

## **What Impact Globalization has on Cultural Diversity?**

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Multicultural nature of our society has been ignored. Most countries have been failing to recognize the enriching value of diverse cultures. South Africa, for example, is culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse. It is tempting to deny this diversity consciously or unconsciously. Cultural diversity is now a fact of life in today's *'global village'*. Many people have been experiencing the negative effects of the globalization process. Towards the end of the last closed century, there have been some protest movements against globalization on new world economic, political, cultural, technological, religious order, and the way the pros and cons of a new global world have been assessed. However, this paper will focus on the cultural dimension, giving special attention to the impact of globalization on cultural diversity. Firstly, I want to present a concept of culture which I think, is appropriate to most cultures: the concept of multiculturalism. I believe the concept of multiculturalism to be the most adequate concept of culture today. Secondly, I will explain why cultures are different but ought to be considered equal. Thirdly, I will go on discuss the influence that globalization has on multiculturalism. In conclusion, I will discuss some important practical features showing why there is no one who can afford to ignore the issue of multiculturalism. Because modern societies are multicultural in themselves encompassing a multitude of varying ways of life and lifestyles.

## **The Nature of Culture**

A large part of the study of culture involves discovering how and what definitions are made, under what circumstances, and for what reasons. These definitions are used, changed and sometimes fall into disuse. The idea of culture is not different in this respect from other human ideas. In fact, there are a number of competing words that have meanings similar to culture in some contexts. The list might include among others: ethnicity, socio-cultural group, nation, the way of life, tradition, civilisation, race, colour, customs, etc. For contemporary anthropology some of these terms have useful and well-defined meanings, and others are part of the history of the discipline and have no legitimate usage today. In fact, there is not much point in trying to say what culture is. What can be done, nevertheless, is to say what culture does, and how does culture do it.

However, according to Coertze (1973: 61), there are as many cultures as there are people<sup>1</sup>. Cultures are deployed differently, and it takes different meanings in other histories and in other places. For example, South Africa is multicultural, and the constitution reflects this. Virtually everywhere, from all sides, in law, politics, in the press and from the public channels of communication, we know that South Africa is composed of many cultures, and that those cultures are the product and properties of different people. But this notion distorts the nature of culture. This notion need to be corrected in order to understand what culture is and what it does. However, in a broad sense, some characteristics are developed within different cultures. For example, in the 1950s, the South African Freedom Charter stated firmly that different people of South Africa will be free to develop their own cultures. One thing that culture did during apartheid era was creating the boundaries of class, ethnicity, race, gender, generation, territory within which we all live.

As it is used in the modern world the idea of culture acquired the main features of its meaning in the nineteenth century. We all live our lives in terms of the definitions, names, and categories that culture creates. The intellectual history of the era in which ideas about culture developed was from around the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively. According to Thornton (1988:22), there are a number of things which culture includes, such as knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, etc. The definition of culture that is acquired by humans is a significant intellectual achievement. According to this view, however, civilization is as a result of a rational thought that leads to the general improvement of life. It is not something that people are born with, but something they gain through normal social interaction. Today, culture is best thought of as a resource. Like other resources, such as energy, food, air, etc. it cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals. All groups and individuals must have an access to, at least, some of these resources for survival purposes. Similarly, culture is some kind of the information that human beings are not born with but they need in order to interact with each other in social life. It must be learned during the long process of education, socialisation, maturing and growing old.

Like other kinds of resources, however, culture can be, and is, controlled by the environment, which places limits on what can and cannot be done. But the physical environment can never determine the content of culture. It is people who create cultural resources and control access to them. This is, for its time, a genuine anthropological concept of culture. The most important effect is that all humans possess it, and that it is precisely this that make them human beings. But the history of the word 'culture' continues to suggest to many people that culture belongs to nations, and that it consists primarily of positive attainments and achievements. Although culture is an essential resource, this does not mean that all people have access to all of

cultural, or even access to all of the cultural resources that they need or desire. There are limits to cultural knowledge and resources, as much as the nature of those resources is concerned. For instance, there are differences in the way people behave, think and live. This reflects their differing access to cultural resources, as well as their use of these resources to make statements to each other about themselves. This means that culture functions to maintain society (or nation), and that culture is historical and changes over time, often in relation to (or determined by) changes in society (or economy). We find similar views world-wide.

