

Progress and Control: Positivism and the European Epistemological Hegemony¹

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Abstract. *This article focuses on the way in which European colonial powers tried to extend their political and territorial grip on their colonial empires by imposing and actively promoting the cultural imperatives of European modernity. In particular we try to understand how positivism became an indispensable tool for the propagation and also legitimatization of their hegemonic project. The attention we give to the Islamic world ensures that our analysis is both historically and culturally grounded in a civilization that received the full force of the European modern narratives of progress and development. In our opinion positivism and its implicit depreciative orientalist discourse managed to reset the mindset of both political elites and intelligentsia convincing them of the urgency of adopting defensive modernization programs. From this perspective, in this paper we will try to examine how positivism fortified the belief in the superiority of Western civilization and how this discourse fueled colonialist mentalities. In the same time we will take a closer look at the limits of the positivist project by taking into account the post-positivist stance and their emphasis on culture, localism and historical context.*

Keywords: *Epistemology, Positivism, European cultural hegemony, Islam, Orientalism, Multiple Modernities.*

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Introduction

The traumatic experience of the twentieth century (see Badiou, 2007) has made researchers more conscious about the need to develop viable strategies in order to properly understand how the intricate mechanism of civilizational dialogue functions, in all its potentially conflictual stances, be they cultural, religious, demographic or ideological/institutional, and more precisely, how should such fierce civilizational contention be sublimated into stability or, at least, the intensity of its occurrences mitigated. To this end, scholars started to envision *conflict* as a scientific concept constructed in the theoretical debates that have been generated by the multiple, and indeed contradictory discourses and narratives which surrounds it. The complexity of *conflict* as a concept derives from the intricate relationship created between its fundamental constitutive elements. These elements, such as culture, religion, politics, geography or psychology demand a multidisciplinary approach in this demarche of constructing an explanatory theory of cultural interactions and conflicts between different cultures. Having in mind this heterogeneous nature of human reality, we can hardly find an exhaustive and all-encompassing understanding of it. Researchers, according to their fields of study, have each attempted to bestow their very own specific interpretation of human reality; for instance, psychologists have insisted on the relation between the conscious and unconscious, the Freudian school of thought being of major importance as an interpretational tool of human behavior (Brunner, 1995). Others have insisted on the cultural aspects that shape the nature and define our relationship with each other (the culturalist school). Yet another school of thought has insisted on the economical dimension in cultural interactions (Ryan, 1995).

The development of modern sociology and psychology has brought a new understanding on human behavior from a positivistic standpoint. The logical and mathematical manipulation of data was became the only true mechanism for understanding and addressing social phenomena. Human behavior and human interaction were now to be envisioned as a mathematical equation, an impersonal and abstract relation between numbers (Putnam, 1975). In this *brave new world*² of technology and computational perspectives, scholars have enlarged their understanding of reality by blindly accepting the output resulted from the huge amount of data that was to be processed by computers. These materialistic perspectives, enforced by their radical positivistic methodological reflexes, have consequently become normative in studying and understanding human societies. Because their focus has been, at

2 To some extent, the analogy we make to the utopian universe of Aldous Huxley's book, *Brave New World* (1932), is intentional and, in our opinion, sheds another light on the impersonal data-collection and date-processing based methodologies which have now become a standard across the social sciences.

least in their initial phases on native European societies, results and methodologies that were naturally evolved in a European ambience assumed a more or less paradigmatic standing.

