



Non-Revolutionary Violence: Culture Talk and the ‘Clash of Civilization’

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I. Introduction

Over the past fifty years of independence in Africa and in the Middle East, no event has captured the minds and imaginations of activists, scholars, policymakers, and challenged the conscience of the global community like violence and its related outcomes, including poverty. The 20th century was a period in human history replete with violence on a never-before seen scale. Violence continue to dominate coverage on political events unfolding in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. A survey of events on the African continent likewise shows political upheavals, civil wars, and revolutionary movements competing for state power in South Sudan, Sudan, Nigeria, Central Africa Republic, Cameroun, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Egypt, Libya. Alongside inter-state violence, one increasingly find intra-state violence that takes the form of civil war, and trans-regional conflicts where multiple actors including state, regional, international and non-state actors are all major stakeholders competing for power. With inter-state conflict greatly reduced, intra-state conflict, trans-regional conflicts, and conflict that pits non-state actors against state actors are on the rise in both Africa and the Middle East. In this article I analyze the “Culture Talk”¹ or the “culturalist approach”² framework as a way of making sense of non-revolutionary and non-traditional violence and its implications.

¹ Mahmood Mamdani, "Whither Political Islam?," *Foreign Affairs*. 84, no. 1 Jan/Feb2005 (2005).

² Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam : The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: New York : Columbia University Press, 2004), 10–12.

In this article I attempt to think through existing debates on violence, focusing on postcolonial violence. In the first section I discuss the mainstream approach to making sense of violence by relying on culture as a marker and tool for determining one's politics. This is an intellectual approach that argues that culture is the most reliable clue to people's politics and therefore interprets political violence as a product of a people's culture. In the second section, I analyze violence and discuss the main proponents of culturalist approach to the study of violence: Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis and their contribution to Cultural Talk. In the third section, I analyze the application of Culture Talk to postcolonial violence.

Since the end of World War II and continuing through the subsequent end of the Cold War there has been a dramatic drop in inter-state violence or conflict between countries. At the same time there has been a rise in intra-state violence³ and asymmetrical forms of waging war⁴ by non-state actors.⁵ A report by The Rand Corporation noted that "overall levels of conflict have been declining in the past two decades, notwithstanding the increases in certain types of conflict since 2012."⁶ The major shift has been from wars fought between states (inter-state conflict) to various forms of intrastate violence (revolutionary and non-revolutionary). However, the nature, intensity, and frequency of conflict have changed since the end of the Cold War with recent increase in civil wars in Africa since 2005.⁷ A new type of literature along with various econometrics⁸ for measuring peace has emerged that discuss the so-called fragility of the state,⁹ state failure,¹⁰ or nation failure.¹¹

³ World Bank, "World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development," (Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank., 2011); Thomas S. Szayna et al., "Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections," (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation. Accessible from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1063.html, 2017).

⁴ Sebastian Kaempf, *Saving Soldiers or Civilians?: Casualty-Aversion Versus Civilian Protection in Asymmetric Conflicts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵ Sukanya Podder, "Non-State Armed Groups and Stability: Reconsidering Legitimacy and Inclusion," *Contemporary Security Policy* 34, no. 1 (2013); Samir Puri, "The Strategic Art of Confronting Armed Groups," *Adelphi Series* 55, no. 459 (2015).

⁶ Szayna et al., xv.

⁷ Ida Rudolfson, "Non-State Conflicts: Trends from 1989 to 2018," *Conflict Trends* 2, no. Oslo: PRIO (2019): 4.

⁸ The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), "Global Peace Index 2018," (Sydney, New York and Mexico City: The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 2019).

⁹ Sonja Grimm, Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, and Olivier Nay, "'Fragile States': Introducing a Political Concept," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2014); Isabel Rocha De Siqueira, "Measuring and Managing 'State Fragility': The Production of Statistics by the World Bank, Timor-Leste and the G7+," *ibid.*

II. Non-Revolutionary Violence: State and Non-State Actors

According to researchers at The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2017 and 2018 saw the highest number of active non-state conflicts¹² and the highest number of civil conflicts since 1946.¹³ Since the end of the Cold War, most non-state conflicts have been concentrated in Africa but with increases observable in the Middle East, Asia, and Americas.¹⁴ The Americas have experienced the highest percentage of formally organized conflict groups with 94 percent (127 of 135) with concentration in Colombia,¹⁵ Mexico (90 of 135 conflicts), and Canada (e.g. Rock Machine and Hells Angels).¹⁶ The trends are observable in the Middle East and in Asia. Global trends in armed conflicts was slightly higher in 2018 than 2017 and much higher than a decade ago.¹⁷ However, conflict fatalities was below average for the post-Cold War period.

