

Part III

Sociology in (Post-)Authoritarian
Context

Post-colonialism vs Post-authoritarianism: The Arab World and Latin America in Comparative Perspective

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There is a tendency in Arab media and scholarly work to blame Arab intellectuals for failing to accompany the Arab uprisings (2011 on) and guide their public and social movements. In this chapter, I challenge this tendency and argue that extensive debates have indeed been raised through scholarly knowledge production and through mass media, especially newspapers and TV programs. The issue for me is, rather, the failure of certain academic and public intellectual schools of thought, including those associated with what I call ‘the post-colonial anti-imperialist left’.

By focusing on scholarly work, I will argue that the intersection between the social sciences and post-colonial studies is not without problems, and reflects a crisis among the Arab left which espouses post-colonialism as a singular perspective, and whose members distort it while projecting it into the Arab context. I will highlight two features of the Arab left: firstly, the tendency to be excessively anti-imperialist, and secondly, being anti-Western. Then, I will suggest that this post-colonial approach should be complemented by a post-authoritarian approach. While this chapter will focus on the debates in the Arab World, it will conduct some comparison with Latin America.

One can currently witness a wide and heated discussion all over the world. Perhaps the most violent moment (verbally) can be depicted in the debate between Slavoj Žižek, Walter Dignolo and Hamid Dabashi. This latter declares in his *Can Non-Europeans Think?* the independence, not just from the condition of post-coloniality, but from the limited and now exhausted epistemics it had historically occasioned. He deplores the fact that he doubts whether ‘European philosophers can actually read something [from the non-Europeans] and learn from it – rather than assimilate it back into what they already know’ (Dabashi, 2015).

Post-colonial Debate

Post-colonialism is a theory and praxis that has been, since its inception in the 1960s through the works of scholars including Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, riven with debate and controversy. One major criticism has been the way this trend has generated and reinforced binary categories such as tradition/modernity, East/West, rational/irrational, English language/vernacular language, etc. For others, such as Sadeq Jalal al-Azem and Mahdi Amel from the Arab world, this theory overemphasises the significance of the cultural at the expense of the economic. As Nash et al. (2013) argue: ‘The tradition of post-colonial thinking that follows after [its] thinkers, however, has sought to theorise the epistemological, psychological and ideological inside western domination, thereby redeeming or reclaiming a version of autonomy rather than overcoming the structures of global capitalism.’

These two very different theoretical orientations and political agendas have become sources of conflict and contention in worldwide debates but also in the Arab World and Latin America.

For Latin America, the debate was more important with different theorization. Aníbal Quijano (Peruvian sociologist), Walter D Mignolo (Argentinian sociologist) and Enrique Dussel (Argentinian philosopher) are the first to theorize the concept of coloniality, followed by Edgardo Lander (Venezuelan sociologist). They have been working within the modernity/coloniality perspective; the experience of modernity has meant something radically different for the North and the South.

For Aníbal Quijano, the process of political independence without a social revolution is behind the basic current patterns of the coloniality of power. In the same vein, Mignolo argues that the world is today characterized by a ‘colonial matrix of control’ that was established with modernity and continues in our present moment. Coloniality is therefore an inherent part of modernity, understood as a historical era. Mignolo spells out the three levels of the logic of coloniality: the coloniality of power, of either political or economic structures; the coloniality of knowledge, which refers to epistemology, philosophy, science and language; and the coloniality of being, which makes reference to subjectivity, such as perceptions on gender roles and sexuality.

Concerning Dussel, in his philosophy of liberation, he does not simply criticize the Eurocentrism but he provides an expansive theory that encompasses domination in the domains of gender/sexuality, pedagogy, religion

and economics (Kohn and McBride, 2011: 131). He outlines an articulation of two concepts: the totalizing totality as the violence assimilation of anything alien. Given Dussel focuses on European conquest of Americas as a defining moment of modernity, it is clear that Western colonialism is the paradigmatic illustration of the logic of totality. Externality is the other concept which means “the ambit whence the other persons, as free and not conditioned by one’s one system and not part of one’s own world, reveals themselves”. For him, Latin America is in the position of externality vis a vis the centers of economic and culture American-European power, and the poor in Third world is in the position to challenge the view that capitalism, colonialism and globalization are beneficial to all parties in these hierarchical relationships. (Kohn and McBride 2011, 132) He however grants epistemic privilege to the oppressed. Wendy Brown (2001) suggests that moralized identity politics can be a form of resentment that instrumentalizes powerlessness of dispossession in an effort to assume a moral superiority.