In the form of myths, political, religious, ideological, historical and traditional, culture is held to have a social function, the theory requires that each culture exists as a whole within a society. South Africa is no exception in this regard, it has people developing their own different cultures, although the texture of cultural diversity and especially the way in which it has been politicized in the colonial past and in the apartheid era makes South African situation different. During apartheid regime, for instance, people were classified according to their race, colour, each nation with a distinct language, producing and maintaining its own culture. It could perhaps be argued that this was part of the mainly constructed legacy of apartheid, having been a totalitarian system that specifically reinforced and politicised the existing ethnic diversity of the population and blatantly catered for the values, norms and interests of specific socio-cultural and ethnic groupings at the expense of others.

As in the case of all words, the meanings of words such as culture and ethnicity, and others, are always as a result of their use within a specific context. With regard to culture various meanings of importance for the purpose of this discussion can be stipulated from the following scholars: Degenaar (1994:3-5); Van Peursen (1970:7-22); Lemaire (1976:374-8)<sup>2</sup>. According to all of them culture refers to: firstly, the ways, means, and results of the human interaction with

and material transformation of the nature towards an environment suitable to human existence, and to the total strategy of human orientation within that environment.

Secondly, culture also refers to the common form of life of a national community which have achieved a common national identity and homogeneous value system and lifestyle, either by the forging of a common identity through processes of industrialization and modernization.

This definition could thirdly be extended further to include a broader international form of life, or even societal and political arrangement in terms of which various national and ethnic cultures are accommodated and towards which they contribute. In this sense one can speak of Western culture (or nowadays with the unification of Europe of European culture). Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures, but go beyond these, and are found in the same way in other cultures.

Fourthly, in the case of an intertwining of culture and ethnicity, culture could also refer to the form of life and concomitant history, language, values, symbols, customs, and practices of a specific ethnic community. Regarding ethnic community the most important feature of its meaning can be stipulated as a form of life of a community with a common descent, history, and language which is experienced and valued by its members in such a way that it provides them with a common sense of identity on the basis of which they distinguish themselves as a community from other communities, maintain cohesion and regulate relationships between members<sup>2</sup>.

In a nutshell, culture can be defined, as it has been defined before in various ways according to the intended purposes. Tiedt & Tiedt (1989:3), describes the broad concept of culture as a complex, integrated system of beliefs and behavior that may be both rational and

non-rational. For the purpose of this article, the most general definition of culture as the human way of existence, expressed in the various forms of life of specific communities, can now, at least, to a certain extent be understood as the structuring of this fundamental human need for recognition of multiculturalism. Obviously, culture in itself is a declaration of what it is to be a human being. An attempt to define and understand culture is part of culture, to have an effect on it, and ultimately to change the very nature of the object itself. This is part of what culture does. In fact, defining words, ideas of other people is an important part of what culture does. To define something means to specify a meaning which is clear enough to distinguish it from others that look alike. If different, cultural differences are themselves created by cultural processes that span and encompass these very differences. The significance of recognition of culture is a fundamental, essential and universal human need which is at the core of a very old tradition of philosophical reflection and has further been enhanced by numerous interpretations of mythology. An understanding of culture is not simply knowledge of differences, but rather an understanding of how and why differences in language, race, thought, use of materials and behaviours have come about. There are certainly cultural differences, just as there are differences in tastes, climates, personalities or the various batches of the same colour of paint, and these differences have history, function and meaning.