The African continent saw “an increase in civil wars¹⁸ from 18 in 2017 to 21,” the “highest number of civil conflicts since 1946 – with 21 also recorded in 2015 and 2016.”¹⁹ In Asia most of the conflict where concentrated in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, accounting for 70 percent of all non-state violence.

¹⁰J. J. Messner et al., *Failed States Index 2014: The Book* (Washington, D.C.: The Fund for Peace, 2014).

¹¹ Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail : The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2013); Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion : Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹² Rudolfsen. Uppsala Conflict Data Program deems an active conflict, both state-based and non-state, when there are at least 25 battle-related deaths. See The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), "Definitions," Uppsala University: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, [https://pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/..](https://pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/)

¹³ Siri Aas Rustad and Ingrid Vik Bakken, "Conflict Trends in Africa, 1989–2018," *Conflict Trends* 6, no. Oslo: PRIO (2019).

¹⁴ Rudolfsen; Rustad and Vik Bakken. Most of these conflicts were concentrated in six countries: The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. See Rudolfsen. for more on conflict trends involving non-state actors.

¹⁵ In Colombia conflict were driven by confrontation between Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia or The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and The United Self-Defenders of Colombia

¹⁶ Rudolfsen, 3.

¹⁷ Håvard Strand et al., "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2018," *Conflict Trends* 3, no. Oslo: PRIO (2019).

¹⁸ A war is considered a state-based conflict with at least 1000 battle-related deaths in a calendar year The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).

¹⁹ Rudolfsen, 4.

In the Middle East there was an increase in the number of non-state conflicts since 2010 from 2 in 2012 to 19 in 2014 and 10 in 2018.²⁰ These are armed conflicts between organized groups, “neither of which is the government of a state, resulting in at least 25 annual battle-related deaths.”²¹ At the same time there was a substantial increase in casualties resulting from non-state conflicts since 2004 and was mainly driven by the conflict in Syria.²² Around the world, internationalized conflicts, or civil wars where external parties are involved e.g. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Democratic Republic of the Congo- accounted for most fatalities.

Various schools of thought have attempted to understand what gives rise to certain kinds of violence. Some argue that violence has to do with a clash of civilizations, of cultures.²³ According to this view, differences between civilizations lead to major conflicts on a global scale. While political scientists like Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis argue that a driver of violence is a clash of civilizations,²⁴ some economists are busy arguing that the root cause of violence exemplified by civil wars is economic.²⁵ With the end of the Cold War there has been a tendency to frame the problem of violence in the non-western world through using culture as a determining and causal factor. In this process - whether in the media and academic institutions or policymaking establishment - religious and cultural experiences have been turned into a political category.

²⁰ The conflicts in the middle east were driven mainly by violence in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon.

²¹ Rudolfsen, 2.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1997); Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic* 266, no. 3 (1990).

²⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993); Lewis.

²⁵ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, no. 4 (1998); Paul Collier, *Civil War and the Economics of the Peace Dividend*, Working Paper Series (Centre for the Study of African Economies) ; Wps/95-8. (Oxford, UK: C.S.A.E. Publishing, University of Oxford, 1995).

III. Culture Talk and Non-revolutionary Violence

The binaries created by the conceptual framework of the Clash of Civilizations, "Culture Talk"²⁶ and "culturalist approach"²⁷ hypothesis not only offer a simplistic picture of a complex and messy world, but frame everything in scale from the individual to whole societies as being part of a culture and prisoners of cultural drivers. The outcome is that it invites both bad analysis and poor policy, often leading to violent outcomes especially when it informs state policies. For Mamdani, this tendency in western discourse is the notion that "culture is the most reliable clue to people's politics" and that by studying culture one can derive knowledge about people's politics.²⁸ Olivier Roy refers to a "culturalist approach," the practice of tracing all the problems suffered or caused by Muslims to Islam or culture,²⁹ at the same time as linking Islamism to anti-western sentiments, and Third-World movements.³⁰

In his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (2004), Mamdani notes that the two variants of contemporary Culture Talk date back to the end of the Cold War and both claim to interpret politics from culture, in the present and retrospectively throughout history. For Mamdani, the first variant of Culture Talk was championed by its founding father, Bernard Lewis. The second and cruder version was articulated by Samuel Huntington.