Regarding Edgardo Lander (in his edited book [1993] with other contributors), he played an instrumental role, not only criticizing Eurocentrism and orientalism, but rather discussing the role social sciences should have concerning women, nature, power and the economy.

While the four authors provide amazing insights on how we need to inform our current analysis with the impact of the historical colonial processes, any attempt to consider their approach as a solo perspective will fail to account for the current dynamics. For instance, if we know after Edgardo Lander (2013) that many Venezuelan NGOs are funded by US, how much will this ‘colonial-eurocentered grammar of politics’ inform us about the social and political dynamics of Venezuela today, rather than the real internal crisis of the current Venezuelan regime?

More recently, I found the edited volume of *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Morana et al., 2008) extremely interesting, as it investigates the regional roots of critical thinking in Latin America and offers acute critiques to the applicability of post-colonial theory in Latin America, with articles from sociology, literary criticism, philosophy, and history. Precious post-colonial concepts, such as coloniality, colonial difference, Occidentalism, and dependency are defined and analyzed in relation to modernity, postmodernism, and globalization. Almost all the contributors fail to bring the post-colonial debate into the present, much less into the future. This is one of the exceptions to that discussion of secularism as a Eurocentric category which I found very relevant to today’s discussion of religion and religiosity. The major contributions

to post-colonial theory were made in the 1980s and 1990s and very few concerned Latin America. In any case there are serious limitations of the capacity of post-colonial theory to inform and reflect grassroots movements in today's globalized world.

In this section, I will make several criticisms of post-colonial metamorphoses. I will provide a critique of post-colonial scholars and knowledge producers that overstate the role of the imperialism and generate an oppositional binary with the West.

Anti-imperialist and Conspiratorial Scholars

Although I agree with Prabhat Patnaik (2011) that imperialism has not become an obsolete concept, and has some meaning in current life, its reality has nonetheless metamorphosed and cannot be understood as a simple political and economic domination of the imperial power over the rest of the world – by this I mean to argue that imperialism has lost its hegemony, as evidenced by the importance of the role of the state (Harvey, 2005) and the salience of culture and transnational corporation that can be captured by the notion of empire (Hardt and Negri, 2001). When scrutinizing the relevance of the concept of imperialism to understand the crisis of Arab post-uprisings, it is evident that the influential powers are not only the classical imperial powers, but also Iran, Gulf monarchies and Turkey. They are all seeking to become empires.

After half a century of authoritarianism in the Arab World, post-colonial anti-imperialist academics and journalists have been unable to comprehend local power dynamics, or they have overlooked these. For them, democracy does not occupy the top list of their agenda. Worse, some don't have democracy on their agenda at all.¹ This is why David Scott (2004) witnessed the end of the Bandung project and the transformation of anti-colonial utopias into post-colonial nightmares.

These scholars, for instance, read the Arab uprisings (with all their ramifications of political changes, civil strife and violence) simply as a geo-political game in which former colonial and imperial masters are omnipresent and solely to be blamed. This is conspiratorial thinking in the sense of Kluger: 'You don't want to blame yourself for things you may lack, so you blame anonymous forces instead' (Kluger, 2017). Conspiracy theories are indeed for losers, literally, not pejoratively. For people who have lost an election, money or influence look for something to explain that loss (Uscinski and Parent, 2014).

