

## **Democratisation, Transitology and Orientalism: The Bio-politics of Confession**

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### **Abstract:**

This article explores the application of Foucault's notions of bio-politics and governmentality, in combination with his analysis of the institution of confession, to the analysis of Orientalism and Democratisation/transitology paradigms as performative frameworks, not simply describing the political, but intimately involved in bringing a certain politics about.

### **Keywords:**

Orientalism, Democratisation, Foucault, bio-politics

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## 1. Introduction

This paper sketches the main elements of an examination of Orientalism, and of the Democratisation/transistology literature based on Foucault's analysis of confession, and of the 'effects of power' which such bio-politics entails. This examination suggests that these avowedly neutral analytical frameworks are performative, transformative of the objects they analyse, and that this performativity tends to produce the direct opposite of their intended/declared outcomes.

Part 1 looks at the bio-politics of confession in the context of Orientalism; Part 2 analyses the parallels between the positionalities of Western Selfhood and Oriental Alterity in Social Science; and Part 3 concludes by sketching elements of an analysis of democratisation/transistology as a social scientific discourse through the lens of the institution of confession and by noting parallels with positionalities established by Orientalist discourse.

## 2. Confession, Bio-politics and Orientalism

[*bio-politics*] Foucault defines bio-power as the "controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of population to economic processes" (1998[1976]: 141).<sup>1</sup> More generally, bio-power can be thought of as a form of power which 'inserts bodies' into organisational relations. Bio-politics is a technology of political control which has at its centre the 'care' for a population – rather than the interests of the sovereign – and which finds its own justification in the articulation of what constitutes the individual's and society's own 'interests'.

[*duty of care*] The key implication is that bio-politics generates a duty of care towards both the individual and towards the social body, fulfilling which is achieved by 'inserting' individuals into the body politic appropriately.

Democratisation and Orientalism both have at their centre such a 'duty of care' towards individuals and populations – 'nations' and 'civilisations' – and the 'economy of organisation' target populations, both Muslims/Arabs infused by an Oriental and/or Islamic alterity, as well as the populations identified by the narrative of Western Selfhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault uses the term 'economic' in its early acceptance to mean an organisation which is 'effective' with regard to the goals it sets itself, 'appropriate to its ends'. This meaning will be used throughout the paper unless otherwise specified.

[*governmentality*] These discourses are simultaneously technologies of Selfhood and of its subjection, and also techniques of collective domination, the ‘basic unit of care’ of which is an identified population, and its individual members. In this sense, the organisational forms these discourses produce constitute a ‘point of contact between individual technologies of the Self (subject(ion)) and collective technologies of domination,’<sup>2</sup> mirroring to Foucault’s definition of ‘governmentality.’

[*Confession*] The particular bio-political mechanism this paper takes into consideration is Confession. Foucault’s analysis suggests that the positionalities this institution gives rise to produce a series of power effects: parallels to those positionalities and those power effects can be found both in Orientalist and Democratisation discourses, and in the modes of knowledge organisation/production which underpin them.

First, Orientalist narratives provide for a *specification of individuals*, establishing a (Western) Norm, and constructing of the Other as not simply accidentally, but inherently, necessarily deviant from that norm. The European Self emerging from Renaissance and Enlightenment believed itself to be Rational and Secular: in order to serve the political function of displacing the monarcho-aristocratic Ancien Régime, the categories which underpinned its self-narrative *had to be*, universal.

Consequently, this attributed (Islamic/Arab) alterity with an *intrinsic latency* and a *general and diffuse causality* which one finds again in Orientalism and Democratisation discourses. Analogously to Foucault’s description of sex, Islam’s nature and mechanisms are obscure and by their nature dissimulating: «obscur; parce qu’il est de sa nature d’échapper et que son énergie comme ses mécanismes se dérobent; parce que son pouvoir causal est en partie clandestin» (p. 88, emphasis added). As such, in and of themselves, ‘Arabs’/‘Muslims’ are prone to unpredictable deviations from rational expectations of ‘normal’ politics: even when they appear to conform to the (Western) norm, this appearance will sooner or later, by Islam’s nature, disappoint and deceive.