### **The Recognition of Cultural Differences**

Obviously, there is a demand for the recognition of cultural differences which is central to a number of debates associated with multiculturalism. People belong to many different cultures and the cultural differences are as likely to be within states (i.e. between regions, classes, ethnic groups, the urban and rural) as well as between states (King, 1990:409). Cultural diversity tends now to be as great within nations (Hannerz, 1992: 231). It is natural that in the

contemporary world many local settings are increasingly characterized by cultural diversity, and one may in the end ask whether it is now even possible to become a cosmopolitan without going away at all. According to van der Merwe (1999:313), the prerequisites for the claims towards recognition of cultural differences is further explored by distinguishing between two justifiable claims: on the one hand *the claim that the right to differ should be recognized* and on the other hand, *the claim that the inherent value of the difference should be recognized*. It is argued that the possibilities of granting recognition are, in most cases, restricted to the claim that the right to differ should be recognized. There is a specific common claim to various forms of cultural relativism, a claim which is tacitly or explicitly equated to the claim for recognition of cultural difference, namely, the claim formulated by Holzapfel (1997:13), in a recent definition of the ideology of '**multiculturalism**', that all cultures, values and practices are equal. Likewise, Charles Taylor (1994:64-6), argues that the demand that we all recognise the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth. The demand is based on a premise that we owe equal respect to all cultures. The presumption seems to be of equal worth. According to Gellner (1992:49,57), Charles Taylor (1994), and van der Merwe (1999:328), the truth is that all cultures are equal, and no single one of them has the right to judge and interpret the others in its own terms. This view thus concerns the specific claim that the equality of cultures must be recognised<sup>3</sup>. Even when there are conflicts of cultures, there are no right answers in a conflict of cultures because people look at the world in different ways. For example, consider a belief that 'abortion' or 'euthanasia' are wrong. You are taught this as if it is an objective standard, but it is not, it is just what your society holds. When you say 'abortion' or 'euthanasia' are wrong, this just means that your society disapproves of them. For other societies, based on their belief, abortion might be all right. Abortion might be wrong in one

society but right in another, just like with euthanasia. There is no sense in asking which side is correct. Their views are true relative to their culture, and your view is true relative to your culture. There are no objective truths about right or wrong. When a person claim otherwise, he or she is just imposing his or her culturally taught attitude as objective truth. Unless otherwise specified, the society in question is that of the person or a group making the judgement. When I say abortion is wrong, I mean according to the moral or ethical standards of my society. But how can we know what is good or bad absolutely. How can we argue about this without just presupposing moral and ethical standards of our own society?

Judging from this question, there is a little doubt that the emergence of cultural studies in the field of philosophy and other disciplines provides a corrective method to much that has previously been written and morally and ethically disapproved. Philosophically, there is one person who provides the greatest help for a trans-cultural concept of culture, however, is Wittgenstein<sup>4</sup>. According to Wittgenstein, culture is at hand whenever practices in life are shared. In his sense, culture, by its very structure, is open to new connections and to further feats of integration. To this extent, a cultural concept reformulated along Wittgenstein's lines seems to me to be particularly apt to today's conditions.

Following from Wittgenstein's point of view, it looks like anthropology failed to see that culture is deployed differently and that it takes on different people, different meanings, in other histories and in other societies and other places. The emergence of cultural studies and the significance of recognition of culture is the best sort of philosophical enquiry, offering not a conclusion to the problem and perspectives of multiculturalism, but a pointer as to where to go from here. As a philosopher Gensler (1998:11) argues, cultural relativism is about picking out your moral principles by following what your society approves of. For instance, the norms that



you are taught are the norms of your own society, other societies have different beliefs and backgrounds, so too they create different norms and different codes<sup>5</sup>. Even before we are free to make choices and create norms and codes, according to our own beliefs, customs, etc, conditioned by time, history, places and circumstances within our choices, we already find ourselves participating in the play of recognition of the cultural differences and recognition of equality of cultures.

The purpose of this article, the most general definition of culture as the human way of existence, expressed in the various forms of life of specific communities, can now, at least, to a certain extent be understood as the structuring of this fundamental human need for a recognition of both cultural differences and equality of cultures. I cannot avoid adopting an attitude of making a judgement that cultures are different but equal. I suggest that we must respect the moral choices made by different people in the light of their different cultural, ethnical and religious backgrounds. In multicultural societies this entails that the demand that equal respect must be paid to existing cultures or the equality of cultures must be recognised. Culture in all its forms can thus be regarded as the space in which the play of recognition is regulated institutionally and is played out individually and socially. Culture is the sum total of the original solution that a group of human beings invent to adapt to their natural and social environment. And yet, according to Elvin Hatch (1985:178) and Myburg (1981:31), culture is a common way of life of people or a group of humans that they produce, possess, share and maintain<sup>6</sup>.

