CLASH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A CULTURAL MEDIATION

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Abstract: Throughout the long history of mankind, men and women from different cultural backgrounds have had cause to interact, both as individual and as cultural groups bringing about cultural crosspollinations. Sometimes, this encounter enriches the cultures involved or leads to hybridization birthing new cultures altogether. At other times, the encounter results in ‘clash of cultures’. No time in history is this conflict more prevalent than in our time and no area is it more emphasized than in international relations where globalization has enhanced the interaction of different cultures. This paper explores the role of culture in international relations and investigates how inter-cultural dialogue can foster international peace. The paper discovered that culture, an under-emphasized element in mainstream international relations studies is a key determinant of how nations conduct their affairs internationally. Consequently, achieving peace between nations requires an understanding of the complex relation between international relations and culture. It recommended respect of other people’s cultures and intercultural dialogue as one of the most effective ways of mitigating conflicts in this age of globalization.

Keywords: International Relations, Culture, Cultural dialogue, Conflict, International peace.

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of states as principal authors on international arena, scholars have recognized that cordiality amongst nations is paramount for global security (Ogugua, 2014). This realization led political theorists to identify and promote elements that influence the behaviour of states on internationally. In the past, realism and liberalism dominated the scene. Recently, however, constructivism (one of the many theories called critical or the middle group theories) arose as the main challenger of realism and liberalism.

Realism sees human nature as fundamentally evil. Thus, international relations for the realist, is anarchistic as nations are driven by rivalry (Buzan, 2004, 50. Also, see Wendt, 1994:385). For liberalism, man is good and freedom seeking. For the liberal then, international relations is a scene of cooperation between nations ((Nye, 2008). What these two theories share in common is that culture is not a vital element in international relations. Constructivism views culture as key in international relations. For the constructivist every human behaviour, whether motivated by self-interest or the desire for cooperation comes from the individual’s cultural orientation (Ghavam, 2005, 298).

This paper deploys the method of literature review to investigate the relation between culture and international relations in order to see how intercultural dialogue can enhance peaceful coexistence among nations. The paper is
divided into seven sections. The first section is the outlay and the second operationizes key concepts. While three discusses the major theories in international relations, section four explores the relation between culture and international relations. The fifth section examines how culture influences international relations and the increasing rate of conflicts emerging from intercultural misunderstandings. Section six looks into how intercultural dialogue can help to resolve these problems. Finally, the concluding section makes recommendations and summarises.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1. Culture

Culture is problematic to define. Kroeber and Kluckhohn conducted a thorough assessment of culture concepts and meanings in 1952, compiling a list of 164 diverse meanings (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, 1). In the 10-volume Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics, Apte (1994, 2000-2001) stated the situation as follows:

Despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature.

Thus, culture is defined differently by differently scholars. According to British anthropologist Tyler (quoted in G. Chunsong, 1998), Culture is the intricate sum of man's knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capacities and habits gained as a member of society. Clyde Kluckhohn, an American anthropologist (quoted in G. Chunsong, 1998), claimed that culture is a history-created system of dominant or recessive survival types with tendencies shared by the entire group or by a specific segment over time. According to a German anthropologist (cited in G. Chunsong, 1998), culture is a way of life; its pillar is the power of thought; its scope includes rational knowledge; and its primary content is the form of what used to be existence, compulsory knowledge or insight, object conception, and language command.

The bottom line of these definitions is that culture is defined by human creativity, which includes everything that men have made, whether it is material or spiritual. Overall, culture refers to the sum of material and spiritual wealth developed through human society's historical activity.

2.1.2 Evolutions in the Understanding of Culture in International Relations

When UNESCO was founded in the aftermath of WWII, culture related primarily to artistic production, fine arts, and literature (Matsuura, K. 2007). Also, the Memorandum of Association of the Organization postulated the existence of different cultures overlapping with the frontiers of the United Nation.