Moreover, because Islam – analogously to the ‘Arab mind’ – possesses an *inextinguishable and polymorphous causal power*, singular events tend to be read in the context of, that is to say explained as the result of this causal power, and,

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<sup>2</sup> This is the definition of ‘governmentality’ which Foucault gives in his Lecture on Governmentality, *Essential Works: Power*, James Faubion (ed.).

conversely (and tautologically), the significance attributed to them is that of demonstrating the strength and pervasiveness of the causal force at their root. Islam is therefore adduced as root explanation for a vast range of occurrences, from revolution in Iran to codes of dress, from forms of government to gender relations: “The most discreet event – accident or deviation, deficit or excess – was deemed capable of entailing the most varied consequences” (1998[1976]: 65).

Fourthly, Orientalism and Democratisation both provide a *method of interpretation*, a grid which allows the ‘speaker’ to listen to a subject (population), whose ‘confession’ is required in order for the truth of its condition to be interpreted. This confession is, however, necessary but not sufficient to uncover the truth: the confessing subject needs to have this truth revealed to it by the ‘confessor’. This confessional relation drives the production of what counts as knowledge – and therefore truth – about the West’s Other. In it, as Foucault points out:

“[t]ruth did not reside solely in the [confessing] subject [...] It was constituted in two stages: present but incomplete, blind to itself, in the one who spoke; it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it [...]. [T]he revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said” (1998[1976]: 66).

The method of interpretation thus disenfranchises the confessing subject of the truth of his/her own position by establishing a hierarchy of power and authority between the two (which, as they are constituted in both Orientalism and in Democratisation discourses, are ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’). Paradoxically, the only way the Oriental Other may have access to its own truth is through accepting the authoritative positionality of – and thus the truth produced by – the Western Self, accepting the role of eternally confessing subject, and admitting an ‘original sin’ which by definition it would never be rid of. As with sex, there is particular relation between the truths Western Selfhood tells about itself and those it tells about its Other(s), which requires that, like sex, Islam must

“speak the truth (but since it is the secret and it oblivious to its own nature, we reserve for ourselves the function of telling the truth of its truth, revealed and deciphered at last) and we demand that it tell us [...] that truth about ourselves which we think we already possess in our immediate consciousness” (Foucault, 1998[1976]: 69).

The confessional relation between Western Self and Arabo-Islamic Other in Orientalist discourse derives from the combination of a truth of alterity which requires Western scrutiny to be revealed, with an inescapably constant danger generated by the

very nature of that alterity. The following section will argue that this combination transforms a framework the intention of which is avowedly merely to observe – even emancipate – the Other, into a *machinery of incitement* of that same alterity posited in the Other, undermining the very possibility of the ‘progress’ which is its avowed goal.

### 3. The bio-politics of Orientalist confession and its ‘effects of power’

It is important to note that lynchpin of the ‘effects of power’ Orientalist discourse produces is not the categories employed in Orientalist discourse (and, to a great extent, in Democratisation discourse) *per se*, but the combination of ‘confessional’ positionalities with the universalism of the categories upon which they are founded. This universalism is crucial, because it transforms narratives of Western Selfhood from those of a European experience – one possible trajectory among many, towards one goal among others – into *the* experience of Humanity as a whole.

This move is not arbitrary or accidental, but has a crucial function within Europe’s ‘internal’ political context: espoused by opponents of the Church, and flourishing in particular in the Renaissance princedoms like Medici Florence, it grounds the displacement and neutralises the Church’s attempts to re-assert its primacy over temporal power. Later, humanist universalism, having helped move the locus of sovereignty and legitimacy away from spiritual power, became a key intellectual foundation of the discourse which nationalist bourgeoisie used to displace the monarcho-aristocratic *Ancien Régime*. It is this historical contingency in which the particular positionalities of Orientalist (sub)alterity are rooted.