Lewis argues that there is a clash between civilizations. In *The Roots of Muslim Rage* (1990), Lewis writes "there is something in the religious culture of Islam which inspired in even the humblest peasant, a dignity and courtesy towards others that is never exceeded and rarely equaled in other civilizations. And yet, in moments of upheaval and disruption, this dignity and courtesy can give way to an explosive mixture of rage and hatred."³¹ Lewis views Islamic civilization as stagnant, frozen in time and history. As Mamdani notes, "Lewis writes of Islamic civilization as if it were a veneer with its essence an unchanging doctrine in which Muslims are said to take refuge in times of

²⁶ Mamdani.

²⁷ Roy, 10-12.

²⁸ Mamdani.

²⁹ Roy, 10-12.

³⁰ Ibid., 333.

³¹ Lewis.

crisis.”³² Lewis draws a line, allowing one to locate the roots of political violence in Islamic culture and civilization, modern rebellious attitudes, and offering another binary: tradition and modernity, antithetical to each other, leading to “good” and “bad” Muslims, which in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States became a driving force in how the US government relates to the greater Middle East and informed the Global War on Terror (GWOT) from Afghanistan to Iraq, from Syria to Sudan, from Egypt and Somalia.³³

Whereas Lewis restricted his analysis to two civilizations – “Islamic” and “Judeo-Christian” – Huntington expanded the original thesis to cover the entire world by focusing on perceived conflicts in the future between various civilizations.³⁴ After 9/11, there was a drive to make sense of the violence, the actors, the motivation(s) of its perpetrators, and the source(s) of inspiration behind the violent acts. Culturalism and Culture Talk as a way of framing the problem of terrorism was revived. To build his argument Huntington traces history from the Peace of Westphalia, arguing that conflicts were once driven by princes, monarchs, and emperors, then by states (in the 19th and 20th centuries), and then by ideologies (the Cold War). Huntington’s main thesis, first articulated in 1993, was straightforward:

The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.³⁵

The post-Cold-War era’s conflicts would thus be between countries, cultures, and groups of countries/regions, which he sees are forming a homogeneous “civilization.”

³² Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim : America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York, NY: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 22.

³³ Ibid.; Christopher Zambakari and Richard Rivera, "Somalia in the Age of the War on Terror: An Analysis of Violent Events and International Intervention between 2007 and 2017," *Georgetown Public Policy Review* 24, no. 1, Spring Edition (2019); Alex Bellamy et al., "Security and the War on Terror," (London, New York: Routledge, 2010); Library of Congress and Congressional Research Service, *Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11* (Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service & Library of Congress, 2007).

³⁴ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim : America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*.

³⁵ Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," 22.

Huntington never really theorized about culture or civilization but instead borrows uncritically from colonial historiography as articulated by its main proponent, Sir Henry Maine. Maine's theorization and distinction between the west and non-west, native-settler dichotomy, and progressive-regressive societies),³⁶ led to a racialized view of history that reduced major historical development to the west and excluded all other regions of the world. From this vantage point, Huntington has no problem claiming that democracy is a western export and was exported to non-western societies through conquest and colonization.³⁷

The issue of culture is particularly important for Huntington as he notes that "differences in culture and religion create differences of policy issues, ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and commerce to the environment."³⁸ He conceptualizes culture as being static and frozen in time. If what divides civilization is cultural differences, then culture is taken to be immutable and not shaped by historical forces. Huntington thereby de-historicizes the construction of culture as political, dynamic, mutable, and a constitutive force.

Huntington's usage of culture from which he derives his civilizations thesis makes use of what Mamdani and Roy call "Culture Talk"³⁹ and the "culturalist approach"⁴⁰, which contends that the politics of a region can be read from a people's culture. The unstated assumption that holds his understanding of civilization is one where culture is seen as a discrete entity that is coherent, organized around sets of beliefs, values, history, and common society without many diversity and variations.⁴¹ This grants Huntington the license to read history and political development from a sensitized conceptualization of culture. As Mamdani put it:

According to some, our culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that all Muslims are just plain bad. According to others, there is a history, a politics, even debates, and there are good Muslims and bad Muslims. In both versions, history seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom of an antique people who inhabit antique lands. Or could it be

³⁶ *Ancient Law: Its Connection to the History of Early Society; Introduction by J.H. Morgan* (London, UK & New York, NY: J.M. Dent & Dutton, 1960).