The imposition of such theories worldwide, in an age marked by the hegemony of the mighty European civilization, would set the roots for decades of misunderstanding, and eventually conflict between the West and the rest of the world. The western scientific obsession rooted in a largely secularized environment would, in time, give birth to serious preconceptions about societies unwilling or unprepared to accept this holistic perspective of confidence in progress, science and rationalism. In the same time it created a sort of blindness towards social and cultural phenomena rooted in the pre modern past, embedded by patriarchal symbols and spiritual itineraries. Thus, concealed and misled by their methodological hegemony, many Western scholars created a simplistic and schematically flawed picture of the different human societies characteristic to other civilizations. What they failed to notice was that although these societies were developing in the shadow of the multiple manifestations which European modernity has assumed in various specific civilizational and social contexts, they were still retaining a surprisingly high degree of pre-modern traits. After all, it was in exactly in such confident circumstances that the modernization theory, one of the most comprehensive that ever took sway across the field of social sciences, crumbled and was largely disregarded after its blunt failures became evident in the second half of the 20th century. Up to that moment, in a true positivistic fashion, non-western societies were believed to follow the same Euro-Atlantic pattern of rationalization and industrial convergence (see Kaya, 2004; Halpern, 1963). Daniel Lerner for example believed that the traditional Islamic society was heading towards dissolution, because most Muslims found it unappealing to continue living in its boundaries. The evident choice in this context of continuous societal and institutional change and rearrangement under the aegis of European modernity was between “Mecca or mechanization” (Lerner, 1958: 405). Nevertheless, as time proved, that long awaited paradise of technological and industrial convergence doubled by the rearrangement of social patterns, that was supposed to swipe the cultural remnants of the past, clearly deposing the arbitrary dominion of tradition, was failing to materialize.

The failure of the modernization theory, and consequently of the entire inventory of methodological and epistemological positivistic certitudes that accompanied this sociological discourse, represented a clear disregard for European modernity, more specifically a sound defeat of the former metropolis cultural hegemony. The periphery was now challenging the center by selectively adopting parts of its modern experience, while disregarding others, and using tradition as a means of accommodating and legitimizing innovations and change in archaic social contexts (Salvatore, 2010). This was hardly a monochromatic image of failure, as some western scholars

would imply by relying on what they chose to term as „poor socio-cultural indicators of modernity“ (Hunter, 2005:1-18; see Lewis, 2002). True enough, such data was compelling, and supplemented an extensive inventory of numerous regional malaises (Bellin, 2004: 139-141), though it could hardly account for the wide range of transformations that were reshaping the Muslim world. In order to fully understand these changes, as well as the failure of positivistic entrenched methodologies, we need to depart ourselves from the wide range of epistemological impulses generated by the austerity of an old scholarly *Orientalist* tradition. Thus, the global modern panorama that emerges lacks, in our opinion, both fluency and linearity, portraying instead an image where different societies show great institutional specificity and diversity based on particular intrinsic ideological premises and cultural dynamics. This is largely due to the conflictual and hegemonic characteristic of European modernity which, as S. N. Eisenstadt states, “challenged the symbolic and institutional premises of those societies that were incorporated into it, calling for responses from within them, opening up new options and possibilities” (Eisenstadt, 1987: 1-12; 5).

By resorting to the multiple modernization theses (its liberating inclusive perspective on the global specific civilizational nature of modernity) we attempt to bypass the sterile hegemony of positivism, while also taking into account the importance of contextual factors and elements of local specificity in the articulation of indigenous narratives of modernity. We also want to portray the complex ways in which *orientalist* tradition, fuelled by European perspectives on progress and indeed colonial experiences, placed a depreciative Western view on Islam and the Muslim civilization. At a local level, this depreciative view corroborated with Europe’s impressive military and economic achievements, instilled on Muslim political elites a desire to emulate and appropriate the elements which appeared to give success to Western powers. In supporting such measures, and with the complete devotion of both Muslim political rulers and intelligentsia, the European model of modernity with its managed to hijack for two centuries the development of a specific form of Islamic modernity.

We will also focus on the European obsession with progress and how the idea of progress prepared the way for holistic European epistemologies such as positivism. Our aim is to emphasize on the need to find a new way of understanding societies built on different fundamentals than that of the western European predicaments. We suggest that the way in which Europeans see the conflict between civilizations is rooted in the belief of continuous and uninterrupted progress, in the conviction that the European society is the culmination of this progress. From this perspective, positivism is a discourse that only helps the spread and cementation of a global discourse that aims for hegemony, colonialism being only an element of a mindset faithful in its own superiority. Our paper will also point out to the limits of positivism examined by the post-positivist scholars broadening the picture of human society

by taking into account contextual interpretations of modernity, shaped by specific cultures – taking by this a closer look at the validity of multiple modernity theory.