The point that I wish to develop in this regard is that the need for a recognition of different cultures, whether universal and fundamentally human, results from the global expansion and universal acceptance of the cultural conditions of modernity. According to Grossberg, Christo van Staden, and other scholars, contemporary notions of culture have to begin

by assenting to the fact that we are all coerced into globality in the contemporary world<sup>7</sup>. Understandably, no one can afford to ignore the issue of multiculturalism and the influence that globalization has on it. In multiculturalism, thus where the people with their cultures intermix. Intermix like the waters from sources, streams, and rivers, so they run together to a great, living torrent.

### **What influence Globalization has on Multiculturalism?**

Let me now turn to a crucial point of this article, today, the most intense debate in philosophy, economics, politics, socio-cultural studies, etc. is about morality and ethics. However, another issue, the issue of globalization, may also prove to be of greater consequence in the long run. We now live in a world in which markets, media, law, corporations, labour, scientific research and advocacy groups are international, multinational, and multicultural. Many people are suspicious of this new world order, fearing that it is being built on the triumphs of one or another people or culture or class. Certainly the process of globalization disrupts fragile societies and disrupts traditional identities. On the other hand, globalization does not necessarily mean homogeneity. Indeed, in some respects globalization fosters and allows for differences. A trivial example almost every town of any size in the world now offers residents the choice of food such as French, Italian, Thai, Indian, Mexican, Chinese Arabic, etc. We have multiculturalism not only in cuisine, but in areas of media, education, finance, computer manufacturing, corporate management-and in religion. In the face of so many forms of diversity living in close proximity, one must wonder if there are moral or ethical social commonalities to hold us together-and thereby allow and support diversity. Roland Robertson points out that even a number of the world's tribal peoples have joined an intercontinental association that shares information by

technology. The conception of multiculturalism seeks ways in which such cultures could nevertheless get on with understanding and recognise one another.

It is, indeed, as good a moment as any to ask where the impact of globalization on cultural diversity thinking may be heading. Spurred by modernization, global politics are being reconfigured along cultural lines. The new paradigm of globalization model will continue to exist. But for it to succeed it must gain a new dimension, a worldwide agreement to install controls, checks and inspections while permitting the free flow of trade. All nations ought to adopt a system with good information and global cooperation in order to ensure security that will be able to prevent a global economic slowdown, and be able to defeat terrorism. As long as we live in an open, accessible, interconnected world and as long as there are evil men and women, we will face the spectre of international terrorism. Even if there is such a date as *11, September 2001* that will never fade (World Trade Centre terror attack), even if terrorist groups continuously disrupt the whole world, even if some of the state sponsors are punished, we will live with the knowledge that terrible things do happen and are likely to occur again and again. Free trade, the technological revolution, the information superhighway, all these wondrous aspects of the open world economy make it easier than ever before to penetrate and disrupt globalization process. As we have recently painfully discovered, one explosion strategically planned and caused massive harm. Since these disruptions that we seem to have experienced are looking at the world using a new paradigm. Politics will always be there as long as there is interaction of humans, culture will also be there, ideology is necessary also, and above all, government will always be there to govern the people. After a decade of the dominance of business, economics and entertainment, government is there because it is needed to fulfil its fundamental role, the provision of security for its citizens. Politicians appeal to others for help or

for protection and identify with greater cultural communities that transcend nation state boundaries. For example, in the whole world, some countries that have been dependent on Western support are now looking increasingly to other countries for preferable unconditional or conditional aid. As Held David (1999:483) puts it, **Globalization** is a process or set of processes which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and power<sup>8</sup>. People and countries with similar cultures have been coming together and yet people with different cultures have been and still are coming apart. Political boundaries are increasingly redrawn to coincide with cultural boundaries, that is, ethnic, religious, and civilizational. Countries non-aligned, as many were and still are, but some did and still do change their alignments from one side to another and the leaders are making choices in terms of their perceptions of their security interests, their calculations of the balance of power, and their ideological preferences. In this new world of globalization, however, cultural identity is the central factor shaping a country's association and antagonism. The question, 'Which side are you on?' has been replaced by the much more fundamental one, 'Who are you?' Every state has to have an answer. An answer would be aligned with a cultural identity and defining the state's place in world politics, its friends, and its enemies.