³⁷ "The Clash of Civilizations?," 41. *ibid* *ibid*.

³⁸ *ibid* *ibid*., 29.

³⁹ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim : America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004). *ibid*.

⁴¹ *Ibid*., 9. *ibid*.

that culture here stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity with rules that are inscribed in early founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artifacts?⁴²

When it comes to Africa, journalists and human right organizations (amongst others) have developed a way of presenting the root causes of conflict in a manner that is suitable to the readership, which is predominantly a western audience. The hallmark of the presentation of African conflicts is the de-politicization, de-contextualization and de-historicization of most African conflicts. Most media coverage and academic reporting omits the complexity of the issues and the politics that drive violence. For journalists and human rights organizations in particular, the coverage of violence is presented in its raw format, fixated on the gory details: the more graphic the brutality, the more it is used to convey complex conflicts devoid of the historical contexts, issues, and politics that drive most conflicts in Africa.⁴³ Scholars have correctly referred to this sort of coverage and analysis as the "pornography of violence."⁴⁴ Mamdani notes that:

Its peculiar characteristic is to write a pornography of violence. As in pornography, the nakedness is of others, not us. The exposure of the other goes alongside the unstated claim that we are not like them. It is a pornography where senseless violence is a feature of other people's cultures: where they are violent, but we are pacific, and where a focus on their debasedness easily turns into another way of celebrating and confirming our exalted status.⁴⁵

The message is clear; violence and the depiction of it speak for itself. There is no history. There is no context. There are no real issues. The psychology of perpetrators suffices in explaining the violence. What then is the real reason behind the proliferation of violence in the postcolonial period in Africa? Is it violence embedded in African cultures or *civilizational* differences between the North and South that accounts for the brutality with which the wars have been waged?

⁴² Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim : America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, 18.

⁴³ Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families : Stories from Rwanda*, 1st ed.. ed. (New York: New York : Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998).

⁴⁴ Jane Kilby, "The Visual Fix: The Seductive Beauty of Images of Violence," *European Journal of Social Theory* 16, no. 3 (2013); Arthur F. Redding, *Raids on Human Consciousness : Writing, Anarchism, and Violence* (Columbia, S.C.: Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, 1998); Alicia C. Decker, "Pedagogies of Pain: Teaching "Women, War, and Militarism in Africa", in *Narrating War and Peace in Africa*, ed. Toyin Falola and Hetty ter Haar (Boydell and Brewer, 2010).

⁴⁵ Symposium Nobel Centennial, *War and Peace in the 20th Century and Beyond: Proceedings of the Nobel Centennial Symposium*, ed. Geir Lundestad and Olav Njolstad (New Jersey, London: World Scientific, 2002), 87.

If the kind of violence taking place after independence from the late mid-1950s onwards is not revolutionary, counter-revolutionary or even anti-colonial, then how does one make sense of this new kind of violence?

III. Making Sense of Post-Colonial Violence

Despite the vast literature that colonialism was devastating and its institutional legacy entrenched in formerly colonized countries,⁴⁶ one still find subtle cases for one form or another of recolonizing former colonies. In light of the recent development around Africa, Bret Stephens, the former Deputy Editor for the Wall Street Journal and now Op-Ed columnist for the New York Times, called for a new kind of colonialism in some countries in Africa because what the West has spent five decades atoning for has failed.⁴⁷ After discussing seemingly inexplicable events in Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire, Bret asks "Haiti, a de facto American colony from 1915 to 1934, has proved unable to pick itself even inches off the ground since last year's devastating earthquake. What, if anything, does it all mean?" In the next line he answers:

It means that we've come full circle. It means that colonialism, for which the West has spent the past five decades in nonstop atonement, was far from the worst thing to befall much of the colonized world. It means, also, that some new version of colonialism may be the best thing that could happen to at least some countries in the postcolonial world.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom, and Social Order : The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 2009); Christopher Zambakari, "South Sudan: Institutional Legacy of Colonialism and the Making of a New State," *Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012); Oyeronke Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995); I. Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (Zed Books, 1987); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, UK: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972).