Positivistic Certitudes: The Advent of Progress

Islam and its civilization are hardly modern discoveries for the western European mind. For centuries Islam and its armies played the ultimate role of alterity (otherness) for the nascent European civilization. It was its enemy *par excellence*, not only in military or commercial terms but more dangerously in religious ones. Beginning with VIIth AD, Christianity and its professed universalism were finding themselves challenged and superseded by a new Middle Eastern Abrahamic religion. Indeed Christianity had always faced challenges, and it remained even after its *Constantinian* incorporation in the state apparatus (Cox, 2009: 5), a religion accustomed to adversity. Still, the challenge posed by Islam went beyond anything Christianity had ever encountered. Despite its humble beginnings, the religion which once sought shelter in the Arabian city of Medina was at the beginning of the XVIth commanding the allegiance of most of the known world. Historian Marshall Hodgson aptly suggests that, seen from outside at this point, Islam was in no case falling short of its universalist claims (Hodgson, 1993: 97). It wasn't only the huge geographical expansion, at times ranging from Indonesia to the heart of Central Europe, which gave credibility and confidence to both Islam and its adherents, but rather the impressive degree of cohesion that the Islamic civilization was able to instill upon its dominion (Stearns, 2007: 31-34).

Except for the brief period of the Crusades, which can never be equated to a proto-colonial European endeavor as Amin Maalouf suggests (see Maalouf, 1984), Christianity has always been on the defensive whenever it was forced to militarily confront the Islamic civilization. On the other hand, it can be argued that it was exactly this unabated aggression, starting with the 7th century and advancing up to the dawn of the modern age, which solidified the identity and shared civilizational experience that would later materialize into the European civilization. In this regard, historian Franco Cardini considered that Islam acted as a "violent midwife" to the nascent Western European civilization (Cardini, 1999: 3).

The old *status quo* between Islam and Christianity abruptly came to an end in 1683, when the Ottoman armies tried for the second time to conquer Vienna. Despite the resounding disaster and the following territorial losses which it implied, this was still a defeat that could be accepted by the Muslims because it was framed in religious terms. After all, the Polish King Jan III Sobieski declared after the forces of the Holy League destroyed the Ottoman Vizier's Kara Mustafa Pasha's siege on the Hapsburg imperial capital, that it was God who had won the day (Lane-Poole, 1893: 207-227). The situation changed dramatically, a century later, when Napoleon Bonaparte was obliterating in the Battle of the Pyramids the Egyptian Mamluk army.

What must have been a very troubling development for Muslims, apart from the defeat in itself, was that the representative of the French Directorate was apparently not acting on religious motivations. In fact, the scientific mission that accompanied his expeditionary force hoped to crack the hieroglyphs in order to question biblical chronology (Cavaliero, 2010: 127-130).

Jan III Sobieski was, by all accounts, a representative of the old Europe, that *Civitas Christiana* and his action, as well as those of his contemporaries, were circumscribed to a bi-dimensional religious struggle. On the other hand, the future French Emperor (ironically) was the representative of the new modern Europe, for which past religious struggles were now becoming irrelevant. Medieval Islam, with its spiritual and imperial outlook, could make sense of a Christian Europe, or *Christendom*, but it could hardly muster any answer to a modern Europe which started to define itself less and less in spiritual terms. The shock induced by the new assertive modern Europe was to shaken the very basis of Muslims perception for which, as Bernard Lewis assures us, "...Islam itself was indeed coterminous with civilization, and beyond its borders there were only barbarians and infidels" (Lewis, 2002: 3).