During decolonization in the 1960s, there was a greater prominence on recognizing the equal dignity of cultures and the necessity for policies that promote cultural cooperation. The statement of Bogota, issued in 1978 at the conclusion of an intergovernmental conference on cultural traditions in Latin America and the Caribbean, set the final touches on this transition by asserting unequivocally that culture is a set of values and creations of society and that actual expression of life is indispensable to this and is not just a means or supplementary instrument of social activity (cited in Matsuura, K. 2007).

From 1980s onwards there were several arguments on cultural expansion, cultural multiplicity and essential “dialogue between cultures and civilization.” The conclusion of the Global Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico in 1982, the works of the Global Commission of Cultural Development, and the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development have all influenced the reference definition of culture in the Universal Declaration of UNESCO on Culture Diversity of 2021. It stated that, “culture must be considered as the entirety of the spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional distinctives that characterize a society or social group; it includes besides arts and literature, the life styles, the manners of collective living, the value system, the tradition and beliefs” (Matsuura, K. 2007).

Overall, the underlining impression from the various definitions and historical development in the understanding of culture is that culture is the opposite of nature, everything produced by man in the cause of his interaction with his environment. These would include: language, custom, work, values etc. Thus, culture is dynamic and is continually on the process of creation and recreation.
2. 2. International Relations

As in culture, authors approach the definition of international relations differently. However, extant literature shows that there are three bases of these approaches. These include International Relations as a course of study, as a situation, and as a principle.

As a course of study, International Relations is a discipline of political science that studies the entirety of human relations across state borders. Goldstein (2010) similar to Carr (1981) posits that International Relations is the discipline of political science that deals with interactions between state and non-state actors in the international system. Hoffman (1977, 15), describes International Relations as a field... concerning the issues and actions that determine the exterior policies and power of the basic components into which the world is divided. Like culture, international relation is dynamic. This underlines the link between culture and International Relations since the behaviour of states on the international arena is determined by their cultures.

As a situation, International Relations refers to the interactions between memberships of the global community. All or any facets of their relationship are covered, including warfare, conflict, separation, belligerency, settlement, pacts, treaties, alliance, conferences, and organization (Hoffman, 1977).

As a principle, International Relations denotesanestablishednotions that create the foreign policy of a state, international organization or region, which are enunciated, formulated and executed by an International Department. The sum of such policy processes is frequently referred to as, for example, Nigerian International Relations. It is also known as international diplomacy in other circumstances.

Theories in International Relations

As indicated already, there are many theories in International Relations. However, three major strands can be identified: liberalism, realism and constructivism.

3.1. Liberalism: The proponents of Liberalism reason that humans are characteristically decent and that peace and concord between nations are not only possible, but desired. Immanuel Kant created the concept in the late eighteenth century. Kant believed that the more liberal governments there were in the world, the more non-violent it would be, because liberal states are ruled by their citizens, and citizens are rarely inclined to wish war. Modern liberals have taken up and expanded on Kant's ideas, more especially in the democratic peace theory, which affirms that democracies do not go to war with one another for the reasons Kant stated (Gold, D. & McGlinchey S. 2017).

Putting liberal beliefs into practice, in January 1918, during the last year of the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson delivered his famous "Fourteen Points" to the US Congress. The creation of a broad association of nations, which became the League of Nations, was the final of his points as he offered his plans for a reconstructed world beyond the conflict. The League of Nations was created in 1920 with the key goal of overseeing inter-state relations and implementing and preserving world peace. However, when the League fell in 1939 as a result of the onset of World War II, liberals struggled to understand why it had failed, as circumstances seemed to contradict their views. Notwithstanding the efforts of great liberal intellectuals and politicians such as Kant and Wilson, liberalism failed to gain sway, and a new elucidation arose to explain the persistence of conflict. Realism was the name given to this idea (Gold D. & McGlinchey S. 2017).