⁴⁷ Bret Stephens, "Haiti, Sudan, Côte D'ivoire: Who Cares? Perhaps We Need a New Kind of Colonialism.," *The Wall Street Journal Online*, JANUARY 11, 2011 2011.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

What Bret fails to come to terms with was the devastating legacy of colonialism in Africa and in the Caribbean, not to mention the role that western countries played in destroying Haiti. Without engaging with or obviously having consulted the vast literature on the legacies of colonialism on African countries from which Africa has yet to fully recover, Bret prescribes a “new version of colonialism” as a remedy for the ills “to at least some countries in the postcolonial world.”⁴⁹ Instead of contextualizing the violence and its corresponding twin, underdevelopment, on the continent, Bret saw the problem as internal and prescribed the solution to be a new kind of colonialism to be externally imposed. This shows a failure to understand the nature of non-revolutionary violence in Africa.

In 2017, Bruce Gilley, a professor of Political Science at Portland State University, wrote an article that was later published in *Third World Quarterly* titled “*The case for colonialism.*”⁵⁰ Gilley noted that as a general rule, western colonialism [*sic*], “both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate in most of the places where it was found, using realistic measures of those concepts. The countries that embraced their colonial inheritance, by and large, did better than those that spurned it.”⁵¹ After the piece was published, the editorial board of the journal resigned in protest about the manner in which the journal’s poor judgement and failure to thoroughly evaluate the arguments allowed Gilley’s article to be published in the journal. In their letter of resignation, the editors said, “We are deeply disappointed by the unacceptable process around the publication of Bruce Gilley’s Viewpoint essay, ‘The case for colonialism,’ which was published in *Third World Quarterly* without any consultation with the Editorial Board. We asked for these reviews to be sent to the Editorial Board, and they were not.”⁵² The letter further noted that the article failed “to meet academic standards of rigour and balance by ignoring all manner of violence, exploitation and harm perpetrated in the name of colonialism (and imperialism) and that causes offence and hurt and thereby clearly violates that very principle of free speech.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bruce Gilley, “The Case for Colonialism,” *Third World Quarterly* (2017).

⁵¹ Ibid., 1.

⁵² Rosamma Thomas, “Journal’s Editorial Board Resigns over Colonialism Essay,” *The Times of India*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/journals-editorial-board-resigns-over-colonialism-essay/articleshow/60754617.cms?>

⁵³ Ibid.

Today's popular culture and mass media (TV, radio, newspaper, and internet) increasingly highlights violence, coupled with constant obsessive replays 24/7. Those who study violence distinguish between two dominant forms: violence which makes sense (progressive) and violence which does not make sense (regressive). In attempting to come into term with a bloody century whose consequences continues in the 21st century, scholars group revolutionary violence and anti-colonial struggles during the decolonization phase as well as counter-revolutionary violence as meaningful, meaning thinkable violence. This kind of violence is said to be progressive.⁵⁴ The second kind of violence is said to be reactionary and regressive, thus counter-productive. This latter kind is said to be meaningless violence that seems to defy reason and thus stands outside the scope of understanding and is devoid of meaning.⁵⁵ The former classification is a legacy from the European Enlightenment which saw politically organized violence as a necessary component of progress. The latter type of violence is linked to the process of state formation in Africa and is an outcome of the mode of rule used to colonize Africa in the 19th century. Mamdani has called the latter type of violence, one said to be devoid of meaning, as non-revolutionary violence.⁵⁶

Progressive violence or 'good violence' is also associated with the legacy of Karl Marx who famously professed that "revolution is the midwife of history"⁵⁷, a tradition that finds its genesis in the French Revolution. Since the French Revolution, violence has been understood as essential to progress. However, the Marxist paradigm on violence failed to account for non-revolutionary violence or violence which does not remain class specific but transcends both class and ethnicity. The Marxist classification of violence failed through its inability to intellectually understand the kind of violence that pits the impoverished and disempowered against each other. With non-revolutionary

⁵⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, "Making Sense of Non-Revolutionary Violence: Some Lessons from the Rwandan Genocide: (Text of the Frantz Fanon Lecture to Be Given at the University of Durban, Westville)," (Westville, South Africa: University of Durban, 2001), 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, "The Politics of Culture Talk in the Contemporary War on Terror (Hobhouse Memorial Public Lecture)," (London, UK: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007), 7.

violence, the lines of battle is not drawn by wealth and poverty but by differences that are not economic.⁵⁸ This is also where lies the fundamental error committed by development economists and many international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human right organizations and government agencies devoted to helping Africa. These agencies come with the preconceived notion that they necessarily have answers to complex problems and that violence is linked to poverty.