At the basis of this new assertive behavior that Europe starts displaying, lays a civilizational confidence that is tremendously influence by the specifically Western idea of progress. Robert A. Nisbet point out that progress is a concept that is strongly and uniquely embedded in the psyche of Western civilization. Up to the 20th century, when its triumphalist impetus lost its grip both on Western as well as on other civilizations that were until then influenced by the categories of Euro-Atlantic modernity, progress was considered as one of the major cultural and civilizational landmarks of Western (European) identity. Identifiable in the earliest intellectual achievements of the Greco-Roman world, the idea of progress continued to develop in the ambience of early Christian thought, when Greek ideas of growth were fused to the Jewish heritage of sacred history. The vision that prevailed was that of a world that was striving and also evolving towards its final chapter, while remaining centrally entangled between the contradictions of divine predestination and its immanent drives of self-realization (see Nisbet, 2009; Nisbet, 1979: 7-37)

The famous *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, which shattered the literary certitudes of the *Académie Française* at the end of 17th century, moved the idea of progress from Christian inspired intellectual instances, heavily dependent on Augustinian and Joachimian thought, into its rather tormented modern(secular) existence (de Benoist, 2002:55-62). Subsequently, through the Enlightened thinkers, the history of mankind stopped following a pattern of inescapable decrepitude, and acquired a new outline defined by a relentless belief in the realization of the highest human potentials. To some extent, some of the Christian messianic brushes that fueled Medieval conceptions of progress, were quickly drawn to placate a new, at the time foreseeable, golden epoch of humanity. Achieving it though would require

the relentless process of accumulation, advance and development of science, education and arts, of material progress, and ultimately the complete discarding of past epochs' social and cultural remnants. Politically, the blessings of this "positive and scientific age" of human progress would not stand without its necessary placement under the aegis of the political state, considered by many to be the most perfect accomplishment of progress in history (Nisbet, 1979: 24-7).

Still, on a cultural level, this belief in a process of irreversible changes towards improvement, of cumulative and imperturbable progress, was taken at face value and transformed during the 19th century into a secular Western religion, which, in part at least, managed to replace the receding Christian faith. English writer Andrew Norman Wilson, in his seminal book, *The Victorians*, manages to catch a glimpse of this new generation and its historically conscious worldview which strongly believed that "...it was different, that its achievements, its metaphysical self-understanding, marked it out from anything which had gone before..." (Wilson, 2003:98-99). Progress was elevated to a new secular religion, and as Ronald Wright notes, was enforced in an anthropological sense by its own mythology, eventually being used as a cultural map to navigate through time/history, and on a larger scale to evaluate other civilizations that the expanding European world was encountering (Wright, 2005: 4-5).

European Colonial Modernity and the Discursive Subtleties of Orientalism

Out of all the civilizations that during the 19th century became the focus and subject of what can be termed as European colonial modernity, none received the full force of the secular religion of progress like the one built upon the Islamic revelation. European perception on Islamic civilization largely depicts the manner in which Europe was seeing itself in relation to other, more powerful or, during its modern success, weaker civilizations. During the Renaissance period a mixed feeling of fear, inferiority and true admiration towards the Islamic world triggered the European inquisitive humanistic interest to focus on the philological study of Arabic sources. While these studies began under different agendas, having initially religious motivations, the mass of European knowledge about the Orient, accumulated enough momentum to insure the establishment of a new discipline in itself later called *Orientalism* (Lewis, 1993: 101; 14; Hoepfner and Cruz, 1999: 71-72). Later on, when the European perspective was transformed by a secularized modern optic, the scholarly discourse on Islam became permeated by new conceptual categories which, though not entirely divorced from earlier spiritual preconceptions, relegated Islam, and the Islamic civilization to the unjust status of a study object. A study object that was now becoming an active part, though a silent one in the ever-developing methodological and epistemological inventory of European nascent social sciences.

