



ROOTS OF CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICTS

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ABSTRACT

This study is mainly focused on how civilizational conflict develops through multiple layers consisting of language intersecting with identity formation, ethnic divisions, and religious beliefs joined by post-colonial practices. This study highlights how these elements, which tend to stay isolated from each other, share deep connections because powerful entities historically worked to create strict civilizational structures and social hierarchies. The chapter studies how modern conflicts emerged from colonial disruptions of indigenous cultures and foreign governance systems that were enforced upon native populations.

This study also challenges the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms in international relations and critiques the tendency to universalize Western experiences as normative. It instead calls for a re-evaluation of how civilizational narratives are constructed, maintained, and contested. Through this framework, the chapter establishes that civilizational conflict is not a clash of fixed identities but a dynamic struggle over meaning, memory, and power in a world still shaped by colonial histories.

Keywords: Civilizational Conflict, Language, Identity, Religion, Ethnicity, and Colonialism

1. INTRODUCTION

Civilisational conflicts have played a major role in shaping world history, often caused by deep differences in culture, religion, and ideology. In the modern era, scholars like Samuel P. Huntington, Arnold Toynbee, and Francis Fukuyama have used the idea of civilisations to explain global tensions. Huntington (1996), in *The Clash of Civilisations*, argues that future conflicts will be based on cultural identity rather than politics or economics.¹ Toynbee (1934–1961), in *A Study of History*, looks at history to show how civilisations rise and fall, often facing conflict when they begin to decline.² Fukuyama (1992), in *The End of History and the Last Man*, originally believed that democracy would eventually unite the world but later admitted that cultural and civilisational differences remain strong.³ These ideas help explain why civilisations often come into conflict. Many factors contribute to civilisational conflicts, including languages, religious differences, distinct identities, ethnicities, and colonialism. Conflicts from the past still affect relationships between civilisations today, often fueling nationalism and distrust.⁴ Religion and ideology also create divisions, especially when civilisations with different beliefs come into contact.⁵ Economic struggles and competition for resources can make conflicts worse, especially when a rising power challenges an established one. In today's world, major civilisations—such as the West, the Islamic world, and China—often find themselves in competition,

¹ Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The end of history and the last man*. Free Press.

² Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilisations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.

³ Juergensmeyer, M. (1993). *The new Cold War? Religious nationalism confronts the secular state*. University of California Press.

⁴ Kaplan, R. D. (2012). *The revenge of geography: What the map tells us about coming conflicts and the battle against fate*. Random House.

⁵ Tibi, B. (1998). *The challenge of fundamentalism: Political Islam and the new world disorder*. University of California Press.

supporting Huntington's (1996) idea that civilisations, rather than individual countries, will shape future conflicts.⁶

This chapter explores the main reasons behind civilisational conflicts, looking at how history, culture, politics, and economics contribute to tensions. Understanding these factors helps explain why civilisations continue to clash and how these conflicts shape today's world. By studying these causes, we can see that civilisational conflicts are not just part of the past but continue to influence global affairs today.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative and analytical approach. This research mainly uses sources from three scholars: Huntington's clash of civilisations and the remaking of the world order, Toynbee's study of history, and Fukuyama's end of history and the last man. All these scholars offer a civilisational paradigm, which is crucial to this study.

3. LANGUAGE AND CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICT

One significant factor contributing to these civilisations is "language," which goes beyond the mere tool of communication. Language is intrinsically linked to identity, ethnicity, religion, and history. Language plays a central role in shaping many civilisations. Muslims in the Islamic world utilize the Arabic language in religious rituals, maintaining their cultural and civilisational sense of unity through it. The Hebrew language is essential for Jewish identity development, and it played a prominent role during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because it defined both geographic and cultural boundaries. The Balkans experienced widespread conflicts because language differences between Serbs and Croats, as well as Bosniaks, deepened the ethnic and religious rifts in the region.⁷

The implementation of foreign languages following colonization practices serves to increase cultural separation among communities. European powers, especially Britain, together with France, expanded their languages through wide colonial territories, thus causing native languages to fade into obscurity. When Britain established its governance and educational systems during its rule in India, it made English the official language, which divided the English-speaking elite from the population that primarily used regional languages. The colonial period led to present-day Indian politics, which determined the status of Hindi and native languages within the nation. The colonial governments in Africa forced the implementation of French, which triggered conflicts regarding cultural identity and language politics because local languages lost their status.