3. 2. Realism gained popularity during the Second World War, as a plausible explanation for how and why the world's bloodiest conflict erupted following a period of seeming calm and optimism. Many realists have traced its beginnings in older texts, despite the fact that it was termed in the twentieth century (Gold D. & McGlinchey S. 2017). Realism's proponents claim that it reflects the world's "reality" and more efficiently accounts for change in international politics, as its name implies. Thomas Hobbes is frequently invoked in debates of realism because of his account of the viciousness of life during the English Civil War (1642–1651). Hobbes saw human beings as existing in an order less state of nature, which he saw as a battle of all against all. That is why realists believe conflict is more prevalent than peace; indeed, they believe war is unavoidable.
Both liberalism and realism regard the state as the primary actor in international relations. Many researchers have come to criticize these classic views in recent decades because of their fixation with the state and the status quo.

3.3. The Middle-Ground Theories

There is a number of middle ground or critical theories including Marxism, the English school, Constructivism, etc. However, constructivism will be discussed here. Unlike scholars from the mainstream theories, constructivists highlight the importance of culture in International Relations. According to Wendt (1994), the core of constructivism is that the crux of international relations is found in human interactions. States, after all, do not interact; it is their agents, such as politicians and diplomats, who do. As a result, comprehending constructivism entails comprehending the force of "norms." Hence, constructivists are interested in studying these norms.

4. International Relations Theories; Culture and Practices

4.1. Liberalism, Realism and Culture

The two mainstream theories, identified above have dominated studies in International Relations in about the last one hundred years. Cultural questions during these years have only been raised sporadically and are not the basic feature of any of the two paradigms of the inter-paradigm debate (See Khodaverdi et al. 2016:51 & Thompson et al. 1990).

4.2. Emergence of Culture in International Relations Study

Many philosophers of science, including Wittgenstein, Rorty, Quine, Feyerabend, and Habermas, began to oppose behaviorism and logical positivism in the 1960s. Their objections sparked the well-known linguistic turn in a variety of social scientific disciplines. The linguistic turn in social theory drew more attention to the functions of language and human interpretation. With the advent of critical and postmodernist approaches to International Studies in the 1980s, this heightened attention on language and interpretation also struck the field of international relations. Though these approaches have flaws, a fundamental contribution of these ways of thinking is that they have rekindled interest in cultural issues in international relations.

4.3. Cultural Constructivism and International Relations

As previously stated, constructivism is a "social theory of international politics" that emphasizes the social construction of international affairs. Military strength, trade relations, international institutions, and home preferences are essential in Constructivism not because they are objective truths about the world, but because they have definite social meanings. This meaning is derived from a complex and unique combination of history, ideas, conventions, and beliefs that researchers must comprehend in order to explain state behavior (Wendt, 1995, 71-81). As a result, culture as a key notion in constructivism is the newest concept sweeping the international relations literature (Mazarr, 1996, 177).

The fundamental criticism of Constructionism against mainstream theory is that prior theories failed to consider the significance of culture in international relations. Constructivists' willingness to understand international concerns via the lens of culture has resulted in the formation of two groupings. Culture has been interpreted by some as a source of conflict and tension in international relations. In the realm of international affairs, the other side believes that culture is a place for debate, engagement, and integration. As a result, it appears that Constructivism occupies a unique position in that it tends to reconcile these two viewpoints.

5. International Relations in Practice

S.P. Huntington’s (1993) vastly publicised ‘Clash of Civilizations’ study lures devotion to a habitually disregarded facet of international relations - culture. This disregard, as already pointed out is premised on the view that culture is of diminutive significance to international relations. While this interpretation of international relation is not entirely wrong, its shortcoming is that it does not question how states define their interests, and whether ‘rationality’ is always the driver in this definition. Constructionists, in contrast to mainstream ideas, believe that cultural values influence what people and states want and think in international relations, often unconsciously.
This is demonstrated in the behaviour of nations in the international scene. For instance, Nigeria is seen as the giant of Africa and wanting to maintain that has influenced the way Nigeria behaves and the kind of images she projects to the outside world. Particularly, it has influenced her treatment of immigrants, aid supports to other African countries, even while her own people are starving and her participation in peacekeeping missions in the continent. Not wanting to be seen as a big brother bully especially influenced Nigeria’s ceding of Bakasi Peninsula to Cameroon and her refusal to fallout diplomatically with South Africa following the killing of Nigerians in that country. This behaviour can be traced to a fundamental Nigerian trait; Nigerians are proud people who feel theirs is a great country and want the world to see and treat them as such.