For instance, during the mid-1990s there have been countries where questions of national identity have been actively debated including, among others, South Africa. In coping with identity crisis, what would count for people is blood, belief, faith and family. People rally to those with similar ancestry, religion, language, values, and institutions and distance themselves from those with different ones. For example, the 1990s have seen the eruption of a global identity crisis. Almost everywhere a person from a group, looking and asking, 'Who are we?',

‘Where do we belong?’, and ‘Who is not a member of us?’ For example, Europe, Austria, Finland and Sweden (culturally part of the West), have been divorced from the West and were neutral during the Cold War. They have been now able to join their cultural kin in the European Union. In a very fluid world, people are seeking identity and security. People are looking for roots and connections to defend themselves against the unknown. During this era countries, throughout the world began developing new affiliations. They have been looking for groupings with countries of similar culture and the same civilization<sup>9</sup>.

Civilization has been the broadest cultural entity, hence conflicts between groups from different civilization become central to global politics. In today’s world improvement in transportation and in communication have produced more frequent, more intense, more symmetrical, and more inclusive interaction among people of different civilizations. As a result their civilizational identity has become increasingly salient. All things considered, globalization has not ended conflicts but has rather given rise to new identities rooted in culture. This means that the 1990s has produced a paradigm of globalization through which to view the whole world.

As a new buzzword that emerged in the 1990’s globalization holds that capitalism, trade and technological revolutions are transforming the world and breaking down old obstacles and mind-sets. Global capitalism or globalization is now the only game in town, and countries are playing by its rules. Politics have to accommodate itself to these new realities. For example, American and European publics have been seeing globalization quite similarly. For instance, the U.S. State Department poll of Europeans in the fall of 2000, 65 percent of the British respondents, 73 percent of the Germans, 57 percent of the French, and 62 percent of the Austrians judged globalization to be primarily positive<sup>6</sup>. Polls also gainsay the notion that Americans are on a mission to spread their culture through globalization, while Europeans are fending the Americans

off to protect their own culture. In fact, Americans and Europeans differ little in their view of the U.S. popular culture. Like their neighbours across the Atlantic, Americans tend not to see their culture as a serious threat to other cultures. Not that Americans are wildly enthusiastic about their own culture. Just 60 percent of Americans, roughly the European-share rated it favourably, while 39 percent rated it unfavourably. Nor are Americans overjoyed to see their popular culture spread around the world. Asked how they feel "When people see or hear about McDonalds opening up in cities around the world or when they hear about the popularity of U.S. TV shows in other countries," only 43 percent said they have positive feelings; 43 percent said they have mixed feelings, 5 percent negative feelings. Attempts to understand the attitudes of the publics on both sides of the Atlantic are complicated by the strident voices of vocal groups who are suffering the negative consequences of globalization

Nonetheless, the American and European publics seem to agree that globalization is more positive than negative. At the same time, most of countries are uneasy about the impact of globalization. Most desire to keep some trade barriers for now, at least long enough to help them adapt to the changes that globalization entails. For example, the most important development in global inequality in recent decades has been the growing divergence within the developing world, and it is directly related to whether countries take advantage of the economic benefits that globalization can offer. To cite one example, if international trade and investment primarily benefit the rich, many people will feel that restricting trade to protect jobs, culture, or the environment is worth the costs. But if restricting trade imposes further hardship on poor people in the developing world, many of the same people will think otherwise. These findings have important implications for developing countries, for rich countries such as the United States, and for those who care about global poverty. All parties should recognize that the most recent wave

of globalization has been a powerful force for equality and poverty reduction, and they should commit themselves to seeing that it continues despite any unknown obstacles lying ahead. It is not inevitable that globalization will proceed. For instance, in 1910, many people believed that capitalism was unstoppable, they soon received a rude shock when it stopped. History is not likely to repeat itself in the same way, but it is worth noting that antiglobalization sentiments are on the rise. A growing number of political leaders in the developing world realized that an open trading system would be very much in their countries' interest. We are now convinced that globalization is good and it is good when a person does his or her homework. Developed and developing countries are keeping their fundamentals in line on the economy, building up high levels of education, and respect the rule of the law.