At the site of this confessional relation are reproduced a whole series of ‘effects of power’ are produced through discursive positions which foreground or elide specific political practices, and which can be characterised as ‘bio-political’, controlling the ‘insertion of bodies’ into a certain organisational structure, a certain form of power, by means of a discourse of self- and collective identity which declares its aim to be the welfare of the (individual) population as such.

The first ‘effect of power’ which a relation so structured entails is a hierarchical and re-productive one. Since “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks [...] but in the one who listens and says nothing” (1998[1976]: 62), the act of entering confession, requiring the acceptance of certain conditions for speaking and for being heard, tends to reproduce authority and confessing subject, and thus their hierarchical relation. Despite its avowedly emancipatory function, the

very act of confessing, of ‘speaking the truth’ about one’s Self to an authority, becomes an act of submission.

Secondly: the causal loop from essence, to deviant event, to the confirmation of deviant essence which is characteristic of the confessional relation is crucial, because, based on the essentialist characterisation of Islamic/Oriental Otherness, it authorises a representation of the connection between Islam and politics – of ‘political Islam’ – which emphasises its religious nature over its political roots. In Western politology, a similar emphasis would be unthinkable in analogous conflicts over land with religious overtones, such as Northern Ireland, and yet it is entirely plausible viz. Palestine or Islamist opposition groups from Morocco to Turkey. These confessional positionalities are a key support to the (re)production of religious essentialism’s place of privilege in public discourse both in the ‘Orient’ and about the Orient in the West.

Now consider the presentation of Islam’s relation to the political in Orientalist discourse as latently and diffusely causal: this dissimulated, dangerous and inescapable causality has several important implications.

The latent nature of Orientalist Islam’s causality imposes the need for *constant, endless and ubiquitous surveillance*. The ‘passional impulses’ built into the very nature of the Islamic Other might manifest themselves at any time and in any place: society and its political agents must be constantly monitored for even the slightest hint that such dangers might manifest. Islam (alterity) thus becomes a ‘police’ matter, “not something one simply judged, [but] a thing one administered,” “regulated for the good of all” (Foucault, 1998[1976]: 24).

Moreover, the risk posed by Islam’s latent causality transforms the specification of the (Western) Norm into a ‘grid’ – provided by Orientalism’s classical motifs described above – identifying possible kinds of deviation and the sites at which these might manifest, transforming the supposedly neutral and objective taxonomy of a machinery of observation into lines of penetration established all around the Islamo-Oriental Other’s body politic, into a taxonomy of surveillance.

That Orientalism codifies an imperative upon the Islamic Other to speak of its ‘sin’ is straightforward. In the name of a ‘natural’ and objective desire for Progress and Civilisation (understood in the universalist acception noted above), in the name of the defence of both the Western and Oriental bodies politic, the risk posed by Islam’s inherent tendency to deviate from such a norm requires permanent surveillance. The lynchpin of this surveillance mechanism is a confession which will reveal and pre-

empt such danger. The imperative of a complete ‘confession’ is a result of the attribution of such latent, diffuse and dangerous causality.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the shared commitment to certain ideas of the European Enlightenment – from rationality and secularism to the Progress, Civilisation and Modernity they make possible – which forms the precondition of ‘dialogue’ with the Other *in and of itself* requires the Islamic Other to volunteer this confession, as it entails admission of Islam’s deviant causality.

[*Caring for the Fallen*] This encouragement to speak which Orientalist discourse places upon Western Selfhood is not simply negative, not merely geared towards repression: it entails also a ‘progressive’ duty of care towards its Other. Sustained by a narrative of Western history which describes a Self free of ‘sin’ – a Self whose falls are merely temporary, in contrast to an Other whose sinfulness is ineluctable – the goal which both Self and Other pursue is an emancipation which the West assumes already achieved, and which the Other desires (or at least *should* desire), but which is *intrinsically* foreclosed to it. The Western Self’s authority is therefore justified only insofar as it (avowedly) attempts to help its less fortunate Other in the attempt to throw off the shackles of backwardness.