The support for native languages transformed into an active form of countering colonial rule after colonialism ended. In Algerian society, the campaign to establish Arabic as the official language directly supported the national battle to obtain independence from France. Various post-colonial communities perform language revitalization efforts because their native languages serve as a crucial means to restore cultural heritage while fighting against continuing colonial influence. The Indian government has supported Hindi along with regional tongues to build cultural independence from colonial heritage since colonial times.⁸

Today, language serves as a major cause of societal clashes in modern societies. Belgium faces enduring political tensions because of its two main populations: Flemish speakers who identify with Dutch, while the Walloons are French speakers who use language as the main marker of both cultural ties and political allegiances. The tension between French-speaking Quebecers and English-speaking Canadians throughout the 1980s and 1990s concentrated on language-related matters, with independence referendums taking place. Spanish government authorities maintain a constant struggle with Catalan nationalists who use language to oppose what they see as Spanish cultural and political domination.

Modern population flows between regions, and the process of cultural assimilation is significantly influenced by language. When Arabic-speaking refugees entered Europe, they triggered disputes about national cultural identities as well as adaptation processes. Some European nations utilize their primary languages to symbolize their current immigration-related social and cultural difficulties since they debate whether to require immigrants to abandon their mother tongues or not. Society-wide tensions between different groups result in social forms of separation along with political conflicts, which exacerbate existing civilisational gaps within these communities.⁹

⁶ Toynbee, A. J. (1934–1961). *A study of history* (Vols. 1–12). Oxford University Press.

⁷ Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster.

⁸ Toynbee, A. (1934–1961). *A Study of History* (12 vols.). Oxford University Press.

⁹ Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. Free Press.

A notable example of a conflict driven in part by language and identity occurred during the *Yugoslav Wars* (1991–2001). The dissolution of Yugoslavia led to the breakup of a multi-ethnic state into separate nations. Language played a significant role in this process, as the linguistic and ethnic differences between the Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks became a major point of contention. The Croatian language, for instance, was seen as a symbol of national identity in the newly independent Croatia, while Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia viewed the promotion of the Croatian language as a threat to their cultural identity. These linguistic divides, coupled with religious and historical animosities, contributed to the violent conflicts that tore apart the region.¹⁰

In conclusion, language plays a pivotal role in civilisational conflicts by reinforcing cultural and national identities and shaping how groups perceive each other. Whether through colonial imposition, post-colonial revitalisation movements, or modern-day linguistic struggles, language remains a key factor in creating and perpetuating civilisational divides. By understanding the role of language in these conflicts, we gain deeper insight into the complex cultural and historical forces that continue to shape global relations today.

4. IDENTITY AND CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICT

Identity plays a fundamental role in shaping civilisations and often serves as a catalyst for conflict. Identity penetrates personal and social self-definition processes because it determines how people link with others and how they maintain their allegiances and create boundaries of opposition. Identity conflicts emerge during cultural clashes, especially between various groups in diverse countries and border territories and nations born from colonial rule. Identity exists as an evolving force rather than a fixed state, so history combined with culture along with language through religion and political elements form its structure. The transformation of identity into rigid categories or political tools results in greater civilizational estrangement that creates wartime circumstances.