In order to understand this modern development it is of great use to analyze the extremely influential work of American cultural critic Edward Said, *Orientalism*. His theorization of the concept of *orientalism* continues to be considered as an analytical standard when approaching such a cultural and intellectually fluid area of research. For E. Said, *orientalism* represents the enormous corpus of European writings and knowledge concerning the Orient (*Islam*), which despite its multiple levels of complexity and ambivalence, acted as a medium through which all associated with the East was being evaluated and understood. At its most basic form, Orientalism operated by navigating the patterns of a profound dichotomy between a European civilization defined in the Enlightened modern positivistic terms of progress, reason, secularity and an external *Oriental world* (civilization) which was still clinging to mysticism, patrimonialism and stagnation. This view, seconded by the scholarly authority that it commanded and the knowledge it bestowed upon its students, placed the West and the westerner in particular, on a position of domination and superiority when faced with the realities of the Eastern world.

Once the colonial project was well on its way, European Orientalism became a necessary tool in the arsenal of any self-conscious colonial administrator. His task would have been made easy by the structure of Orientalist knowledge, which was organized and transformed into a systemized and efficient pedagogical structure under the guidance of linguists and orientalists such as Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan (see Said, 1979). It was of little importance that this discourse was ultimately subjecting entire cultures and civilizations to a reductionist exercise in which the elements that were too complicated or complex to be understood, fell victim to its key selective methodology. The symbiotic relationship that occurred between orientalism and colonial endeavors is best illustrated by the enormous quantity of works that were produced during the 19th century and early 20th century. Without any doubt this relationship was extremely beneficial to both their narrative and practical manifestations, most likely because of the extremely coordinated way in which both discourses and practices were complementing each other. The colonial could not rule the colonized without the power given to him by the orientalist knowledge and the methodological certainty. Discourse, knowledge and practice offered to the European mind the comfort of superiority, while also exonerating its shadier motives and actions.

The impact of this colonial-orientalist perspective was not reduced to the cultural and civilizational outlook that produced them, but went far beyond rooting itself in the discourse and views of the indigenous intellectual elite. From here, this intellectual discourse filled with the vast array of colonial argumentation, permeated in times both political and social spheres, inducing a motivation and a societal ideal that was actually connected to European social ideals. Thus in their attempt to fend off colonial encroachment, first the indigenous religious intelligentsia and

then the political elites were forced to transform themselves into the mouthpiece of modernization and progress.

Positivism as a Hegemonic Discourse

Understanding the Middle Eastern mind, in our case the Islamic psyche, necessitates a solid process of analysis. In recent decades, western scholars have opted for a mainstream realist, or liberal approach in schematizing and explaining the "Islamic behavior". As for the results of these academically directions, one might say they oversimplify realities and impose a western-centric perspective. Thus, to have a more authentic picture on the Islamic World we should use a constructivist approach that deals with categories such as culture, religion and identity (Amir-tav, Buzan, 2010: 174). In our view we understand as appropriate for our goals a methodological perspective that can be circumscribed to a post-positivist direction. Thus, we find it useful to follow a perspective that can illustrate the multiplicity of layers that form what is perceived as the "Muslim thought". In this respect we try to overcome the positivist perspective which is a reduction to the observable and the measurable. Comte's aim was to develop a science based on the methods of the natural sciences, namely observation. Its purpose was to reveal the "evolutionary causal laws" that explained observable phenomena". In Comte's view, "positive science was a distinct third stage in the development of knowledge, which progressed first from theological to metaphysical knowledge and then to positivist knowledge. For him the sciences are hierarchically arranged, "with mathematics at the base and sociology at the top, and thought that each of the sciences passed through the three stages of knowledge" (Smith, Both, Zalewski, 2005: 14).

Positivism was influential for intellectuals such as Marx, Engels or Durkheim shaping their materialistic perspective on human society and human progress. Following this direction, in the 1920's emerged the so called Vienna Circle, or second school of positivism (Logical Positivism). The central idea of the members of this circle was that science was the only true form of knowledge and that there was nothing that could be known outside of what could be known scientifically. For them moral and aesthetic statements were seen as cognitively meaningless since they could not be in principle verified or falsified by experience. By this, human society was put under the dominance of science and every aspect of human life had to be validated thru scientific inquiry. The faith in progress, science and technology changed the overall perception of human society that was becoming more and more technologized.

