Article

Defiant Culture - one of the Main Pillar of Twenty-Year Resistance in Afghanistan

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Abstract: The current work attempts to explore the role and importance of the culture in power politics and shows how power is legitimized by the culture. In fact, culture and power are very intertwined and the whole structure of the cultural traditions rule and customs are developed by and represents the power division inside the culture and its people. Research claims that understanding the culture from inside give us the opportunity to better understand the power relations inside the society and accordingly is beneficial for policy makers will it be inner politics or the international one. The work is interdisciplinary and consists of politics and cultural studies fields. It uses the theoretical framework-an interesting mix of theories from both fields to explain the relationship and behaviour of the political and cultural variables of the research. Article chose to do to case studies and together with comparative analyses and content analyses find out common and different trends. It avoids discussions how just or fair was the whole operation in Afghan or Ukraine case but it assess how correctly was those operations planned and realized from the point of view of power culture relationship and how cultural understanding or misunderstanding contributes in achieving political goals in such a cases.

Keywords: Culture, Power, Politics, Cultural Relativism, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Realism

I.   INTRODUCTION

The main goal of the article is to investigate the connection between culture and power which is the main subject matter of politics and to investigate how much influence does power and its division inside the society have on culture and its components.

The topic is very actual and ongoing because currently the international liberal order and its universal values are being impacted by the various challenges throughout the globe that are the emerging new political players that are trying to create multipolar world order instead of unipolar one which existed before. In this process they are trying to promote their own cultural values that are sometimes incompatible and even antagonistic to the values that are considered as universal liberal values. Other than this there are some other forces players that maybe not very powerful in a classic sense of international players such as major state powers or international organizations but also challenges comes from small states and non-state actors.

It is important to mention that the article is intended to be interdisciplinary work that contributes to understand politics and power in a better way through the lens of culture which is the very important variable that has in some case a tremendous influence on policy creation and power division or on politics in general.

The main research question can sound as follow: **Why and how was it possible to resist and defeat the strongest army in the world during the twenty-year asymmetric war in Afghanistan?**

Hypotheses: throughout the history cultures produce their own values and if these values are against the internationally recognized universal values people that are representatives of the culture tend to support their local cultural values than the international ones because they consider them as foreign. This can be a very fertile ground for creating very resilient and long lasting resistance of various forms: cultural, political, peaceful or open military conflict (conventional or asymmetric warfare).

Theoretical framework: Franz Boas' theory of "cultural relativism" can be compared to the Realism and interestingly one can see some interesting connections between them. They have many common things: Realism says that states are the main players of the international political system and all states are equal players but this equality is about the legal rights but in reality they are not equal in their power and abilities. Similar thing exists in Franc Boas Cultural Relativism theory it claims that all the cultures are equal in rights it does not matter how discriminative, brutal or unjust the one can be. Boas also says that cultures cannot be compared in order to find out which one is better; for example, western countries' cultures are not any better than other countries' or regions' cultures. Culture should be assessed or understand by the inner values and criteria not by outside morale. Cultural values and believes are the historical product and they are not universal. (Academics, 2022) The criticism of Cultural relativism claims that sometimes culture can violate fundamental human rights and commit a massive crime such as torture, genocide and others what should be done in such a case still no critique and should it be tolerated because it has some kind of cultural legitimation? (Ember, Ember, & Peregrine, 2007) So for this article it is very important to investigate what kind of relationship exists between power and cultures. Why cultural relativism was compared to the Realism? The answer connects these two theories to each-other because neither cultural relativism nor realism considers human rights as its main subject matter. For realism the most important issue is the power and its division between players. Power and its distribution in the particular societies is one of the main issue around which cultures are organized and developed with their customs, traditions, religion, literature, folklore and so on.

II.   METHODS Research design

As for research methodology article uses case study, comparative analyses and content analyzes. The case study method will be dedicated to the afghan war since 2001 and to the currently ongoing Ukraine war and with comparative analyses differences and commonalities will be identified. In addition to this desk work of content analysis will be conducted to critically analyze the existing literature about the topic of this article to verify the hypotheses and the theory created/presented in frames of the ongoing work. It is also worth to mentioned that this work operates on the individual, local (inside the country or culture) and international levels of analyze.

1. Culture and its connection to power

So what is the culture? How is it different from the civilization and what kind of importance does it have for this article? Culture has hundreds of definitions and meanings, but for different contexts purposes. Which one should be

chosen for this article? Of course the ones that describe or explain the division and organization of the power into the social group. To start from the basics one of the dictionary provides the following definition: "The sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another." (dictionary.com, 2024) Second meaning which was found says that culture is "the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time; a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc." (britanica, 2024) As it is clearly depicted here main focus is on the style of life, how they organize family, the government, what they believe is valuable and second definition also adds that culture can be connected with the place as well and influenced by it. Another focus on time means that the particular culture-in other words the way of life of a certain group of people can be ended either by themselves or by some other external forces/factors. The notion of beliefs that contains religion is also a very important pillar of the culture and has very big organizational potential in building the resistance against outside factors about which will be a detailed discussion in the case study below. All abovementioned notions are connected and somehow serve the division of power inside the group of people, society or a state but about this there will be detailed analyze down too.