Portraying the current transformation of Arab societies in this way makes many of these scholars simply defend ‘progressive’ Arab dictators. The quasi-conspiratorial apologetic and defensive analysis becomes a tool to justify local repression and even torture. Post-colonial scholars in the Arab region and sometimes some leftists in the West have rarely acknowledged and articulated a set of internal and external influences that have shaped the political landscape of the Arab World. In the same vein, Achille Mbembe criticizes Marxism for presenting itself as ‘radical and progressive’, when it in fact developed an ‘imaginaire of culture and politics in which a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse,’ such that it was, at root, a ‘cult of victimology’ (Mbembe, 2000: 5, cited by Hoffmann, 2017).

Hamid Dabashi’s *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012) is the best criticism of the regime of knowledge production that ignores the development, and social and intellectual changes inside the Arab world. More generally, post-colonial critiques have ignored the current crises in Angola, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, East Timor, Myanmar, Peru and other societies suffering from neo-colonial structures (San Juan, 1998), but also from structures that have nothing to do with the condition of coloniality. Post-colonial attempts to reify cultural differences and to generate cultural compassion unsuccessfully grappled with the reality of globalization, both its history and its more recent intensification, and the reality of specific historical contradictions in the ongoing crisis of late, transnational capitalism and repressive regimes in many Southern countries.

To illustrate this argument, I shall give an example from the work of Gurinder Bhambra. While her excellent scholarship is to be commended on how, within sociological understandings of modernity, the experiences and claims of non-European ‘others’ have been rendered invisible to the dominant narratives and analytical frameworks of sociology (Bhambra, 2014), her approach can be reductionist when reading some social phenomena. In her keynote ‘Postcolonial reconstructions of Europe’ at the 9th European Sociological Association Conference in Prague, 2015, she portrays Syrian refugees in Europe simply as post-colonial migrants. She explains that Europe attracts them as Syrians’ former colonial masters and maintains that white European societies do not want them because these societies have not addressed the memory of colonial legacies. This post-colonial framing cannot account for the fact that Syrians’ exile was generated by a very violent authoritarian turn in the Arab World, where the

weight of local authoritarian regimes (for example, in the case of Syria of the Assad regime, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran) surpasses that of the imperial Western power.

Anti-Western Scholars

The second feature of leftist post-colonial scholars is being anti-Western. Instead of following Talal Asad who looks to any authority behind social science discourses (Bardawil, 2016), they understand this authority as something that emanates from Western power. Many call for de-westernizing and decolonizing knowledge production in the Arab region but have ended up impoverishing themselves because of the tendency to keep on harking back to the achievements of historical vernacular scholars (Ibn Khaldun for instance). Even if Patrick Williams (2013) defends the importance of Said's *Orientalism* and argues that even this book has become embedded in anti-humanist theorizing, the West was not portrayed simply as an 'Other', and yet the way this seminal book was understood and cited in the Arab World reproduced the binary of East/West. Some Arab authors were aware of such problematic diatomic thinking: Abdullah Laroui (1967b), argued 'The refusal of Western culture does not in itself constitute a culture, and the delirious roaming around the lost self shall never stir it up from dust.'

As an editor of the *Arab Journal of Sociology (Idafat)* since 2006, I have found that authors often either employ a decorative reference to Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) or Malik Bennabi (1905–1973) or force the analysis to fit some of their concepts. For instance, in spite of the fact that the French colonial authority and the post-independent state have destroyed Algeria's tribal structure, many social researchers continue to invoke *asabiyya* (tribal cohesion) as a major foundation for political organizations.

Post-colonial arguments suddenly unified a fringe of the left with a fringe of Islamism who keep blaming the West for any social, economic or political problems they face in the region. This use and misuse can also be found among those who advocate for the Islamization of knowledge tout court and of social science in particular (see Hanafi, 2016). They conceptualize an anti-thesis of 'Western' social science, through a structure of antinomies such as modernity, development, democracy and secularism. This approach was founded on the basis of a presupposed relationship vis-à-vis the West. In identifying a singular and monolithic 'Western' tradition, the

Islamization trajectory seemingly ignores ‘inter-paradigmatic’ diversity, such as the axiomatic differences between the Marxist school whose unit of analysis is primarily class-based, and the Functionalist approach which marginalizes those class-based units of analysis. A cursory glance at the diverse paradigms within so-called ‘Western’ sociology demonstrates that these competing trajectories cannot be reduced into one school. The same observation applies to the Islamic social sciences; the diversity of the field prevents any such generalizations.