Political elites succeed in manipulating identity by exploiting historical grievances and cultural differences to justify their political power, which supports the creation of conflicts. By establishing borders according to imperial interests, many diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities became united in political units, thus deepening potential cultural divides between groups. Artificial national identities created by social forces do not emerge naturally from cultural unification, yet they drive internal conflicts together with foreign hostility.¹¹

Through its function of cultural transmission, language serves as the primary tool in forming civilizational identities and rise to conflicts. Different languages act as communication obstacles by producing an ‘otherness’ effect, which generates tension between groups. After decolonization, numerous postcolonial nations encountered the problem of colonial language dominance, which caused the decay of traditional culture while sparking revival efforts that developed into nationalist rebellions. Native language suppression establishes cultural divisions that symbolize political domination, resulting in socio-political conflicts.¹²

Civilizational interactions are affected by religion in two ways, as it both unites different groups through shared beliefs yet also creates separation from one another. Frequent conflicts between religious doctrines outnumber shared common denominators in faith traditions to create religious unity because these differences generate serious divisions. Political ambitions, joined with religious identity, have provoked noticeable conflicts and violent battles as well as ideological battles when several religious groups live together; the political manipulation of faith results in increased regional divides and converts religious doctrinal differences into basic civilizational conflicts.¹³

The concept of ethnicity makes civilizational paradigms more complex since it often carries historical accounts of imperialism, population movement, and warfare against domination. Nation-based ethnic tensions alongside cross-border tensions tend to become violent during times when political and economic differences elevate ethnic social standings. The enduring cultural tensions between ethnic communities were made worse by colonial rule as dominant ethnic groups and their resulting advantages continue to manifest through divisions between nations today.¹⁴

5. RELIGION AND CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICT

Religion serves two contradictory roles when civil cultures come into contact because it both brings people together and creates separation among them. Religious traditions that unite people often create solidarity between them, but theological clashes between religions commonly lead to major conflicts. The combination of political aims and religion has created both interreligious warfare and theological clashes that cause

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica. (n.d.). Yugoslav Wars.

¹¹ Fishman, J. A. (1999). *Sociolinguistics: A brief introduction*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

¹² Smith, A. D. (1986). *The ethnic origins of nations*. Blackwell.

¹³ Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.

¹⁴ Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilisations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.

destructive sectarian violence. Multiple faith communities in the same geographic area experience intensified conflicts because religious politics creates deep rifts that evolve into cross-cultural conflicts based on theology.

Main civilization developments during history occurred because of single dominant religious beliefs, and territorial expansions between religious doctrines caused repeated political turbulence. The Crusades became the emblematic battle that revealed religious passion as a cause of large-scale conflicts between cultural groups.¹⁵ A predominant example of inter-civilizational conflict because of theological disputes is the spreading impact of the Reformation, which triggered religious warfare across Europe.¹⁶

Today, religious extremism, together with fundamentalism, intensifies conflicts between civilizational groups. The violent clashes between civilizational blocs result from increased radical religious organizations that emerge due to perceived cultural erosion. State approaches to religious freedoms alongside freedom restrictions tend to ignite tensions between religious groups, which transform domestic disputes into larger, civilizational disputes.¹⁷

For instance, the religious conflict between Israel and Palestine preserves historical origins that continue to affect the present situation. Rival religious claims between Jews and Muslims about ownership of land, especially Jerusalem, form the focus of this contentious conflict because Jerusalem holds essential religious value for both groups. When Israel was officially formed in 1948, it brought displacement to Palestinians, which escalated existing Jewish-Arab-Muslim social conflicts. The ongoing conflict manifests multiple civilizational effects since Western powers lead diplomatic support for Israel, but Palestinian resistance earns backing mainly from nations with Muslim majorities, including Turkey and Iran. Hamas, together with Hezbollah, use their fight to demonstrate a universal Islamic fight against Western and Zionist hegemony, which creates perceptions of cultural confrontation. As a result of the conflict, radicalization, terrorism, and diplomatic crises have expanded all over the world, which in turn intensified both religious and ethnic divisions between Western nations, especially European countries. Religion and civilizational identity remain central factors that drive worldwide confrontations in the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict.