So after this it is necessary to draw the boundaries between culture and civilization: "Culture exists within civilization as it is the behavioral aspect of some individuals or groups, but civilization is a vast community that can be made up of several cultures; Culture transfers from generation to generation and thus cannot be said to be advancing, but civilization is always evolving." (Unacademy, 2024) Edward B. Tylor defined civilization as something more or bigger than culture with the similar core elements "Tylor's original purpose had been to overcome the paradigm of culture as a "primitive" phenomenon, as opposed to civilization as a more advanced stage of humanity." (Tylor & Bornstein, 2012). All this is important because as all these definitions of civilization Shows it is something similar but much bigger/broader notion than culture. This is broader area where it is very difficult to build up for example liberal democracy if it is a very different or antagonistic unity of values from the liberal ones.

As we continue to build up the operational definitions of the notions involved in this article power stands at the core or basement in their relationship. An abstract is presented here about the power from two famous author's perspective:

> "As with the concept of freedom to which it is linked, power is interrelated to the public realm. Arendt does not interlink power with domination, and violence. She disagrees with the definition of power given by major social scientists and especially by Max Weber (Weber, 1978, p. 53).
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> In Arendt's thinking power, that is, political power, cannot be 'possessed' by individuals nor – as this was assumed during the French Revolution – by 'the people.' On this point Arendt differs from the liberal as well as from the revolutionary concept of power. 'Power corresponds to the human ability, not just to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.'
>
> This means that power belongs to the public sphere. It can be incorporated by means of a revolution, a political uprising or an act of founding. However, if power is institutionalized it tends to become bureaucratic. In this respect Arendt agrees with the skepticism of Max Weber about modern bureaucracy.
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> Thus, power comes up and disappears again depending on the contingency of history." (Grunenberg, 2015)

This definition of power by Arendt can be interestingly connected to the definition of culture above. As she says power does not belong to the individual it belongs to the group of people and remains in existence until this group exists as a unity. So here comes the most important function and meaning of culture in relation of power: it provides the existential ground and environment for power to exist. With its shared customs traditions beliefs and values it provides the unity of abovementioned public realm-public sphere where power can exist. There are some authors that offer the definition of the power which consists of individual level of analyses instead of local or group level of analyses but because this article is mostly focused on culture- power relationship which is group level analyses it adopted the

abovementioned definition of power which is more appropriate in current case although the individual level definition is used down as necessary. One more interesting passage in abovementioned definition of power is that it can be incorporated (means united) by revolution, political uprising or by the act of founding. In all three cases there must be internal will of people to support such a revolution or organize political uprising and internal consent about the act of founding new rules/order. If such conditions do not exist, then new order will be based and guaranteed by outside power which will experience the lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the people who will be ruled by this new order. It will not be their will; they did not agree to such a change. So in this kind of case the unity and legitimacy are not provided by culture anymore and the power has to become only institutionalized and bureaucratic in order to be exercised and serve new goals and protect a new way of life. Both Arendt and Max Weber are pessimistic towards this kind of bureaucratic power.

After creating such a theory, it is necessary to be proven by the real life facts and for achieving this type of goal the article uses case studies of Afghanistan and Ukraine to show that Afghan case is directly connected to this theory and Ukraine case is a little bit different and because of this difference whole process works differently. These two cases were chosen also because first Afghan case is the classic case of cultural differences and motivation is to defend their way of life but Ukraine case is totally different to this because Russian and Ukrainian culture are very close to each-other Russia itself started from Kiev state both are Slavic nations same orthodox Christianity is their religion and so on. (Gale Encyclopedia of World History, 2024) here culture is not the motivation of the resistance but power is used by a state and it is a classic case of conventional warfare between the two states. Because in this two cases resistance is and was very fierce it is very interesting to review the motives of such a resistance in both cases. It must be mentioned that in both cases article tries to find the main motives of the resistance but does not suppose that these different motive are the only factors that are involved and play a role there.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Facts: Ukraine case is conventional prolonged war between the armies of Ukraine and Russia; Afghan case was a very short conventional war between ISAF forces and Afghan army and then 20 yearlong asymmetric warfare on the territory of Afghanistan between ISAF forces and different military groups with different interest who had one common enemy ISAF and particularly U.S.A which was a locomotive and main force in ISAF. (NATO, 2022)