Following the "human theory of causation", articulated by the Vienna Circle "the idea that establishing a causal relationship is a matter of discovering the invariant temporal relationship between observed events" the view that the physical world was one which could be accurately observed prevailed. From this perspective positiv-

ism is a methodological scheme that combines naturalism with a belief in regularities, emphasizing a strict empiricist epistemology committed to a radical objectivism concerned with the relationship between theory and evidence. In this respect our knowledge of the world is based on brute evidence (Smith, Both, Zalewski, 2005: 15-16). This secular faith in progress believed with fervor in its exceptionality and ultimate rightness. The technological advancement of the West was seen as a result of a European cultural model that was supposed to be superior to other civilizational models. According to this vision, in order to achieve and sustain progress one had to adhere to this European model of civilization, one had to westernize. Going hand in hand with colonialism, European epistemologies entangled and absorbed cultural spaces that were perceived as marginal, integrating them into a broader cultural system that was aiming for the universal. Positivism as a holistic theory is precisely the result of this striving for the universal so characteristic for the European civilization. In the positivist paradigm, reality is reduced to what is quantifiable, the complex phenomena of human life being understood as a mathematical algorithm, always repeating it according to rules that are unchangeable and eternal. Through positivism the West tried to build a theoretical scheme that would bring the ultimate explanation to social phenomena, to human life as a whole. This epistemological direction had the assumption to be the culmination of a process of cumulative knowledge that found its best form in positivism. By fostering this "technical" superiority of its scheme based on logic and reason, positivism disowned all other assumptions and theories about human being. From a certain point of view, positivism was meant to be the triumph of occidental thought, a way of ending history and establishing a universal framework in which all humanity would function. This new universal reality had to be purged by all other cultural influences that were considered obsolete for this grandiose project. The Islamic culture and Muslim identities were seen as an impediment for the implementation of progressist policies.

The abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924 by Mustafa Kemal, followed by the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and the rise of Arab nationalism (with a very secular agenda) represented strong signals that the Muslim world was at this point completely adopting the western political narratives of modernity. Though projects of European emulation were by all accounts impressive, still most Muslim societies were already accustomed to one version or another of the different modernization programs that the Muslim leaders were attempting since the first decades of the 19th century. In this regard the most successful rulers were by far the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (1785-839) and his vassal and later great adversary, Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769-1849) of Egypt. Both the Ottoman Sultan and the founder of the Egyptian Khedivate can be credited with the first comprehensive attempts at modernization, and although their stance was defensive, they were trying to retain as much of the indigenous culture as possible.

If the colonial system integrated the Muslim civilization in the global market, positivism and European epistemologies in general colonized the intellectual world as well, they created local intellectuals committed to westernization and standardization with the aim of progress. But what seemed to be going without doubt in the direction of westernization ended in the years following the Second World War in the turmoil of an identitarian crisis. The rise of radical Islam as a response to western ideologies that ruled the Muslim World changed the political realities and the expectations of the Muslim communities. Western ideologies were little by little perceived as tools of subduing the World to colonialist interests. In time it was clear that the positivist utopia was meeting with new challenges and that reality was more complex than the rigid schemes of this ideology. Even in the European context, scholars tried to gain a deeper understanding of the elements and forces that shape human reality so that modernity could be understood also from different perspectives. In this way post-positivism or the multiple modernity theory emerged as dissident discourses that challenged the hegemony and arrogance of positivism.

Post-positivism, a Critical Perspective on *Westernism*

Post-positivism emerged from the splitters of positivism raising the problematic of knowledge. Handling with our perspectives on knowledge, exploring our limitations towards the knowable. Scholars such as Kuhn, Feyerabend, Hanson or Toulmin have highlighted the relationship between scientific knowledge and historical contexts. For them knowledge is historically and socially conditioned so that its nature is not absolute (Francese, 2009: 15-17). As Jung stated in his *“Psychological Types”*, “An intellectual formula never has been and never will be discovered which could embrace the manifold possibilities of life” (Jung, 1921: 437).

