is through the societal culture that a fundamental part of the individual identity is determined and through which an individual is given the opportunity to learn about and cultivate differing views on what it is to lead a good life. The role of culture is to provide the background against which one can see those beliefs and goals in proper perspective. For without such a background, such an evaluation would be nothing more than self-indulging acknowledgement of the status quo….\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

While the article would agree with Kymlicka that culture is needed to give direction to human life, to give human thought the focus and cohesion necessary for dealing with our quotidian and long term issues, one must worry about the stress he puts on a cultural group being able to speak its own language, enjoy a degree of self-government, and where possible be granted “territorial autonomy”.\textsuperscript{93} Do a people need to speak a particular indigenous/traditional language in order to flourish? Does a person or even a people need a particular culture to be able “to learn about and cultivate differing views on what it is to lead a good life”? Is territorial autonomy for each cultural/language group likely to strengthen the multicultural balance of our world or weaken it? Is a unique/differentiated cultural identity necessary for societal flourishing?

The Idea of Inter-Cultural Equality

Cultural essentialism and cultural humanism represent different approaches to telling the same story; the story of our current global order. While the former sees it as a project of partitioning human cultures within and against (nation)-states, the latter conceives culture

\textsuperscript{91} Kymlicka, W. 1995, \textit{Multicultural citizenship}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{92} Beck, F. F. M. 2012, Liberalism, minorities, and the politics of social differentiation, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{93} See Kymlicka, W. 1995, \textit{Multicultural citizenship}, 112 – 16.
globally as the celebration of alternating pluralisms, heteronomous alterity and in the Fanon-inspired words of Homi Bhabha, “reciprocal recognitions”. The article contends that until we have made a decision about how best to view ourselves, how best to perceive and relate with persons outside our assumed societal cultural milieu, until we have determined the role culture should play in human affairs, we shall be unable to decide on how best to treat those unlike us. The effort is made here to resolve the above stated problematic by relying on a cultural humanism to generate a principle of global culture the article christens “inter-cultural equality”.

Inter-cultural equality derives ultimately from cultural humanism. It holds that in our current world setting, the interest of diverse human associations and groups matter and matter equally. We can begin to properly understand the contents and implications of inter-cultural equality as well as the arguments that buoy it, if we grasp the role that cultural humanism plays in its formulation and realisation. Cultural humanism says that in our world of interdependencies, cultural differences, pluralisms and multi-formed identities, we ought to recognise the very fact that our own culture and its elements are not necessarily better than those of others; that even though we all have a culture, no human being necessarily belongs to a particular putative culture. Cultural humanism denies that it is possible to describe or identify an individual in terms of a particular putative culture. In addition, the article contends that humanity, understood in Fanonian-Patočkan terms as free beings “living in problematicity” of truth is more important than culture. This is the only way we can learn to set aside or downplay our cultural sentiments while relating with people from different climes and cultural agreements. Cultural humanism is therefore the view that the attitudes and values that inform human society must now be driven by the untrammeled elevation of human interest in general ahead of national, racial, ethnic or religious persuasions or sentiments. Cultural humanism must begin from working to eliminate cultural prejudices – while recognising the reciprocal benefits of all human cultures – so as to engender a better world order.