When people have to do their part, we are convinced that they get the benefit that they deserve. If globalization proceeds, its potential to be an equalizing force depends on whether poor countries manage to integrate themselves into the global economic system. True integration requires not just trade liberalization but wide-ranging institutional reform. Through their trade policies, rich countries can make it easier for those developing countries which choose to open up and join the global trading club. But in recent years, the rich countries have been doing just the opposite. But, appropriate reforms are necessary and they are starting to grow rapidly and take their natural place in the world. But the same cannot be said for other countries, such as underdeveloped countries, from the African continent (Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zambia, Mali, Chad, or other countries or regions cursed with poor geography). Such countries are distance from markets, inherently have high transport costs, and challenging health and agricultural problems. It would be naive to think that trade and investment alone can alleviate poverty in all locations. In fact, for those locations with poor geography, trade liberalization is

less important than developing proper health care systems or providing basic infrastructure and transformation.

## **Conclusion**

With regard to the concept of culture, multiculturalism or cultural diversity I have set out that culture is the whole way of life of people, from birth to the grave, from morning to night, and even during sleep, has today become an obviously inevitable. Judging from the way the texture of cultural diversity is recognized and especially the way globalization influences culture, without doubt culture is and will always be different but equal. Every culture is valuable and worthy of noninterference. In this sense this paper has elaborated on the relocation of cultural studies with increasing attention being paid to the globalization of culture and critical practices concerning cultures. Modern societies are multicultural in themselves, encompassing a multitude of varying ways of life and lifestyles of people. Today most people's identities, not just Western intellectuals are shaped by more than a single culture. Not only societies, but people are multicultural. The concept of globalization on the other hand, assumes that cultures are becoming the same as the world. Globalization is a concept of uniformization, preferable following the Western model. Globalization in this article seems to promote not separation, but exchange and interaction of different cultures.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> As for Coertze, (1973:61); Myburgh, A.C. (1981:31); Hatch, E. (1985:178); and Stoffberg (1982:1), see Thornton, R. 1988. *Culture: A Contemporary Definition*. In: Boonzaier, E. & Sharp, J. (eds.). *South African Keywords*. David Philip: Cape Town, pp. 17-28.

<sup>2</sup> Van der Merwe mentions these scholars in his article on: 'Facing the challenges of diversity: a reflection on the role of philosophy in South Africa', see *S. Afr. J. Philos*, November 1994, 13 (4), pp. 190-198.

<sup>2</sup> The general awareness in the world today of the importance of cultural differences and the problems surrounding the recognition thereof, is reflected in philosophy (See *S. Afr. J. Philos*.1999, 18(3), pp. 313-330).

<sup>3</sup> According to van der Merwe, the recognition of the equality of cultures is a justified claim in a multicultural society. See his article on: "Cultural Relativism and the Recognition of Cultural Differences", (*S. Afr. J. Philos*. 1999, 18 (3), p. 318).

<sup>4</sup> According to Wittgenstein, understanding may be helpful, but it never is sufficient alone, it has to enhance progress in interaction (Featherstone and Lash (1999:202), *Spaces of Culture*, SAGE: London).

<sup>5</sup> Gensler Harry, J. (1998:11), is of the belief that our moral principles describe social conventions and are based on the norms of our society.

<sup>6</sup> According to Thornton (1988:17), we find similar views worldwide, quoting from Coertze (1973:61); Myburg (1981:31; and Elvin Hatch (1985) who defines culture as the way of life of all people.

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<sup>7</sup> On this point that Grossberg, and Christo van Staden agree upon, see an article on: “Cultural Studies and Literary Theory: Issues of Textuality and Communication, published in the *Acta Academica*, December 1997, Vol. 29, Number 3, December 1997, p19.

<sup>8</sup> See *Global Governance Journal*, Oct-Nov 1999, Vol. 5, Issue 4, p. 483.

<sup>9</sup> See Huntington, S. P. (1997), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster Ltd.: London.