This duty of care places entails the responsibility to know its Oriental/Islamic Other, a knowledge which must in part be provided by the Other, subordinating itself by confessing its inscrutable secrets, its darkest innermost pulsions, to a Civilised Western Self whose very civilisation insulates it but also blinds it from such ‘barbarism’. Its aim is to learn from its Counsellor how to monitor and keep in check such pulsions, however temporarily.

The ‘effects of power’ of these positionalities are not limited to the establishment of this hierarchy, they entail a whole political dynamic which favours the (re)production of this hierarchy, and manifests itself at a number of sites, such as the debates over ‘democratisation’ approached below, or the legitimisation of colonialism evidenced in the so-called ‘Scramble for Africa’ or the ‘Mandate system’ established after World War I. These effects of power amount to the characteristic of the confessional relationship that while its function is avowedly to emancipate the confessing subject, in practice it sets the subject up to fail, and therefore to return to

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<sup>3</sup> «devoir tout dire, pouvoir interroger sur tout, trouvera sa justification dans le principe que le sexe est doté d'un pouvoir causal inépuisable et polymorphe» (Foucault, 1976 : 87)

the point of submission where the authority of the confessor must be sought out and obeyed.<sup>4</sup>

[*Orientalism and Confession as a machinery of incitement*] At this point, the ‘grid of observation’ built around the motifs of Western Selfhood – rationality, secularism, egalitarianism, meritocracy, humanitarianism, democracy, etc. – becomes a grid through which the West polices its Oriental Other (for its own good) to detect any deviation. Any such deviation is then disciplined in order to inoculate both Oriental and Western bodies politic against infectious irrationality.

But the ‘system’ described so far remains static, there is no sense of how its operation might bring about its (re)production. This section suggests extending the analogy between the operation of Orientalism and Foucault’s analysis of confession to the role the latter has as a ‘machinery of incitement’, a grid which does not simply describe nor even merely discipline its object’s ‘deviance’, but generates and incites it. Pursuing this line of enquiry also suggests that the conflict generated by such disciplinary action, legitimised through the framework itself, is not a simple by-product, but is central to the (re)production of the confessional hierarchy – to the biopolitics of confession – as a whole. This will be a particularly important implication when extending our analysis to democratisation discourses.

In Foucault’s analysis, confession was the lynchpin of the deployment of sexuality: “the dissemination and reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities, are [...] linked together with the help of the central element of confession that compels individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity” (1998[1976]). Foucault is not simply proposing that ‘diverse sexualities’ are pre-existing and that a disciplinary grid is imposed upon them which then ‘artificially’ transforms them into objects of discipline in order to ‘normalise’ them, but that they are literally created by/through the observational framework itself, that this framework is performative, transformative with regard to sexuality.

This poesis, this implantation/creation of a dangerous Otherness, takes place because, under the constant and ubiquitous threat deriving from alterity’s polymorphous and generalised causality, frameworks of observation also act as *devices of saturation*, seeking out alterity in the most minute details of an individual’s

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<sup>4</sup> (and, as will be shown below in the analysis of Disciplines/Area Studies organisation of knowledge production, more generally of a confessorial relation between the ‘objective’ analyst and the developing object)

or a society's practices. In these conditions, the taxonomical structure of such frameworks, come to operate as *lines of penetration*, lines along which failure to fulfil expectations legitimises disciplining the deviant Other.

Orientalism – like democratisation/transitology – responds to similar logics. Islam obviously has a long history of being connected to the political sphere before Orientalist discourses began to impact upon the region during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but this nexus was radically reshaped by the implantation/adaptation of Western ideas and institutions, as the emergence of anti-imperialist movements, both (Arab) nationalist and Islamist, attest. The emergence of these movements, particularly when in opposition to Western governments' contemporary interests and practices, were not only taken as evidence of the danger immanent in the 'Arab mind' or in 'political Islam', but were part and parcel of the mechanisms which gave rise to those movements themselves – mechanisms which relied crucially on those very intellectual frameworks which authorised the view that these movements constituted dangerous deviation from a 'modern'/'democratic' norm.