For this “historical relativists”, every historical manifestation has its own sets of values and ways of dealing with knowledge, its own epistemology. Michel Foucault follows Kuhn in assuming that there are unnumbered discursive regimes “each supported by its own correlated matrix of practices”, “each regime includes its own distinctive objects of inquiry, its own criteria of *well-formedness* for statements admitted to candidacy for truth and falsity, its own procedures for generating, storing, and arranging data, its own institutional sanctions and matrices” (Alvesson, Skoldberg: 2009).

Foucault understands this phenomenon of multiplicity of knowledge from the perspective of power introducing the concept of power/knowledge. For Foucault power is not an institution as it is rather “a complex strategical situation in a particular society”. He argues that power relations and scientific discourses mutually constitute one another and power/ knowledge is a knot that is not meant to be unraveled. Foucault has an “ascending analysis of power”, analyzing the “infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own

techniques and tactics" that are integrated "by ever more general mechanisms and forms of global domination" (Foucault, 1980: 98-99).

Power is the "production of instruments" that allows for the production of knowledge with the desire to control (Foucault, 1980:102). Knowledge produced by power utilizes concepts of knowledge as tools for its circulation in the social body. Power is a network of perpetual changing forces that compete and collide, in the struggle for hegemony. In the social system there is a multiplicity of forces, each of them affected by interchangeable roles, either active or reactive "active in the way they affect and passive in the way they are being affected" (Mureşan, 2005: 164). The work of Michel Foucault is important for political science because it concerns the way in which the "new truth" and social practices emerge in the context of power relations. For him, power relations, struggle for a globalistic, total discourse creating „subjugated knowledges“, we are as he says „subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth“. Multiple truths compete for hegemony (Foucault, 1980: 93).

In this respect Foucault can be related with Antonio Gramsci and his concept of *hegemonia* or *hegemony* which is closely linked the intellectual leadership, the sources of knowledge. In his prison writings, Gramsci often portraits *hegemony* as a moral, intellectual leadership that seeks political power. He sees the supremacy of a social group either as a manifestation of "domination", which is realized through the coercive organs of the state, or "consent" of an intellectual and moral leadership, exercised through the institutions of civil society, the ensemble of educational, religious and associational institutions. This makes Giuseppe Tamburrano claim that consent, as understood by Gramsci, is an "expression ... of intellectual and moral direction through which the masses feel permanently tied to the ideology and political leadership of the State as the expression of their beliefs and aspiration" (Femia, 1981: 42).

For Gramsci "philosophy is an intrinsic part of social activity" (Adamson, 1980: 169). He sees the political change in terms of a "dialectical interaction between organic intellectuals and ordinary people" (Adamson, 1980: 173). Gramsci conceptualizes education as a collective action that creates an "intellectual and moral bloc". When he looked to the larger implications of such a bloc, mainly to its capacity to create historical events, Gramsci referred to it as a "historical bloc" (Gramsci, 1971: 168). The "historical bloc" as an effect of social interactions and consent between various segments of society brought together by intellectual formulation is the tool by which hegemony can be established. The historical bloc in the Gramscian sense is a "social ensemble involving dominant strata and a social base beyond the ruling group, and in which one group exercises leadership and imposes its project through the consent of those drawn into the bloc" (Robinson, 2005: 1-16).

Both Gramsci and Foucault see the role of intellectuals in power formation as quintessential. The relation between power and knowledge produces the "histori-

cal blocs” that facilitate the formulation of hegemony. For Gramsci hegemony is not a static concept “but a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop” (Adamson, 1980: 174). Hegemony encompasses elements of the particular that convey for the universal. Robert Cox stresses the fact that „hegemony is in its beginnings an outward expansion of the internal (national) established by a dominant social class...the culture, the technology associated with this national hegemony become patterns for emulation abroad” (Cox, 1996: 137). In this vision of the trajectory of hegemony we meet again Foucault. This is very clearly explained by Wolfgang Detel, who argues that there can be no “power form or global power structure without local power relations. Historically, power never occurs in a space without order, but the social orders and structures are always tied to their actualization by means of local power relations. Epistemically it seems to be clear that the global apparatus “dispositive” can be ‘derived’ from local forms of power” (Detel, 2005: 21).