For development economists, the problem is competition over scarce resources. For instance, the Columbia-based development economist, Jeffrey Sachs, relies on economic reasoning when he presumes that the determining factor is scarce resources.⁵⁹ From this vantage point, Jeffrey Sachs has called for the end of poverty. In his major work on the subject, *The End of Poverty*,⁶⁰ Sachs claimed that world poverty, defined as living on less than \$1 a day, can be eliminated within 20 years. But Sachs never explained what had led to the current underdevelopment or what sustains such an unbalance global system. The unequal relationship between countries whereby some countries have substantial control over financial flows at the international level, access to the natural resources of the entire planet, control of the means of information and communication, and ownership of weapons of mass destruction is simply ignored.⁶¹ The inability to see violence in the relationship between the North and the South is apparent and characterizes most economic analyses. Through political control, coercion, induced instability, the powerful states outside of Africa have in fact reduced African countries to mere 'client states'.⁶²

⁵⁸ Mamdani, "Making Sense of Non-Revolutionary Violence: Some Lessons from the Rwandan Genocide: (Text of the Frantz Fanon Lecture to Be Given at the University of Durban, Westville)," 1.

⁵⁹ Christopher Zambakari, "Modernization Theory and the Metaphor of the Development Ladder," *Africa Policy Journal* no. XIII Edition (2018); William Easterly and Jeffrey Sachs, "The Big Push Déjà Vu: A Review of Jeffrey Sachs's "the End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time"," *Journal of Economic Literature* 44, no. 1 (2006); Vanessa Bush, "The Idealist: Jeffrey Sachs and the Quest to End Poverty," *The Booklist* 109, no. 21 (2013).

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty : Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Samir Amin, "Economic Globalism and Political Universalism: Conflicting Issues?," *Journal of World-Systems Research* VI, no. 3 (2000): 11..

⁶² Samir Amin, "'Dead Aid': A Critical Reading," *PAMBAZUKA*, no. 470 (2010)..

Sachs, like his predecessor Milton Friedman from the Chicago School, is a big advocate of neoliberal policies such as the Economic Shock Therapy (EST) and the infamous Structural Adjustment (SA) that were imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on African countries for over three decades.⁶³ The Shock Therapy Doctrine is an economic policy characterized by a sudden liberalization of the financial market followed by the release of price, currency controls and government subsidies.⁶⁴

The attempt to recover from economic collapse in Chile, Argentina, Mexico, the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are good case studies of failures related to these policies. This is consciously ignored by some development economists who instead rely on self-serving biases and prescribe solutions after solutions despite the documented failure of such solutions.⁶⁵ The solution to violence, poverty and underdevelopment, it is argued, is providing assistance to people and getting them out of poverty - rather than seeing poverty and underdevelopment as the result of the relationship between the strong and the weak, the North and the South. Poverty is thus erroneously taken to be the cause rather than the consequence of an unequal relationship.

⁶³ United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa, *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (Aaf-Sap)* (The Commission, 1989); Sanjaya Lall, "Structural Adjustment and African Industry," *World development* 23, no. 12 (1995); Mahmood Mamdani, "Uganda: Contradictions of the Imf Programme and Perspective," *Development and change* 21, no. 3 (1990); UNECA, "African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Economic Recovery and Transformation (Aaf-Sap)," (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Available at <http://www.uneca.org/publications/ESPD/old/aaf_sap.pdf>, 1989).

⁶⁴ N. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, vol. null, Null (2007); P. Thandika Mkandawire and Charles Chukwuma Soludo, *African Voices on Structural Adjustment a Companion To: Our Continent, Our Future*, 1st ed. ed. (Ottawa, Ont: International Development Research Centre (IDRC), 2003).