[*The bio-politics of failure*] A key element which closes the loop of confessional politics, allowing it to reproduce itself, is failure to achieve the goals declared by progressive dimensions of Orientalist discourse. Foucault points out that the central function of the confessor is "to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (1998[1976]: 61-62). The confessor is midwife to sinner's redemption. And yet, the confessor cannot deliver the sinner from evil entirely, since this redemption, this normalisation, cannot but be temporary. However necessary, confession remains non-transformative, unable to alter the (Oriental) subject's inherent propensity to 'sin' against (the Western Self's representation of) Progress.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, induced to confess its shortcomings, exhorted to strive for a 'modernity' by, for and of the West, *the Oriental Other is set up to fail*.<sup>6</sup> The Orient's inevitable failure is mirrored by another, equally inevitable failure: that of the charitable Western Self's mission of redemption and emancipation.

[*Disciplining the Failed Other*] This failure which – through no fault, malice or even choice of its own – authorises, indeed compels, it to intervene to control Islam's ultimately irrepressible deviant impulses. Set up to fail, the Other is thus also

<sup>5</sup> [conjunction of original sin and predestination?].

<sup>6</sup> A key 'metric' of such failure is the use of violence in politics, which, as will be suggested below, provides an important element in dismissing the political dimension of such movements as Hamas or Hizballah which contain such components.

set up to be disciplined. The confessional relationship inserts bodies politic into a dynamic which tends to (re)produce (Oriental) failure and (Western) success, and to authorise the exercise of discipline by the latter upon the former. The objective of such discipline, as it is framed by Orientalist discourse, is to neutralise the danger posed by deviance to both Self and Other. As Foucault puts it:

«les ennemis qu'il s'agit de supprimer, ce ne sont pas les adversaires au sens politique du terme; ce sont les dangers, externes ou internes, par rapport à la population et pour la population.»<sup>7</sup>

Herein are the roots of Orientalist discourse's 'racism', generalising Foucault's observations in relation to the right to kill, this qualitative discrimination between Self and Other is necessary in order to intervene disciplinarily:

«Là où vous avez une société de normalisation, là où vous avez un pouvoir qui est [...] en première instance, en première ligne, un bio-pouvoir, eh bien le racisme est indispensable comme condition pour pouvoir mettre quelqu'un à mort [...]. [Voilà] l'importance [...] du racisme dans l'exercice d'un tel pouvoir: c'est la condition sous laquelle on peut exercer le droit de tuer.»<sup>8</sup>

Of course, since this applies to the threat of alterity rather than to a specific Other, failure should be understood more generally as encompassing the failure of either Others, or of some within the folds of Western Selfhood. In other words, it also applies to dissenting voices within the West: such dissent is 'failure', it is the penetration of threat into the Western body politic, and as such must also be disciplined.

In sum, the result of these basic assumptions/positionalities built into the Orientalist narrative is that the Oriental Other, placed within a history and taxonomy – e.g. Orientalism's – is to establish a confessional relation between it and the Western Self, which becomes not only a grid for the evaluation of its actions, but also a mechanism through which the Orient is produced and disciplined. 'Islam' is on the one hand forced to endlessly 'prove' it can comply with, live up to standards of that narrative, and on the other hand it is inescapably bound to fail. This chronicle of a failure foretold then legitimises a) disciplinary interventions upon it, and b) the suspension of 'normal' ethical standards which (are thought to) apply to Western politics.

<sup>7</sup> (Foucault, Michel. *Il faut défendre la société - Cours au Collège de France, 1975-1976*)

<sup>8</sup> (Foucault, Michel. *Il faut défendre la société - Cours au Collège de France, 1975-1976*, p. 228)

#### **4. Confession and Social Science**

This section analyses some of the ‘effects of power’ produced by the emergence of Social Science as a mode for the organisation, production and validation of knowledge. In particular, the division of intellectual labour involved therein between Disciplines and Area Studies is relevant here, as it constitutes a key ‘transmission mechanism’ through which positionalities similar to those produced in Orientalist discourse are reproduced in Democratisation frameworks, and particularly in the ‘transitological’ literature.