India following the Gandhian tradition, presents itself as following its earliest ideal of non-violence. By contrast, many states in the Middle East, particularly, Iran, Iraq under Saddam Hussein and Palestine, though militarily weak, for reasons of honour, adopt the mantle of dominant aggressor making attacks by more powerful adversaries such as Israel and the US seem more justifiable and damaging to the formers’ strategic interests.

Rather than being motivated by security concerns, as most Western observers believe, India’s nuclear program is motivated by a desire to improve its international status. This is supported by the value of hierarchy, which may be observed in the Indian caste system. When nuclear weapons are paired with the concept of nonviolence, they become symbolically significant but militarily useless. In contrast to India's position on nuclear weapons, other countries, particularly Israel and the United States, perceive Iran and North Korea's pursuit of the weapon as driven by military imperatives. That is why while India’s restrained nuclear posture helped the US and others to rationalise giving New Delhi differential treatment in nuclear cooperation; Iran and North Korea get sanctioned and isolated (Canberra K. P. 2014).

5. 1. Specific Ways Cultures Influence International Relations

The impact of culture on current international relations has piqued the interest of a number of academics. Who Prosper? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success? is a book written by Lawrence Harrison in 1992, Samuel Huntington released his article "The Clash of Civilizations?" in 1993; in 1994, Thomas Sowell wrote Race and Culture: A World View; and in 1995, Francis Fukuyama published Trust: The Social Virtue and the Creation of Prosperity. These types of works have shed light on the influence of culture on international relations. This can be summarized in five models (Washington Quarterly, 1996), which are related in certain ways but distinct solely in terms of their focus.

1. Culture has a significant influence on the state's successes. The spiritual, ethical, and economic conditions for human life are all influenced by culture. Nothing can be accomplished in modern capitalist development without paying attention to the cultural dimension. In the above-mentioned book, Lawrence Harrison (1992) claimed that cultural values and beliefs cause phenomena such as chronic volatility and injustice in Latin America, the economic miracles of South Korea and China’s Taiwan, and Japan's achievements in distinct ethnic groups. This fundamental link between national cultures has a significant impact on the state's and nation’s economic fate, as well as their standing and involvement in international relations.

2. Culture is the compass in making decision. Certain people see culture as analogous to a filter of knowledge. Different cultural lenses are used by leaders to approach situations and make decisions. Various states have different strategic emphases, according to Alastair I. Johnston (1995), which stem from their early or established experience. An individual leader or a group of leaders uses their cultural concepts as the coordinate in their decisions, whether consciously or unintentionally. As a result, culture has a significant impact on how leaders approach various foreign relations difficulties.

3. Culture is responsible for the creation of social and economic structures. In his book "Trust," Francis Fukuyama (1995) emphasizes the sociability of culture, or communal credit. He believes that a state's welfare and competitiveness are restricted by a universal cultural identity, which he believes reflects the operation of social credit and is a prerequisite for economic success. As a result, culture influences the character of cooperative organs and controls the degree of social credit. It sets the standard for social and economic institutions, and as a result, it has a huge influence on how countries behave and how they are treated in the international community.
4. Culture is a significant factor in international relations. Samuel Huntington (1993) justified this point in his article The Clash of Civilizations? In the post-Cold War world, he believes, the basic source of conflict will not be ideological or largely economic. He even predicted that the next world war, if one occurs, will be a clash of civilizations.

5. The complementarity and universality of cultures provide a key foundation for international relations harmony. As early as 1934, Arnold Toynbee asserted that the emergence and fall of civilizations follows a strong, planned, and harmonious pattern. In 1948, he emphasized the importance of culture and the uniformity of diverse civilizations in societal structures, which peaked during the Industrial Revolution. As a result, the uniformity and complementarity of world cultures offers international relations an enormous and unavoidable boost.