From this perspective, positivism is a local, European discourse created by the intellectual class. The logical apparatus and clear structure of positivism as a theoretical framework for explaining the world, created the circumstances for the articulation of hegemonies that strives for broader and broader spaces of dominance. Positivism becomes a “technological” discourse, the ideas of progress and modernization being fundamental for the understanding of western European thought and the relationship between them and colonialism. According to Arthur Bordier the conceptualization of French colonial politics is based on the determinism of science – because science provided the rational model of a productive colonial model (Sefa Dei, Kempf, 2008: 28). Alexis de Tocqueville for example, in his *Travail sur l’Algérie* written in 1841, was diligently one can say almost scientifically developing, what can only be described as a French colonial catechism in Algeria. The focus of his work was entirely on the efficiency and success of the French colonial enterprise, hardly showing any sign for those whose lives were destroyed by the conflict between the French forces and those of Abd al-Qadir (de Tocqueville, 1841 [2002]).

This rational model was meant to be exported and implemented all over the World as the expression of a civilization that had to become universal and unchallenged. As a culmination of progress, positivism was meant to replace all other existing paradigms, from this perspective, the Muslim civilization had to be seen as a thing of the past. The progressist obsession with efficiency and technologization had no time for metaphysics or religion, stages of history that had to be overcome. But the outcome of history, at least in the Muslim World challenged directly the core of positivism, nowadays Arab states value Islam as an important identitarian element – after decades of Kemalist policies modern Turkey experiences the revival of Islamic values cherished by a society for which (at least for a numerous segment)

secularism is no longer an option. In this context scholars need to acknowledge the fluid nature of human society and the importance of culture in defining political mentalities.

Conclusion

Throughout history, every political system had to develop a coherent discourse in order to mobilize and strengthen the social body that was meant to be used for its own goals. The nature of these political discourses has to be understood from an utilitarian point of view, because politics are based on interest and pragmatical goals. From this perspective we can argue that every discourse used by politics is basically meant to be a tool that is employed to fulfill carefully planned agendas. In order to benefit from these discursive tools the political elite had to rely on intellectuals, on the so called intelligentsia that has a crucial role in formulating the ideologies that sustain power. We might say that “the metaphysical idea of the world produced by a certain epoch has the same structure as the form of its unquestioned political organization” (Schmitt, Hoetzel, Ward, 2008: 6). As a result, the relationship between the political and the intellectual life is a knot that can’t be unbound. By this we can state that positivism is as well an intellectual formulation that can’t be and shouldn’t be seen outside the goals and interest of the political. In our article we tried to elaborate on how this discourse legitimized the colonialist actions of the western political powers. Even if at a basic level positivism wasn’t meant for this clear purpose, its circulation and usage in the public sphere can’t be understood without the role played by politics. The rise of *orientalism*, the large corpus of knowledge and practice that the West thought it managed to amass on the Orient (Islam), provided the western powers with a moral alibi for their colonial undertakings. Positivism and orientalism see the other as stacked in a backward historical phase that can be only overcome by applying the principles of rationality, secularism and technologization. Playing on the excuse of implementing his more successful civilizational model, the West fortified its position of dominance and mastery over the *other*. The aim of our article was to show the foundations of the post-positivist critique on positivism and the intellectual trajectories that can develop from this debate, namely a reshaped image of the global political and cultural landscape that should be understood as a multipolar environment with endless epistemological possibilities. The rise of holistic epistemologies, such as positivism describes in fact a political reality that strives for hegemony, a state that is ephemeral because of the fluid nature of human societies. From this perspective we have to be open to new interpretations and to new epistemologies that follow the political realities of our world.

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