The civilizational manufacturing of boundaries (East/West; tradition/modernity, etc.) has not been a heuristic mechanism that enables us to understand changes in the Arab world. Having said that, I am in favor of using local sources of knowledge not only in terms of data but also concepts and theories, and this should be done not as a nationalistic project but as a necessity to grapple with local realities. The recent work of Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha (2017) is extremely interesting in proposing an alternative sociology which deals with different sociological traditions, including Western theories but beyond Eurocentrism and Androcentrism. In other words, one can generate a discussion between, for instance, Ibn Khaldun and Michel Foucault when exploring the transformation of the political regime in Saudi Arabia, instead of choosing one of them. While there is a necessity to move away from universalized social science and towards looking into the particularities of the context, this latter is not simply a culture but also social, political and economic settings with a depth of history, whether pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial or authoritarian. In this regard, using Arab or Islamic culture as a medium of differentiation does not always help: the Arab Gulf countries are closer to Western countries (their political economy, consumption society, etc.) than other Arab or Middle Eastern countries.

Toward a Post-authoritarian Approach

What I propose here is to supplement post-colonial studies by what I call *post-authoritarian studies*. The lexical kinship with post-colonialism means that it could, by association, draw on a number of assumptions underpinning the former category, especially in terms of power structures but not in the meaning of having come to terms with authoritarianism; nor are we ‘post’ this era.

This field should pay attention, first, to how authoritarian regimes shape knowledge production in different ways, and second, how scholars

maneuver and overtly resist these regimes. This means we need to conduct double critiques, following Abdelkaber Khatibi's advice:

The essential task of Arab sociology is to carry out critical work within two threads: (a) to deconstruct concepts that have emerged from the sociological knowledge and discourse of those who spoke on behalf of the Arab region, marked by a predominantly Western and ethnocentric ideology; and (b) to simultaneously critique the sociological knowledge and discourse on various Arab societies produced by Arabs themselves. (Khatibi, 1983: 34)

With this in mind, why do we need post-authoritarian studies? There are many reasons, including the following:

1. There is a paucity of systematic studies, in relation to André Béteille's (2013) use of the term, i.e. exploring the interconnections among social processes in a systematic way, without presuming whether those interconnections are basically harmonious or basically discordant in nature. Much social research in the Arab World aims to simply understand/describe a social phenomenon without connecting it to the political economy and the nature of political choice adopted by the state. For instance, browsing two social science journals in the Arab Gulf, *Social Affairs* (UAE) and *The Social* (Saudi Arabia), I found that social science is lacking this dimension. Sociology becomes the study of micro problems using scientific techniques but without addressing the authoritarian nature of monarchies there, or, indeed, other power structures. There is in fact a trend of empiricism that is disconnected from discussing the political economy or the moral imperatives of justice and respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this regard, and as the Lebanese–Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage has aptly pointed out, many requests for scientific, empirical rigor are often selective in the face of overwhelming evidence and become a technique of denial, as in the case of denying the Syrian regime's responsibility in mass killings, bombing and using chemical weapons.² This technique has also been observed among those who deny the holocaust in the name of the absence of conclusive evidence about gas rooms or about the precise number of holocaust victims.
2. The self-censorship of scholars means that social science production is full of unspoken issues. For instance, we often find a broad criticism of society or the state where the message becomes diluted. Those who resist the authoritarianism do so subtly,³ since otherwise they will end up in prison. Good critical research produced under authoritarianism often leads to the marginalized career of its authors. Since the start of the Arab uprisings, we hear on a daily basis evidence of the violation of academic freedom, for example, the expulsion of Dr Moulay Hisham Alaoui from Tunisia while being