5.2. The Clash of Culture in International Relations

One of the basic characteristic of the modern and post-modern ages is the attempt by some states to impose their cultural values systems on other states. In International Relations, this phenomenon is called cultural hegemony, cultural imperialism, and cultural colonialism. Although associated with the modern and postmodern times, cultural hegemony has been in existence since the beginning of time. However, in its modern form, cultural imperialism is seen in the attempt by America and its Western allies to universalize and impose Western values globally. There are a number of ways through which this manifested.

**Human Rights Diplomacy:** Western politicians are primarily concerned with their own interests as a result of balance-and-maneuuvre. Western civilization is being exploited as a tool to further these goals. Human rights, which are a part of Western culture, are the most universal. Human rights diplomacy is seen by Western politicians as a "sophisticated weapon" that gives liberal democratic countries a crucial edge in the quest to spread their influence (Hongyi, 1993). At the UN Human Rights Commission, some Western countries, led by the United States, have repeatedly hurled attacks. Developing countries are always the ones who have been accused. The assailants are insufferably arrogant, believing that their divine purpose is to popularize so-called freedom and social justice throughout the world by demonstrating democratic forms. Human rights are obviously exploited to intrude on others’ sovereignty, to violate their sovereignty, and even to destabilize the regimes of other countries. The crux of Western human rights diplomacy is this.

**Reigning International Institutions:** Western countries try to enforce their will on international organizations in order to make them follow Western civilization’s values and serve Western interests. In his book "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993), Huntington admitted that the United States controls international political and security institutions, substituting "the world community" for "the Free World." Decisions made at the United Nations Security Council or the International Monetary Fund that support the interests of the West are presented to the globe as reflecting the wish of the global community. In effect, the West is governing the world through international institutions, military might, and economic resources in order to retain Western dominance, safeguard Western interests, and promote Western political and economic values.

**New Interventionism Implemented via Military Means:** From March to June 1999, the US-led NATO conducted an extraordinary 78-day bombing campaign against the sovereign state of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The atrocity imposed on Yugoslavia by the US-led NATO is a classic illustration of hegemonism and power politics masquerading as civilization. The main principle of new interventionism has three aspects: first, that human rights are superior to sovereignty; second, that the entire world should be "democratized"; and third, that democracy should not be limited by national lines. Thus, the West can carry out so-called humanitarian intervention in any country that has been classified as a human rights abuser according to the West’s own understanding.

**Recourse to the Power of Commodity:** In the present world environment, imposing Western civilization on others by force is becoming increasingly difficult. Therefore, the West uses market forces to promote liberal and democratic principles and values. This is the West’s most important cultural strategy.

West’s culture today is a well-developed market economy, in which spiritual topics are typically marketized and sold. The West, led by the United States, places a high importance on manufacturing and exporting cultural commodities, anticipating that these will serve as the primary means of enforcing personnel contacts and
exchanging ideas and values.

Strengthening Cultural Expansion: Western civilisation is shocked by the friction and collision at the intersection of world civilizations. The West, which has long seen itself as the center of the universe, sees the problems as a danger, leading to the development of "collision and threat theories." While celebrating the success of Western culture's liberalism, some are astonished to learn that the millennium of a Western civilization empire has yet to arrive. The new international scenario has exacerbated the clash of world cultures, owing to the fact that Western industrialized countries are obligated to export Western culture due to their superior economic, political, and military positions. In developing countries, this has resulted in a retroactive psychology and resistance. This resistance is being labelled by the West as a rebirth of nationalism. Those who oppose the West are labelled "nationalists" and subjected to a barrage of denunciation.

6. A Call for Cultural Dialogue

International relations are changing at a breakneck pace as humanity moves closer to recognizing multiculturalism. The United States is making progress toward its aim of a unipolar world. However, the multipolar tendency is forming as a result of a series of difficult battles. In the new circumstances, great power relations are readjusting. Countries are developing national strategies based on their own objectives as well as their internal and external environments. Interactions between cultures that are diametrically opposed have a dual impact on international relations, resulting in cultural gaps.