94 To be sure, Fanon saw beyond the politics of recognition to ask other more difficult but important questions about our common humanity. To that extent he dreamt Taylor’s dream, but was able to wake from that dream to seek interpretation and application in the real world laden with oppression, cultural prejudices and egregious injustice. 95 An individual is capable of, and often, share in cultural values other than those within which he or she is born. People may also and often do repudiate or reject customs, traditions, beliefs or practices embedded in the paraphernalia of the putative culture they were born into. For example, it would be erroneous to move from the very fact that many Brazilians have a football culture, to say that all Brazilians belong to a Brazilian football culture. 96 See Patočka, J. 2007, Living in problematicity; Fanon, F. 1963 [1961], The wretched of the earth and Fanon, F. 2008, Black skin, white masks.
In transcending multiculturalism in conceptualisation, cultural humanism views global culture more broadly as a project that would ultimately free human beings from the shackles of parochialism and uncritical traditionalism. To be precise, the multiculturalists want us to (1) preserve and recognise all cultures and (2) allow for cultural mix and diversity. Cultural humanism disputes both propositions, in part. While cultural humanism agrees that we should recognise the value of all putative cultures and allow for cultural mixing and intermingling, it denies that cultures or their values should be preserved at any cost that might be harmful to some human beings/groups. Preserving cultures at inhumane and unjust costs is but one way of essentialising culture at the expense of humanity, at the expense of robust human freedom. In addition, cultural humanism argues contra Kant and Huntington that cultures need not survive in their pristine, “unadulterated” forms at the expense of human beings, the reverse should obtain, if need be, in the way of achieving global justice or strengthening international cooperation. In this way, global culture is understood as humanism, a humanism that in Levinasian terms places our own value, autonomy and freedom heteronomously subject to the existence of the Other, regardless of cultural leanings.

The thinking here is that a theory of global culture needs to transcend Taylor’s politics of recognition and the postcolonial desire to reclaim history, creating a cosmopolitan and “postracial” world, to aim for a world of inter-culturality that remedies the masses’ suffering – the world’s unfortunates’ current burdens of “continued exclusion, oppression, poverty, alienation and unfreedom.” Inter-culturality, freedom and inclusion are the only ways to begin to position much of the world’s populations (living in “precarious conditions”) advantageously to earn their survival in dignity. Furthermore, cultural humanism denies claims like that made in Michael Didbin’s novel, The Lagoon (which Huntington cites and thinks it correctly describes the requisite ethics or “grim Weltanschauung” of the current world order). The claim has it that:

‘There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are old truths we are painfully rediscovering after a century and more of sentimental cant. Those who deny

them deny their family, their heritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves! They will not lightly be forgiven.'

The greatest rebuttal to views like this is that in our world today, it is becoming increasingly very difficult to say for sure what we are not, to identify correctly who our real enemies are and who our true friends might be. For indeed our friends today can be our enemies tomorrow and vice versa. In the area of identity, it is just not true that people can correctly be identified according to a single unique criterion. And if we cannot use a single term or aspect to identify people, including ourselves, how can we then hope to separate our selves from those unlike us that we must hate? Amartya Sen has rightly observed that there is no rational impediment to understanding and accepting the very fact that the same person can have very many non-contradicting (different) identities that make her a fuller, fulfilled and integrated person.

More than this, are many of us not able to speak other languages other than that of the putative culture in which we were originally born? Ngũgĩ has argued persuasively that “Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable froth the language that makes possible its genesis growth banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next.” And since this is so, we are right in agreeing with Fanon that “A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language.” Noam Chomsky echoes this view in arguing that “no individual speaks a well-defined language.” If we recognise the merit of the above argument, then we would in addition think more deeply and appreciate the Platonic-Socrates when he rhetorically asks Alcibiades

[D]o you think that people in general disagree about what wood or stone is? If you ask them, don’t they give

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102 Ironically, Ngũgĩ himself is a cultural essentialist, since he generally espouses views same as the cultural nationalists. For the quote, see Ngũgĩ, wa Thiong'O, 1987 [1981], Decolonizing the mind: the politics of language in African literature, p. 15.
103 In another rendition, Fanon is translated as saying that “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.” See Microsoft Encarta © 2009, © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. For the citation in-text, see Fanon, F. 2008, Black skin, white masks, C. L. Markmann, p. 9.
the same answers? And similarly for all other cases; I suppose this is pretty much what you mean by understanding Greek, isn’t it?  

From the foregoing, it follows that language has the power to bond people of different putative cultures who have come to speak a shared language. And since we have come to learn and share our languages (which carry our cultures with them) with others, it makes it very hard to show that individuals who could speak and learn different languages can be identified as belonging to any particular culture.