invited to participate in an academic workshop there (8 September 2017); or expressing sympathy for Qatar is an offense punishable by a lengthy jail term in Bahrain and UAE. In the same vein, demanding an independent inquiry into the deaths of four Syrians who died while in Lebanese army custody in August 2017 was considered as crossing the red line and undermining the national unity in Lebanon.⁴ Scholars' fear is not only of the state, but also of some violent ideological groups such as radical Islamists and fascist military-secularists. Here, enjoying a form of freedom not available in Arab countries, the role of immigrant and exiled intellectuals in protecting the critical role of intellectuals becomes very important, as suggested by Edward Said (2002).

3. Authoritarian states often give primacy to the 'national' cause over the social one. With that, external factors are often overstated as compared to local ones. The way the Arab uprisings have been analyzed demonstrates this. Browsing some writings of the Arab left in scholarly work (see Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2016: Chapter 8) or as Op Eds in Lebanese newspapers (*ibid.*: Chapter 9) demonstrates the lack of any sociological discussions on why people revolt, the extent to which a systematic use of torture in Syria in the last half century generated a social and political situation that cannot be overlooked simply because the Syrian regime has been providing arms to Hezbollah, and thus contributing to the resistance against Israel.
4. The authoritarian Arab regimes have encouraged a mono-culture in line with the official narrative, driving other narratives to private and semi-private spheres. The absence of a Habermasian public sphere, necessary for intellectual cross-fertilization, has contributed to a deepening rift between the liberal left and large segments of Islamists. The blame here is not on the state alone or on one side, but on both sides, though to varying degrees. It is no exaggeration to say that we have witnessed semi-civil wars between these sides, as is the case in Egypt or Libya. Post-colonial studies has failed to understand the 'Other' (popular Islam, political Islam) that becomes domestic as much as external (the West). The work of Christina Phillips (2013) on modern Arabic literature clearly demonstrates that post-colonial theory's concentration on the colonizer/colonized binary is limiting in relation to a topic such as Arab identity and nation. She argues that the relationship of the self and other is a site of power struggle, ambivalence and independence. This amounts to a positing of a variant, internal colonization in which secular writers, if not directly connected with the colonial penetration of Egypt, nonetheless endorsed the Western affiliated nationalist discourse of their generation.
5. There is fear and suspicion of any form of universal concepts such as human rights. Some of the scholarship under authoritarian regimes propagate the mythology of uniqueness of each society and culture.
6. Reluctance to engage with the public and policy-makers has reduced knowledge production into its professional knowledge (Hanafi and Arvanitis,

2016: Chapter 5). In light of the fact that the authoritarian state is not interested in having evidence-based policy, knowledge production becomes more project-based research rather than program-based, often using funding from abroad.

7. The good critical research produced under authoritarianism often leads to a marginal career of its authors.
8. One needs post-authoritarian studies because funding agencies are no longer exclusively based in the West but also from countries known for their authoritarianism, such as Arab Gulf monarchs (Qatar Foundation, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation, etc.).

As such, post-authoritarian studies should address all the above issues, if we are to generate not only new epistemologies but also healthy working conditions conducive to the research practices.

Conclusion

Post-authoritarianism is a political project concerned with reconstructing and reorienting local knowledge, ethics and power structures. It does not aim to function in a silo as a singular theoretical formation, but as a broad set of perspectives, concepts and practices to be developed in resistance to authoritarianism. I am not declaring post-colonialism dead and wishing a long life to post-authoritarian studies, but one simply cannot understand the current situation of knowledge production by simply delving into a remote past and forgetting how local political subjectivities have also shaped this very production. To understand the current turmoil and its social, political, and economic ramifications in the Arab world we need to pay little attention to post-colonial effects and much greater attention to the effect of authoritarian regimes.