To review some history of the war in Afghanistan it began as the response to the terrorist attacks in U.S.A on 11 September 2001. By the end of summer of 2021 Taliban that was the Government in power when the war started and after defeat in conventional war continued as an asymmetric war that was very costly for U.S.A and the western countries involved in ISAF mission. 2 trillion U.S. dollar and tens of thousands of dead and wounded soldiers was not enough to reach the victory and in 2021 Taliban came into power again. (History.com Editors, 2021) There are many different explanations why the 20 yearlong military operation did not brought success and failed to achieve its military political goals. The critical analyze of the content below does not attempt to find out what is writ or wrong to do according to the point of view of fairness, but it tries to find out the main reasons of the occurrence of failure to achieve success. In Success it is meant to build and maintain effective governance of the territory and people in Afghanistan. One of the authoritative media that can be considered as one of the trend of western assumptions is Journal of Democracy Murtazashvili as the author of the article "The Collapse of Afghanistan" states that "The Afghan government collapsed before the 31 August 2021 withdrawal deadline. Images from across the country of Afghan soldiers quickly surrendering to the Taliban led many foreign analysts to focus on the ability of the United States and its allies to build armies. In Washington and European capitals, military experts began fretting about "right-sizing" armies and pointing to the centrality of logistics and the loss of crucial U.S. air support. These analyses reflected a misunderstanding of what happened. The collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) was not due to technical issues; it fell to pieces for political reasons. No amount of technical assistance or better-targeted logistical support would have sustained this fighting force, because these soldiers believed they had nothing left to fight for.

The Afghan state collapsed because it lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the people. The sources of this legitimacy crisis were multiple and interwoven. First, the 2004 Constitution created a system of governance that provided Afghan citizens with few opportunities to participate in or have any meaningful oversight of their government. As a result, the gap between the rhetoric of the U.S. intervention and citizens' realities widened with each passing year." (Murtazashvili, 2022) Corruption is a factor to lose support from the people but was Taliban kind of non-corrupted and was it offering a better democracy to the people and the army of Afghanistan? She is absolutely wright when criticizing

the west because of constitutional mistakes but Taliban wanted to go even further in centralizing the power, establishing sharia laws, infringing the women's rights in favor of empowering the men in the society as it was before and so on. So maybe they were corrupted but why they did not fight to keep the grip on power? The answer is that it was not the real reason that they (the west and Afghan government) failed to build the proper institution and proper liberal democracy, but the real reason was that neither the government nor the people were interested to establish such way of life because it was not theirs. Vice versa they would support any organized force any effective power that would fight against the establishment of order and values that was foreign for them.

The power that was established in Afghanistan was illegitimate in the eyes of the people mainly not because of corruption (previous Taliban government was not any better than the one supported by the West) but because it was not the result of internal consent, founding act or political upraise by the people and was not incorporated by the culture, but this power was institutionalized, bureaucratic and corrupt, established as a result of outside support. When the author says they had nothing to fight, she means that they did not have good liberal democratic institutions as a value for what the Afghan army and people would fight, but this is not the main reason of the collapse but the cultural reasons that was described just above. The author also talks about the effectiveness of local customary institutions for managing local issues according to their traditional values. This is the proof of what was discussed here. These institutions were effective because they were base on their own cultural and historical traditions, values and beliefs in other words these institutions represented their way of life as before the invasion. She also describes the dichotomy between local Afghan and modern democratic state values and mentions gender equality as an example. (Murtazashvili, 2022) Equality between men and woman in Afghan case meant a big shift in power division on the individual level which was detrimental to men that were before controlling everything and became the main force of resistance and asymmetric warfare against western forces and western values. Again the article does not try to judge the case and state what is right or wrong according to the international law, but attempts to explain causes of the conflict and its results that were connected to the culture and power and assess their importance. It also admits the importance of other factors involved in the conflict that are very often in the main focus for explaining the case and other factors such as culture and power relationships inside it lacks such attention. This relation and power division between men and women belongs to the individual level of analyses. The power on the individual level is regulated also by the culture and its customs/rules. Its definition is very useful to mentioned as well; Carlos J. Torelli and Sharon Shavitt offer several concepts about power: "We define power as "an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments." (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010) after this they hire other's conception connected to power: "Hofstede defined power distance as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a culture expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Power distance characterizes social systems and national cultures, rather than individuals, indexing shared cultural acceptance of the role of social hierarchy." (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010) To adjust this knowledge to the Afghan case one can say that it was unfair power division inside the society and The West was morally(and according to the human rights convention) obliged to provide at least some basics for the equality between man and woman to reach the peace based on fairness but in this case it was vice-versa. As it was described by the notion of "power distance" the existed division of power was accepted by the less powerful members (women) and they also did not have the ability/resources to change or challenge men's status inside the society, so the West could not rely on women's resistance as the internal political uprising for the legitimate change and maintenance of the new order. Speaking about the justice based peace, culture has also its own mode of justifying and legitimizing the power division inside it. This is explained by the cultural relativism also mentioned above meaning that "it is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the prism of one's own culture. It is an attempt to understand cultures on their own terms and appreciate them within their own contexts." (Sociology.Institute, 2024) but antagonistic notion of it is the ethnocentrism which means the following: "Ethnocentrism is a concept that sounds complex, but it's something many of us have encountered without even realizing it. It's the belief that one's own culture is superior to others." (Sociology.Institute, 2024) The wish of establishing modern state with the liberal values in Afghanistan was the example of ignoring the principles of cultural relativism ignoring the opportunity to understand their culture and its logic and adoption of ethnocentric attitudes to establish the universal liberal values that in reality were absolutely irrelevant in that cultural context. Depicting the situation that it was an asymmetric war between good guys (the West) and criminal terrorist groups is not totally accurate as well because these groups were supported not only in Afghanistan but in the whole Middle East which shares civilizational common values with the afghans and was involved in these asymmetric