National identity in numerous countries bases its cultural and political foundations upon religious traditions. Religion creates separation when it embraces exclusive ideals, which increases hostility between different civilizational groups. Successful dialogue between diverse faith communities and cultural interaction serve as the key to conflict resolution and the growth of mutual comprehension.¹⁸

The power of religion continues as one of the primary elements that dictate the patterns through which civilizations develop while causing inter-civilisational disputes. The understanding of religion's role in civilizational clashes between diverse societies has become essential through globalization to create local and international coexistence and lower tensions.¹⁹

6. ETHNICITY AND CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICT

The study of ethnicity involves essential functions in civilizational disputes when historical accounts of conquest, together with migration and resistance events, overlap. Economic as well as political disparities between ethnic groups lead to violent confrontations when ethnic tensions occur both inside and outside nation-states. Many instances of ethnic divisions develop into deep roots, which generate lasting civilizational conflicts that result in prolonged regional instability.

The continent of Africa showcases the fundamental relationship between ethnicity and conflicts, which leads to civilizational struggles. The European colonial powers created artificial boundaries through maps that neglected both the historical and cultural ties of different ethnic groups and placed them under one political jurisdiction. Ethnic discontent between rival groups continues because they fight to achieve national power structures while also seeking control of economic assets and cultural representation.²⁰

For instance, in Africa, the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 stands as one of the worst ethnic confrontations because the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups finally engaged in massive brutality. The genocide took a toll on 800,000 lives while creating enduring damage throughout the area to demonstrate how ethnic disputes transform into major atrocities.²¹ The struggle between Sudan and South Sudan currently represents a major conflict in the region. The bitter civil wars in Sudan between Arab Muslim Northern forces and Christian Southern forces ended when the South declared its independence in 2011. Internal tensions between South Sudanese ethnic groups show how ethnic strife continues to generate long-lasting destabilizing forces within

¹⁵ Riley-Smith, J. (2005). *The Crusades: A History* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press.

¹⁶ MacCulloch, D. (2003). *The Reformation: A history*. Viking.

¹⁷ Juergensmeyer, M. (2017). *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence* (4th ed.). University of California Press.

¹⁸ Fox, J. (2008). *A world survey of religion and the state*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁹ Gorski, P. S. (2017). *American Covenant: A history of civil religion from the Puritans to the present*. Princeton University Press.

²⁰ Gourevitch, P. (1998). We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

²¹ Mamdani, M. (2001). When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda. Princeton University Press.

the country.²² Nigeria's conflict with Boko Haram also receives ethnic characteristics through the longstanding disputes among its Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo people who shape national politics. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ethnic rivalries intensified conflicts since different organized groups fighting on behalf of their ethnic communities have been striving for control of land and resources for multiple decades.²³ In conclusion, Post-colonial societies experience intensified ethnic divisions between civilizations because of ongoing ethnic conflicts that maintain their central position in civilizational struggles. Ethnic cultural diversity has the power to improve societies, but its politicization can trigger ethnic conflicts that cause societies to split. Sustaining peace between different ethnicities requires institutions that welcome all groups equally and the honest distribution of resources alongside dialogue between various cultures as methods to stop minority conflicts from reaching the level of civic unrest.

7. COLONIALISM AND CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICT

The colonial rule established itself as the main force behind civilizational conflict in Global Southern lands after European imperial powers placed fake national borders while breaking indigenous leadership systems and extracting economic wealth. Colonial legacy drives present conflicts within numerous post-colonial states because these nations continue to confront challenges with developing national identities and economic self-sufficiency together with political instability problems.²⁴