Cultural gaps are one of the causes of conflict. The cultural factor invariably constrains the reshuffling of international forces. Human rights is the most prominent issue arising from the cultural gaps between China and the United States. The United States' constant attacks on China and other developing countries, particularly from Africa, at UN Human Rights Commission meetings are part of a strategic intent to force other countries to accept US democracy and ideals. In a broader sense, the US wants to support internal Chinese "forces for economic and political reform" and "ensure China's broad and peaceful transition from communism to democracy" (Lu Liandi, et al, 1995, 353).

On the part of Africa, it wants African nations to liberalize their positions on human rights issues such as abortion, LGBT rights, and so on. Conflicts over human rights concerns indicate a clash between two value systems as well as between Eastern, Western, and African civilizations. These clashes of ideologies and values have repercussions for inter-state and inter-state-group relations. They can be solved through cultural discussion rather than the traditional Western mentality of imposing one's ideas on others. As rational agents, leaders and politicians should approach these divisive subjects with a spirit of conversation and compromise.

Another area of importance which is experiencing cultural conflict and in need of cultural dialogue is the religious and ethnic elements of culture. The impact of modern ethnic and religious variables on world configuration change is becoming more prominent. Ethnic and religious variables play a role in culture as a whole. Contradictions and disputes may arise as a result of differences in ethnic folklore and religious beliefs. These existed throughout the Cold War, but they were muted by the bipolar conflict as the primary contradiction; now that the Cold War is finished, the previously muted contradictions are rising. In Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kashmir, Nigeria, Chechnya, and Afghanistan, Muslims and non-Muslims are at odds. Some Muslim-Muslim confrontations occur on a local level. This conflict between Iraq and Iran lasted eight years and claimed the lives of about one million people. There were numerous wars between Arab countries and Iraq, as well as clashes in the Sahara between Algeria and Morocco. Egypt and Algeria have been afflicted by fundamentalist unrest. Ethnic slaughter in Somalia, Rwanda, and East Timor has startled the world. Many people are concerned about the escalating ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria. The majority of flashpoints in today's global society are tied to ethnic and religious divisions. The waning in the power of the US as the only superpower after the Cold War and the emergence of other powers such as China, India, Brazil etc., show that the bi-polar world created and run by the US and its Western allies is no longer visible. The world needs a new world order, punctuated not by unilateralism but multilateralism, where the voices of every cultural group, especially marginalized groups in the developing countries of Africa and Asia are heard.
7. Conclusion

This paper is an investigation on the impact of culture on international relations. The paper is structured into seven parts. The introduction identifies the problem and states the method of navigating it. The section on clarification of concepts operationizes culture and international relations. While culture is the work of man as opposed to the product of nature, international relations deal with the relation between states. This was followed in section three by an elaborate discussion of the three mainstream theories in international relation: liberalism, realism and constructionism. Liberals and realists see culture as extraneous to international relation and consider time spent on it wasteful. In contrast, constructionism sees culture as the mainstay of international relations claiming that the later cannot do without the former.

Sections four and five examine international relations in practice, clash of culture and how a good understanding of culture can help to put the behaviour of states in proper perspective. Section five particularly highlights that the problem facing the post-modern world is the clash of culture, as seen in the efforts by the West to impose its civilization on the rest of the world. In this context, section six recommends intercultural dialogue as the way out of the problem that global multiculturalism is likely to throw up in the coming years. The last section is the conclusion.

This is section seven. It reemphasized intercultural dialogue as the navigators’ mast for navigating the problems of international relations now and in the coming years. In the final analysis, just as the League of Nations failed to withstand the disengagement of then-rising America a century ago, the current international system and its major institutions may fail to withstand disengagement by today’s growing nations. Culture’s return to the international scene is more than a theoretical discussion. Culture is the philosopher’s stone that leaders can no longer ignore if they are to deal with the great concerns of global security and prosperity in a multipolar world.

References