Orientalism, as suggested above, provides in itself a machinery of observation and incitement, and enables the legitimisation of disciplinary practices towards the Other under the rubric of ‘progress’/‘civilisation’/‘modernity’. A key weakness of these narratives is that while they – and the policies espoused in their name – are purportedly objective, neutral and emancipatory they are in practice openly imperial and patronising – witness the justification of the Mandates system and of colonial rule generally. This allowed anti-imperialist movements to accuse European/Western countries of hypocrisy on the basis of their at best selective support of avowedly universal principles of democracy and self-determination – an accusation very effectively used as a site of resistance both in the interwar period and by better-known nationalist independence movements.

This weakness happened to be addressed thanks to the emergence of a new framework for the organisation and production of knowledge: Social Science. Centred around the twin pillars of Disciplines and Area Studies, its key claim was that it could arrive at neutral and objective knowledge.

The confessional relationship, however, remains central to social science thus articulated since, with the method of interpretation at its heart, it is built into the structure of the Disciplines/Area Studies mode of knowledge organisation. This occurs on two levels. Firstly, Area Studies’ focus on ‘assimilating and recording’ empirical data – especially primary sources in original languages such as interviews or written texts – in effect conveys the ‘voice’ of the Other. This is in fact precisely the way in which the historicist methodology of MES scholarship is legitimised (cf. Teti 2007). Moreover, Middle East Studies inherits from classical European Orientalism the idea of the Orient as a ‘cultural unity which the Orientalist alone was equipped to decipher’ [(Mitchell 2003)]. As well as conveying that authentic

testimony, Area Studies scholarship ‘deciphers what is said’, thus penetrating the deeper truth of the reality it analyses, rendering the truth whole back to the Other. In this, MES places itself in the position of the listening confessor, to whom the native informant confesses his reality – a reality which MES scholarship tells the truth of.

Secondly, insofar as the Disciplines are centred on social scientific epistemologies, their function is to reveal, from the raw data provided by Area scholarship, the ‘law-like generalisations’ which underpin the social world. Here it is therefore Area Studies whose duty it is to speak a truth “present but incomplete, blind to itself,” while the Disciplines alone are tasked with “the decipherment of what it said” (1998[1976]: 66).

The depth of the implications in terms of power effects of the Disciplines/Area Studies ‘mode of knowledge production’ is profound. First, and most obviously, with Disciplines and Area Studies as with Orientalism, in a chain which goes from the positionalities of the Oriental Other as ‘native informant’, to the fortress of the Western Self defended by ramparts of Rationality, Secularism and Progress, “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks [...] but in the one who listens and says nothing” (1998[1976]: 62). So it is between Disciplines and Area Studies: the latter’s duty is to speak the truth of the native and to confess its own hermeneutic limitations, the former’s is to attain the truth of scientific knowledge.

Moreover, the D/AS division provides a ‘confessional lens’ which, by virtue of its ‘scientific objectivity’, does away with the need for the confessing subject in order to extract a confession: while ‘unscientific’, hermeneutic methods are used to produce an ‘organic picture’ of the Other, which, because of the objective nature of the taxonomy upon which it is predicated, is itself neutral, objective and therefore true. In a sort of analytical ventriloquism, the Other’s ‘confession’ is produced by the Western Subject itself.

Finally, the ‘objectivity’ of the framework through which observation and diagnosis are carried out pre-emptively and neutralises accusations of personal bias or interest: whereas in traditional confessional techniques – from the interrogator’s cell to the therapist’s couch – the interrogator might be accused of bias or hypocrisy or political goals, here scientific objectivity silences such accusations. Indeed, it frames such accusations as specious – even ‘objectively’ so. Yet the Disciplines/Area Studies division, in providing a channel through which local voices could be heard (indeed, with the declared aim of affecting knowledge-production and therefore policy

practices) still allows for ‘sympathy’ towards or in any case the ‘listening’ of indigenous voices under the rubric of Area Studies. In this way, Area Studies becomes a place where alterity is confined and neutralised. Through the promise of objectivity and neutrality of Social Science, societies – leaderships and subalterns alike – can be made to ‘confess’ without even being required to speak, or rather by being placed in a position where their positionality confesses itself (its Self), and the objectivity of that state of affairs, the objective truth revealed through that confession, prevent and undermine any possibility of objection.