war and in this regard this conflict can be described between different civilizations. That war started when U.S. demanded from Taliban to arrest Osama bin Laden a well-known terrorist wanted by U.S.A. Before he became the leader of "Al-Qaeda" he was in contact with the also popular militant organization "Muslim Brotherhood" which was also involve in the war against Soviet Union. This organization was founded in Egypt and had their own goals that were against U.S., Israel and almost all non-Muslim countries. They as well as Al-Qaeda and others were using religion as one of the pillar of the culture to organize resistance and in many cases were using extremely brutal methods of terror such as human-bombs to reach their goals that were political against the west. (History.com Editors, 2021)

One of the form of ethnocentrism or it may be called the continuation of it is "Cultural Appropriation" which is "Adoption of certain language, behaviour, clothing, or tradition belonging to a minority culture or social group by a dominant culture or group in a way that is exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical. An imbalance of power between the appropriator and the appropriated is a critical condition of the concept." (Kendal, 2024) Cultural appropriation often is viewed as a problem of the current major western powers in the world to depict kind of misleading picture of the nation, culture or civilization and in this way they are supporting creating various stereotypes; This misleading picture is common about the aspects of non-Western or non-white cultures. The main goal of such a behaviour is sometimes to legitimize Governments wrong decisions and actions connected to those cultures in the eyes of their inner societies.

2.1 The case of Ukraine

It started as the invasion in Crimea in 2014, then it was a proxy war between Russian-backed separatists and Ukraine. Since 2022 it is already an international military conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine has regained 54 percent of occupied territory by Russia and Russia currently controls 18 percent of Ukraine. "Since January 2022, Ukraine has received about $278 billion in aid, including $75 billion from the United States, though it warns of donor fatigue. Fighting and air strikes have inflicted over 30,000 civilian casualties, while 3.7 million people are internally displaced, and 6.5 million have fled Ukraine. 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance. " (Center for Preventive Action, 2024) Ukraine is a very different case from the Afghanistan here it is not the conflict of different cultures or values. Vice-versa their culture and values are very close to each-other and share many common values; this is more Geopolitical war with the notions such as spheres of influence, sea forces (The West) supporting Ukraine against land force Russia and its partner China. In Afghanistan Geopolitical aspect of the conflict was important as well but not as obvious as in Ukraine case. Instead of asymmetric war Ukraine counters Russia in land, sea and air military operations and despite the considerable advantage of Russia in weapon quantity and men power Ukraine managed to build up a fierce resistance already more than two years and half. They defend their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity to be able to decide what how to live and govern their country.

IV.   Conclusion

As a conclusion, culture is e very good guideline to explore how the power is organized and divided in the societies and for what kind of goals or values should it serve or protect. From the cultural point of view Afghan case can be described as the military and political conflict between different cultural groups fighting for establishment and keeping their way of life. Some of the players that were using illegal, asymmetrical warfare methods according to the international laws and conventions can be called terrorist, but it does not change or diminish the role of culture in this war. Again as it was many times mentioned above in this war geopolitical and geo-economic factors and accordingly the involvement of different geopolitical players was leading forces, but the goal of this article was to show the importance of cultural factors for creating a very long-lasting and successful resistance that is always very good to consider when one is planning the foreign policy that can be very costly for his/her country with limited success if designed improperly. The culture with its different pillars such as religion, customs and values can be a very effective base to construct the political ideology and organize a very long-lasting and effective resistance that can lead to the victory against very powerful and superior force. The hypotheses can be considered as proved and the goal of this article is reached because the research showed what kind of relationship exist between power and culture and how beneficial this knowledge can be for planning the foreign policy in the current and emerging multipolar world where the competition for power is very high that was not present during the unipolar moment of the international political system that encompasses the time period since the collapse of Soviet Union until 2017.

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