⁶⁵ Samir Amin, "The Millennium Development Goals: A Critique from the South," *Monthly Review* 57, no. 10 (2006); Solomon R. Benatar, "The Deadly Ideas of Neoliberalism: How the Imf Undermined Public Health and the Fight against Aids - by Rick Rowden," *Developing World Bioethics* 11, no. 1 (2011); Gavin Fridell, "Debt Politics and the Free Trade 'Package': The Case of the Caribbean," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2013); Erik S Reinert, "Development and Social Goals: Balancing Aid and Development to Prevent 'Welfare Colonialism' (Paper Prepared for the High-Level United Nations Development Conference on Millennium Development Goals, New York, March 14 and 15, 2005)," (Oslo, Norway & Tallinn, Estonia 2005); Dierk Herzer and Michael Grimm, "Does Foreign Aid Increase Private Investment? Evidence from Panel Cointegration," *Applied Economics* 44, no. 20 (2012); William Easterly, "The Lost Decades: Developing Countries' Stagnation in Spite of Policy Reform 1980-1998," *Journal of Economic Growth* 6, no. 2 (2001); Samir Amin et al., *Aid to Africa: Redeemer or Coloniser?*, ed. Hakima Abbas and Yves Niyiragira, 1 ed. (Nairobi, Cape Town, Dakar and Oxford: Pambazuka Press & African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD), 2009).

Erik Reinert argues that the priority in development economics has been placed on the wrong objectives. A large emphasis has been placed on foreign financing of domestic social goals rather than building industries and capacities to stimulate growth; rather than attacking the roots of the problem, the West has in many cases been attacking the symptoms. This has led to the retardation of development, strangulation of infant industries, and 'welfare colonialism'.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, neoliberal theories that seek to explain the problem of violence and underdevelopment have not been constructive or helpful in Third World countries. Those theories, disconnected from real economic history,⁶⁷ have proved extremely harmful and have only exacerbated the crises in Africa and in many places around the world.

Conclusion

This paper differentiates between different kinds of violence. It was argued that postcolonial violence is different from other kinds of violence exemplified by the Post-French Revolution violence which is said to be progressive. A second distinction was made between the Marxist conceptualization of violence, which is class-based and pits the poor against the capitalist class.

The godfather of Culture Talk, Bernard Lewis, acknowledges a clash within civilizations but proceeded to frame Islamic civilization as stagnant, "a veneer with its essence an unchanging doctrine,"⁶⁸ frozen in time and history. With Huntington expanding Lewis' thesis to the whole world, we were offered another binary choice: modern and pre-modern societies, progressive and regressive, tradition and modernity, each antithetical to each other. Culture talk views non-Western societies through the lens of culture, trapped in a statist past that shapes and determines their responses to modernity.

⁶⁶ Erik S Reinert, "Development and Social Goals: Balancing Aid and Development to Prevent 'Welfare Colonialism' (Paper Prepared for the High-Level United Nations Development Conference on Millennium Development Goals, New York, March 14 and 15, 2005)," (Oslo, Norway & Tallinn, Estonia 2005).

⁶⁷ Ha-Joon Chang, "Kicking Away the Ladder: An Unofficial History of Capitalism, Especially in Britain and the United States," *Challenge* 45, no. 5 (2002).

⁶⁸ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim : America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, 22.

Without acknowledging that Islamist political violence is a result of a particular socio-historical and political context, the main discourse simply attributes political outcomes e.g. terrorism, non-revolutionary violence, to cultural traits and reasons.

Instead the paper has argued that the violence which has consumed Africa after independence is non-revolutionary in that it is a conflict that pits the "Wretched of the Earth"⁶⁹ against each other, the poor against the poor, and the disempowered against the disenfranchised.⁷⁰ To make this violence thinkable requires an understanding of the institutional legacy of colonialism in the late 19th century and the failure of the postcolonial state to reform the legacy it inherited at independence. It requires intellectuals and policymakers to historicize the violence and make it thinkable. To contextualize the phenomenon is to provide it with a history of its own. Rather than assuming that the violence sits outside of history, there is an urgent need to historicize and contextualize the politics of the violence in order to find a way forward. Africa has spent the past six decades trying to master its destiny after it was forcefully deprived of sovereignty over its territories, its resources and its people.

Political reform starts with a firm grasp of the colonial legacy that continues to inform how the world relates to non-western societies. In this article I make the case that culture alone should not be seen as a repository of political act such as violence, but we need to problematize the issues that drives the violence by historicizing them and understanding the social and political context that shapes and informs the political violence in non-western societies.

⁶⁹ Halford H. Fairchild, "Frantz Fanon's the Wretched of the Earth in Contemporary Perspective," *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 2 (1994).

⁷⁰ Mamdani, "Making Sense of Non-Revolutionary Violence: Some Lessons from the Rwandan Genocide: (Text of the Frantz Fanon Lecture to Be Given at the University of Durban, Westville)."

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