



주한 벨라루스 대사관

보도자료

Identity Politics and Culture Wars: A New Determinism?

(V.V. Makei 벨라루스장관 기고문)

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Resume: 국제사회는 문화 결정론이 좌우하는 발전 단계에 돌입했다. 이 문화 결정론은 앞으로 수년 혹은 수십년 간 인류에 큰 영향을 미칠 것이다. 오늘날 일명 ‘정체성 정치’ 그리고 특히 ‘문화 전쟁’이 국제사회 발전에 크게 영향을 미친다.

역사의단계마다 각각 결정론이 적용되어 왔다. 초기 인류 공동체의 예를 통해서도 지리적 여건이 발전 과정에 영향을 미쳤다는 것을 확인할 수 있다. 실제로도 미국진화 생물학자인 제레드 다이아몬드 (Jared Diamond)는 중국과 서유럽을 비교하는 연구를 통해서 이를 설득력 있게 증명했다. 제레드 다이아몬드 교수는 이 두 지역 면적이 비슷한데도 불구하고 서유럽은 기복이 심하며 전체를 연결하는 강이 없었던 반면 중국은 두개의 강과 동서 개방이라는 지리적 조건이 치열한 경쟁을 부추겨 발전에 기여했다고 주장한다.

영어 원문을 첨부합니다.

Identity Politics and Culture Wars: A New Determinism?

By H.E.Mr. Vladimir Makei, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Resume: The world has essentially entered a stage of development increasingly shaped by a cultural determinism that will weigh heavily on humanity in upcoming years and even decades. Today identity politics and specifically culture wars largely influence global development.

All periods in history have been typically marked by some kind of determinism. Even in early human societies geography largely determined the path of development. Indeed, as U.S evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond has convincingly demonstrated, geographic factors such as two rivers and an east-west expanse contributed to the early cultural and political unification of China, whereas Western Europe, with a similar area but a rugged terrain and no unifying rivers, was a place conducive to intense competition.

However, while geographic determinism accounted for how societies developed in the distant past, other factors influenced humanity's subsequent evolution. For example, religion was a key dividing issue for much of the 16th and 17th centuries. The emergence of Protestantism in northern Europe in the early 16th century sparked religious wars on the continent that ostensibly ended only with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Similarly, the class struggle was arguably the key fault line for most of the 19th century, a fight that was at the core of the Industrial Revolution and relentlessly pitted industrial workers against the bourgeoisie throughout much of Europe. The 20th century was marked overwhelmingly by ideological determinism, since the latter stood at the root of the geopolitical rivalry between two superpowers and their respective blocs.

What is the defining fault line in the world today? Many point to growing inequality fueled by globalization and the information revolution, two developments that have divided the world's rich from the poor over the past few decades. Others claim the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 is behind the ongoing geopolitical realignment expected to ultimately result in a new balance of power. Still others argue the new developments are related to the growing challenge of climate change compounded by such factors as energy, water, and food shortages.

I content that the world has essentially entered a stage of development increasingly shaped by a cultural determinism that will weigh heavily on humanity in upcoming years and even decades. Today identity politics and specifically so-called culture wars largely influence global development.

IDENTITY POLITICS COMES TO THE FORE

What is identity politics? One can find an interesting and lengthy definition on Wikipedia, which essentially states that identity politics concern the interests and perspectives of self-identified social interest groups related, among other aspects, to race, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ideology, nation, sexual orientation, and culture. While indeed a very broad definition, we can infer from it that identity politics is very much about social issues.

The British critical historian Eric Hobsbawm might have agreed with that inference. In his book *The Age of Extreme: 1914-1991* (1994), which is essentially a history of the 20th century full of extremes, he wrote: "Identity politics is an emotional reaction to the problems of the early 21st century." Interestingly, Hobsbawm foresaw identity politics as a new fault line already in the early 1990s, when it was unclear what would replace the superpower rivalry.

French political scientist Dominique Moïsi argues in the same vein in *The Geopolitics of Emotions* (2010). For him, whereas the 20th century was about ideology, the 21st century will be very much about identity; specifically, about the particular emotions to which identity gives rise – fear, humiliation, and hope, which he associates with concrete behavioral patterns of certain countries. Moïsi believes that in order to achieve stability, the world will have to strike a balance between these three types of identity-based emotions.

Yet Samuel Huntington seemed shrewder than anyone else in showing how identity politics shaped global politics in the post-Cold War world. In his now much vaunted *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), he wrote: "The years after the Cold War witnessed the beginning of dramatic changes in people's identities and the symbols of those identities. Global politics began to be reconfigured along cultural lines." In other words, according to Huntington, identity and culture emerged as the new fault lines in an impending clash of civilizations.

What was behind the rise of identity politics? And why did it come into the fore at the end of the Cold War and not earlier?

Identity politics did not come into salience earlier because, it seems, it was always muted by great power politics and policymakers in the past were exclusively preoccupied with the latter issue. The same is true of the Cold War era. The rigid inter-bloc discipline did not allow social issues to gain the upper hand over great power politics. Yet when the latter receded in importance with the end of the bipolar rivalry, identity politics came out of the shadows. As a result, the first half of the 1990s saw a series of UN-affiliated international conferences on a range of social issues, like those

held in close succession in Vienna in 1993, in Cairo in 1994, in Copenhagen and Beijing in 1995.

Another reason for the rise of identity politics was that the decline of great power politics occurred at a time when the information revolution was increasingly gathering pace. Indeed, rapid communication and transportation enabled many new ideas to spread and win supporters across the globe much faster than it had been possible before.

However, what is troubling in the context of identity politics is that this phenomenon as a whole has been increasingly overshadowed by the prominence of its radical, libertarian wing, which effectively served to spark contemporary culture wars and set in motion cultural determinism.