Thus, “The uniquely partitioned world [of Huntington and the cultural nationalists] is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse categories that shape the world which we live.” Huntington and theorists like him set the world stage dangerously for the escalation of violent conflicts, in presuming and actually categorising people uniquely and narrowly based on religion or culture. Theirs is an ominous call for the death of humanity – that humanity be sacrificed on the altar of cultural and civilisational calibrations. This outcome may seem an ironic rebound of their hunger to certify and sanctify cultural purity and civilisational survival at all cost. But what really can partitionists and divisionists hope for?

In contrast, cultural humanism consists in transcending the negations of humanity such as colonialism, neocolonialism, Manichaeism, cultural prejudice, cultural racism and oppression. The struggle for freedom becomes the driving force behind this urgent demand for change and reason. For Fanon, anti-colonialism or decolonisation is not all that true humanism calls for: “it [humanism] must be filled out and developed into a practice and awareness of political and social inclusion of the most marginal…” and in Sekyi-Otu’s words, “a resumption of [the] interrupted history” of the dehumanized, the deculturised and the unrecognised – the only way the dialogue of humanity may be universally ignited, afresh. Thus, the new humanism that we invoke is a theory of action, of individual and collective participation in the salvation of our species, even if the struggle to do so may require (some) alleged cultural deaths and the end of

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Fanon’s real warning, is that no nation, no civilisation should claim the monopoly of an unblemished National Culture. Rather, we should continuously strive after an inclusive humanism. For humanism, in the words of Edward Said “is the only, and, I would go as far as saying, the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history.”

In a world guided by cultural humanism, it would make no sense for anyone, including the cultural essentialists, to rue the death of any culture, since culture is not an entity deserving of an autonomous life in the first place! Human beings need not go into extinction in order to save a particular putative culture from itself. We do not need to sacrifice human lives so as to preserve a culture, religion or civilisation. There is nothing wrong with having people who do not share certain aspects of “our culture” live among us. As guests, visitors or residents, we have no right to vilify our host because of “their culture”. All peoples may retain the right to protect and preserve their culture, religion or civilisation, but not at all cost. To reiterate, no culture is worth killing or dying for. We need not worry if the putative owners of a particular culture now choose to not just abandon certain ingredients or values of that culture, but also to borrow from or even migrate to another cultural space for the purpose of survival and flourishing.

Japan’s transmutation following the Second World War is an example of the kind of cultural mutation cultural humanism roots for. The militarist posture then apparent in Japanese socio-political culture was effectively jettisoned following the horrors and errors of World War II. Militarism, intransigence and belligerence have been replaced with more agreeable values and instruments of human cooperation so much so that one commentator recently referred to Japan as “arguably one of the most pacifist countries in the world today.” And yet this seems to represent a good case of a people dynamizing and or humanising its culture – re-examining the institutions, attitudes and values that have for generations informed and buoyed that society. Interestingly, however, Japan has retained other cultural values like “wisdom, industry, resilience, creativity” and discipline. The country did not need to abandon everything Japanese. It merely picked and chose from Japanese and other cultural values. Japan decided to

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choose humanity ahead of culture. Its people finally realised that Japan can exist without what may be called an “authentic” Japanese culture or at least that militarism was not intrinsic to such an “authentic” culture.

Conclusion

Cultural humanism need not lead to a mono-cultural world. It only requires inter-cultural equality which it engenders. To reiterate, cultural humanism is a conceptual apparatus which says that human survival and flourishing is more important than cultural preservation and irredentism. The further claim here is that if cultural humanism is universally endorsed, then a world of intercultural equality, or a world where the interest of every human group would matter and matter equally, regardless (of their multiple and perhaps conflicting) cultural, religious or civilisational affiliations. The foregoing is here advocated as a theory of global culture. The world of cultural humanism is a world where the humane and humanistic take precedence over parochial cultural prides and the opposite stereotypes. This is our best and the only real choice for creating a sustainable one world. We must never lose sight of the very fact that, “[t]he human, and humanistic, desire for enlightenment and emancipation is not easily deferred, despite the incredible strength of the opposition to it that comes from the Rumsfelds, Bin Ladens, Sharons and Bushes of this world;” and that it is that desire that binds us together.112

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