The British partition of India in 1947 became responsible for continuous civilizational disputes between Hindus and Muslims, which ultimately produced India and Pakistan as sovereign states. Mass violence, large displacements, and ongoing territorial conflicts in Kashmir were direct consequences of the partition between Hindus and Muslims. The division created by British colonialism continues to affect Indo-Pakistani relations, making these relations influence broader geopolitical tensions between South Asian and Western countries.²⁵ Colonial authorities throughout Africa, such as Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal, carried out policies that exacerbated ethnic and religious discord through their practice of picking preferred groups for control purposes. The colonial practice of dividing populations for control triggered explosive ethnic warfare, which flared up following independence. The colonial administration of Nigeria favored Hausa-Fulani residents in the northern region over south-based Igbo and Yoruba populations, which ultimately created conditions for the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970.²⁶ The French colonial administration in Algeria generated profound anger among native Algerians up to the point where they launched the Algerian War of Independence, which lasted from 1954 to 1962. A severe struggle surrounded Algeria as it developed its national identity and strengthened enduring conflicts between Western and Islamic societies.²⁷

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, European authorities enforced the demarcation of arbitrary borders, which became a heavy burden for the entire Middle Eastern region. The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) implemented British and French control over the region by dividing it despite ethnic, tribal, and sectarian identities within the area. The unified territories remained unstable because of this, resulting in enduring issues that include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in addition to sectarian war in Iraq as well as expanded tensions between Arab and Western civilizations.²⁸ Modern-day political unrest throughout the Middle East stems from past colonial decisions that continue causing self-determination battles and anti-Western resistance movements.²⁹

The impact of Spanish and Portuguese colonization in Latin America resulted in the demise of native civilizations along with permanent European social-economic caste structures. Continuing racial disparities alongside class differences resulting from the native population and African slave exploitation contribute to present-day political instability and social unrest across the region.³⁰

Colonialism has left serious scars throughout the Global South countries, which continue to create identification conflicts among communities today. Local conflicts will not be resolved until governments accept past atrocities and establish economic autonomy and non-discriminatory systems that discard European colonial principles. Post-colonial societies must recover their historical accounts to build identities that unify people rather than separate them after facing colonial influence on civilizational paradigms.

²² Deng, F. M. (1995). *War of visions: Conflict of identities in the Sudan*. Brookings Institution Press.

²³ Campbell, J. (2018). *Boko Haram: America's war on terror in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

²⁴ Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press.

²⁵ Mishra, P. (2012). *From the ruins of empire: The revolt against the West and the remaking of Asia*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

²⁶ Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

²⁷ Meredith, M. (2011). *The fate of Africa: A history of fifty years of independence*. PublicAffairs.

²⁸ Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

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³⁰ Galeano, E. (1973). *Open veins of Latin America: Five centuries of the pillage of a continent*. Monthly Review Press.

8. CONCLUSION

The analysis in this chapter highlights how language, identity, ethnicity, religion, and colonial legacies serve as key fault lines in civilizational conflicts. These factors not only shape collective consciousness but also define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within societies. Language reinforces cultural and national identities, often acting as a unifying force within a civilization while simultaneously marking distinctions from others. Ethnic and religious identities, deeply embedded in historical narratives, frequently become mobilization tools for political movements, further deepening divisions.

Across various historical and contemporary conflicts, including the partition of India, the Rwandan genocide, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, and the ethnic tensions in Nigeria, it becomes evident that civilizational conflicts are rarely driven by a single factor. Instead, they emerge at the intersection of historical grievances, cultural contestations, and geopolitical power struggles. Religion has played a dual role—both as a source of unity and a tool for exclusion, often manipulated to justify conflicts. Similarly, the enduring legacies of colonialism, from artificial borders to imposed political systems, have exacerbated identity-based tensions, particularly in the Global South. As Edward Said observed, *“Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental.”*³¹ This highlights how colonialism has shaped rigid civilizational identities, reinforcing exclusionary and often conflict-ridden narratives.

The cases explored in this chapter demonstrate that civilizational conflicts are rarely about a single factor; rather, they emerge at the intersection of historical grievances, cultural contestations, and geopolitical power struggles. Understanding these underlying forces is crucial for shaping conflict resolution strategies beyond mere political agreements and addressing deeper cultural and identity-based divisions. As the next chapter explores postmodern and postcolonial critiques, it will further deconstruct the essentialist notions of civilization and offer alternative perspectives on global interactions and power dynamics.

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