Indeed, such framing makes participation in confession impossible to avoid: it would, after all, be patently irresponsible to reject a discourse the sole objective of which is the neutral pursuit of truth, and the sole function of which is bettering the lives of a population as a whole. By the same token, Social Science as a ‘mode’ of knowledge production (and legitimisation) facilitates the formation a subject more willing to participate in his own subjection, thereby contributing to existing hegemonic practices.

## **5. Democratisation, Transitology and Orientalism**

Lingering on the positionalities involved in Social Science as a mode of knowledge organisation is important not just in itself, but also insofar as it frames analytical discourses which arise within it, such as the study of democratisation. Before applying the lense of confession to democratisation and transitology, it will be useful to go over the well-known territory of critiques of Orientalism.

As Said (1978) and others have shown, the norm of Western Selfhood is articulated around the central value of (Enlightenment) rationality, pitting reason against (religious) dogmatism in a struggle to leave behind the Dark Ages (and the Church’s temporal power). A central role is played by the articulation of public space as secular in the sense that religion should be separated from all that did not pertain strictly to personal, individual faith. Man thus freed could turn his intellect to those technological and socio-political endeavours which enabled Europe to subdue the enemies at its gates and far beyond. This norm of Selfhood contains a series of implicit dualisms (articulated along light/dark, superior/inferior, positive/negative axes) such as: transparency vs. obscurity/impenetrable; egalitarianism vs. privilege; meritocracy vs. patronage; democracy vs. authoritarianism; progress vs. backwardness, stagnation; ‘enlightened’ pacifism vs. fanatical violence; etc.

From such dualisms emerges a grid through which Otherness can be both articulated and observed. All these dualisms can be viewed through the spectrum of (a) the kind of public space identified/constructed, and (b) the modes of participation therein. Perhaps the central element in this representation of public space is the notion of 'secularism' as necessary and inevitable consequence of the primacy of Reason over religious dogmatism. While necessary for internal politics of Church/State relations in Europe, however, it did not mean absence of religion from the public sphere, as few contemporary Europeans would have denied the role of religion in public life (e.g. in its relation to the 'national genius'). It did, however, form the basis for the legitimisation of a definition of political participation based on the individual, and as such represents a different mapping of the relationship between religion and politics compared to the system of faith-based communities (*millet*) which characterised the Ottoman Empire's form of political representation and administration of justice. The public sphere is thus constituted as the locus of Rational – and thus 'secular' – public debate, to which individuals have access so long as they participate as rational, secular beings, as any other intervention would violate the nature of that space.

Democracy is certainly based upon egalitarianism and meritocracy, but is fundamentally rooted in the idea of the entry of the Rational and the Secular into politics. Only when understood as such, religion becomes a radical impediment to democracy, and its renunciation effectively becomes a pre-condition for participating in the 'democratic game'.

The idea of democracy has for a century or so played an integral role in Western discourses on its own identity. It functions as a signifier of a Western identity narrative constructed around themes of progress, secularism, rationality, egalitarianism and meritocracy.

The question of transitions away from 'authoritarian' political systems to democracies, and of the conditions under which democracy could be sustained, became important in the 1970s, particularly in the context of debates on paths towards 'development'.

After the end of the Cold War, the 'Washington consensus' came to dominate that narrative – a version of that narrative which narrows the model of what counts as

democracy to a particular institutional configuration, and a particular configuration of the relationship between the state and the economic sphere.