One might wonder if post-authoritarianism studies concern only the obvious authoritarian countries such as the Arab world – not at all. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt (1985) urged us to learn to recognize how different elements of fascism crystallize in different historical periods into new forms of authoritarianism. Such anti-democratic elements combine in often unpredictable ways, and I believe they can currently be found in many of the political practices, values, and policies that characterize many countries in the world, including in the West. As Henry A. Giroux rightly puts it: ‘The discourse of liberty, equality, and freedom that emerged with modernity seems to have lost even its residual value as the central project of democracy’ (Giroux, 2007). With the War on

Terror, market fundamentalism and religious radicalism, many democratic values are eroded and the first of them is freedom of expression. Michael Burawoy in his editorial of *Global Dialog* in 2017 aptly put it: ‘Duterte [of Philippines], Erdogan [of Turkey], Orban [of Hungary], Putin [of Russia], Le Pen [of France], Modi [of India], Zuma [of South Africa] and Trump [of US] – they all seem to be cut from a similar nationalist, xenophobic, authoritarian cloth’ (Burawoy, 2017). For him, Trump’s triumph has given new energy to illiberal movements and dictatorships, but the political reaction has been in the making for decades as liberal democracies have propelled third-wave marketization with its precarity, exclusion, and inequality.

The call of the former French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls and his Canadian counterpart, Stephen Harper that there is no time to ‘commit sociology’ – both referring to the need to get tough with terrorists rather than study the causes of terrorism – was to intimidate sociologists in both countries. In this new wave of authoritarianism, looming so large in the Arab World but also elsewhere around the globe today, there is a serious assault on critical academia. We need to reflect on the unspoken issues of our knowledge production. Social criticism has to be coupled with a vibrant process of self-criticism and the willingness to take up critical positions without becoming dogmatic or intractable (Giroux, 2007).

Post-authoritarianism studies would find inspiration from the work of the Afro-American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. In his autoethnographic work *The Soul of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 2013), he forges the notion of the double-consciousness:

that sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2013: 2)

With this double-consciousness, one should conduct double critiques in order to analyze the complexity of identity formation in the Arab World in its relationship to local, international and transnational dynamics.

Recently, many events in the Arab world have commemorated a century of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, and colonial interventions and geographical divisions in the Arab region. While many speakers argued for the contentious dividing effect of colonial powers in the region, I suggested identifying local politicians as well who have fostered divisions

instead of French, English or American politicians, and I asked the audience to reflect on the fact that ISIS removed border posts between Iraq and Syria in 2014, as part of the group's proclaimed plan to restore the Islamic Caliphate on the ruins of the Sykes-Picot border, but also new geographical borders and social boundaries are at work by regional powers, which include, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Syria.

This chapter argues for a careful examination of the binary categories developed within the post-colonial studies. The proliferation of such binaries has been at the expense of crucial notions such as class, ethnicity, nation and gender; rendering opaque the economic processes underpinning the appropriation of land in the expansion of territory, the exploitation of resources including human labor, the institutionalization of racism and gender bias. As outlined above, I am very critical of the East/West binary; one should be very careful not to look at the international circulation of knowledge through the notion of 'import-export', as this approach is ineffective in analyzing notional and intellectual exchanges from the perspective of the periphery. In this regard, Fernanda Beigel's (2011) book *The Politics of Academic Autonomy in Latin America* is very outspoken against the center-periphery framework. The use of this approach in social studies of science might lead to the assumption that a dependent economy goes hand in hand with an equally subordinated knowledge production 'state,' which, in turn, means that peripheral contributions to international scientific development are expected to be null. Ultimately, these categorizations tend to have a counterproductive effect in the history of science, preserving images of a universal science supported by symbolic violence. The center-periphery mainly reinforces the very idea that there is a dominant science, grounded in European or American traditions, that wields 'originality', rendering the peripheries as passive scientific spaces necessarily 'lacking originality', and merely consuming imported knowledge (Beigel, 2011). The Gulbenkian Commission Report is perhaps the most revealing examination of the profound changes that have been taking place in social thought in the second half of the twentieth century (Wallerstein et al., 1996). This report shows how Eurocentric structures of knowledge have been eroding, both in the core countries and in the periphery, and how schools of thought have emerged aiming to develop alternative forms of understanding social and historical reality (Germana, 2014).