These narratives of democracy, drawn from the Western experience and 'purified' to become – as with narratives of Western Selfhood articulated within Orientalist discourse – archetypes of not merely *a* Western experience, but of *humanity* as a whole. As such, the motifs which underlie the explanation for the emergence of democracy in Europe and the West become a meter of judgement, an apparatus of observation.

The taxonomy which underpins this observation, appears entirely reasonable: it requires, for example, some division between religion and politics ('secularism'), equality of opportunity and meritocracy, rule of law, no corruption, transparency, freedom of speech (e.g. press), etc. However reasonable this might appear, is problematic in several ways, both owing to genuine problems in the analysis of what democracy consists in and how it can be guaranteed, and because on several of these counts Western polities themselves are found wanting. This double elision which occurs particularly when the problem of democratisation is analysed in a Middle Eastern context establishes a hierarchy between a supposedly unproblematically democratic West, and Muslim-majority countries which are required to achieve Western 'standards', some of which the West itself fails to meet.

When combined with an Orientalist view of Islam, democracy/transitology and the democracy model itself becomes a machinery of incitement of deviant, 'Orientalist' Islam. Democratisation models establish the norm (rational secular law-abiding moderate individual...); this in turn establishes '*lines of penetration*' around the Norm to police it and detect 'abnormalities' (these 'lines of penetration' are polar opposites of model's taxonomy); finally, Orientalist Islam's construction as latently and diffusely causal renders these abnormalities 'natural' consequences of 'Islam'.

Whether or not one fulfils such conditions for democracy/democratisation is thus assessed on the basis of the analytical framework strongly reminiscent – in the establishment of West/Orient positionalities, and in certain features such as the centrality of 'secularism' – of earlier Orientalist discourse.

The biopolitical dimension to this framework should also be remarked upon: framed as emancipatory, discourses of political development include a crucial socio-economic dimension, and enable targets – regarding health, education, gender equality, environment, etc. – which constitute not only practical instantiations of

apparatus of observation, but also lines of penetration along which performance can be evaluated. This observation, indeed the progress itself, places upon the observed subjects a requirement to produce information on all sorts of socio-political ambits, from economic reform to political radicalism, which are tantamount to a ‘confession’ concerning their credentials of economic (if not political) liberalism. These positionalities are clearly reminiscent of Foucault’s analysis of confession, and of the position the subaltern Oriental Other is placed in within Orientalist discourse.

Moreover, failure to meet which is used, particularly in policy-making and public debate settings, to justify disciplinary intervention such as economic sanctions or conditions for trade (e.g. the EU’s conditionality clauses) or such as military intervention (e.g. Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon or Israel/Palestine).<sup>9</sup>

Thus, an analytical framework which declares itself as an ‘apparatus for observation’, in its (unintended) effect as a machinery for incitement, opens itself up to becoming a ‘disciplinary machinery’ through which violations of the expected norm can be legitimately punished. In this sense, the position of democratisation analysis – particularly transitology – within social scientific discourse mirrors Foucault’s argument concerning the emergence of biopolitics, namely the emergence of a scientific discourse, while remaining suitably morally scandalised by the object of its attention, as did early psychiatry, applied an analytical grid which – as apparatus of observation and machinery of incitement – both analysed and created its object, combining the confession from the old juridico-legal model, with new techniques of population management (Foucault, 1998[1976]: 64).

## **6. Conclusions**

This paper has sketched the general lines of an application of Foucault’s analysis of the institution of confession, in combination with the ‘effects of power’ which such bio-politics give rise to, to the analysis of Orientalism and Democratisation/transitology paradigms as performative frameworks. While more research is necessary, and the limitations of this context do not permit an examination of both empirical cases and of academic and policy literature on the subject, this

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<sup>9</sup> An interesting difference between 19/20C imperialism and Democratisation/transitology (and ‘failed’ or ‘rogue state’) discourses: Imperialism/civilisational mission/mandates essentially suggested “meet the standard and we’ll leave,” while today the message seems to be “meet the standards or we’ll intervene.”

initial outline suggests that such frameworks do not simply describe, but intimately involved in bringing a certain kind of politics about.