Sari Hanafi and Rigas Arvanitis (2016) reiterate such analyses when they look specifically to Arab research practices and argue that the issue is framed less by the structural dependency of many Arab scholars in elite

universities and more on optional dependency, by neglecting production and publication of knowledge in their own language. In other words, those who have decided to publish globally have perished locally. Or the opposite, those who have published in a vernacular language have decided to perish globally.

Alternatives Based on Diversity

While Eurocentric structures of knowledge have been eroding, both in core countries and in the periphery, there are many alternatives emerging. To cite some, Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting become a model theorized and promoted by Brazil – now it is used in many cities around the world, especially in Latin America, Germany and US (Keel, 2016). Transitional justice is a discipline developed in Latin America and has provided essential lessons in how to deal with the mass violation of human rights, prosecution, reparation, truth commissions, and victim and survivor memory. I am particularly impressed by the work of the Brazilian sociologist Sergio Adorno on violence, whose work I discovered thanks to the open access virtual library of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO). As we see, originality and, I would say, universality need a tool of visibility. The creation of many regional and linguistic databases does indeed enable us to overcome Eurocentrism and the effect of coloniality.

The alternatives thus would be not based on choosing between Western thought and local one but the principle of diversity. As Sujata Patel argues,

Social theory needs to assert the principle of diversities. I use the concept of diversities because it connotes more meanings than other concepts in use, such as alternate, multiple and cosmopolitan. In many languages within ex-colonial countries (including colonial ones such as English), the term diverse has had multivariate usage and its meanings range from a simple assertion of difference to an elaboration of an ontological theory of difference that recognizes power as a central concept in the creation of epistemes. (Patel, 2013: 122)

Thus, alternatives in the social sciences need to promote the many voices of sociological traditions, infra-local and supra-national, with its own cultural oeuvres, epistemologies, and theoretical frames, cultures of science and languages of reflection, sites of knowledge production and its transmission across the many Souths. In order to do so, social theory needs to ontologically assert the necessity of combining space/place with a voice

(Patel, 2013: 126). Often, it is not only the global political economy of knowledge production that hinders this diversity but the authoritarian states that promote particular meta-narratives. The challenge today is in creating the intellectual infrastructure that can interface the many Souths, dissolve the markers of distinction between and within them and make their various voices recognize the matrix of power that has organized these divisions (Patel, 2013: 126). Diversity is advocated also by Connell, who argues that it means learning *from* Southern knowledge and not only *about* it. As Alatas and Sinha (2017) put it, we can think *with* Ibn Khaldun, Marx *and* Rambhai, and not just think *with* Marx *about* Ibn Khaldun and Rambhai. It is remarkable how the late Syrian intellectual, Yasin al-Hafiz, created his own creative bricolage by drawing upon different theories and advocating the historicist blurring of the distinction between liberalism and socialism in the aftermath of the defeat of 1967. I qualify this bricolage as creative to distinguish it from Abdullah Laroui's way of seeing it as 'eclecticism', that is, passive adaptation (Laroui, 1967a).

While there is a necessity to less universalized social science and more looking into particularities of the context, this latter is not simply a culture but also social, political and economic settings with depth of history, whether pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial or authoritarian. In this regard, using Arab or Islamic culture as a medium of differentiation does not always help much; the Arab Gulf countries are closer to Western countries (their political economy, consumption society, etc.)

Notes

1 This statement is based on analysis of the knowledge production of research centers such as the Center for Arab Unity Studies (Beirut), Al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies (Cairo); and newspapers such as *Al-khbar* (Beirut) and *Al-Safeer* (Beirut).

2 Personal conversation with him.

3 See for instance my interview with the Libyan sociologist Mustafa al-Teer who survived the Qaddafi era from 1980s to 2011, in the International Sociological Association Newsletter *Global Dialog*, 3(2), 2013.

4 For more details about the violation of academic freedom in the Arab world see Hanafi, 2015.

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