Why Poststructuralism Is Central to the Study of International Relations

The boundaries imposed to the study of international relations have been self-perpetuated by the supremacy of traditional positivist doctrines, such as realism or liberalism. Yet, as Gregory asserts, "everyday life is ideological in an ontological sense; that which we know and which seems true depends on our sense of what is real" (1989: XXI). Accordingly, the manifold and multiplex essence attached to reality calls for an anti-foundational analysis of the "truths" upheld in international theory. This essay will assess the novelty of the poststructural ethos and how its anti-metaphysical critical posture is central to the study of IR. To begin with, it will draw upon the philosophy and principal arguments associated to the poststructural ideology. For purposes of a better and more cautious understanding of the poststructural arguments, this essay will particularly address, in a relative depth, the work and contributions of Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, exploring them in this exact order. In order to provide this essay with a more balanced and unprejudiced argument, I will assess some of the leading critiques placed upon the several poststructuralist debates, respectively. Finally, the case of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict will be critically contemplated under poststructural lenses in order to conclude that, despite the marginalisation to which poststructuralism has been submitted, its critical ethos is paramount, if not central, to a more accurate and unbiased conceptualisation of the ever-evolving field of international relations

In order to undertake an analysis on the centrality of poststructuralism, as far as the field of international relations is concerned, one ought to begin by grasping the elemental philosophy attached to the formal. Michel Foucault, one of the key thinkers of the poststructural approach, offers a rather critical challenge to the "truth" upheld and bolstered by the positivist ontology entrenched in modern discourse (George, 1994: 191). Truth, according to Hans Morgenthau, is "to be found (…) in the prudential judgement that originates in philosophy and history" and arises as "the transcendent value that gives science meaning" (Morgenthau in Molloy, 2004: 7). Foucault, on the other hand, proposes a divorce from this traditional ethos, and classical understanding of truth. Rather, he alerts to the limitations imposed by history as a promoter of knowledge, arguing that "history must be detached from the image that satisfied it for so long, and through which it found its anthropological justification" (Foucault, 1969: 7). This idea of history qua meaning-producer is extensively scrutinised by Habermas, who argues that "under the stoic gaze of the archaeologist [a metonymy which, in the way I understand it, refers to Foucault], history hardens into an iceberg covered with the crystalline forms of arbitrary formations of discourse" (1987: 253). This critique is comprehensible in that it assesses the repercussions and, to a certain extent, weaknesses of Foucault's genealogy. In short, Habermas alludes to the ineptitude of genealogical historiography in prevailing its own normative grounds, "because the very radicalness of its critique of reason (i.e. its identification of reason and power) undermines any rational grounds on which it might do so" (Habermas in Owen, 1999: 28). Nonetheless, following Koopman, I will urge that the novelty of Foucault's poststructuralism does not reside solely in his genealogy per se; rather, it is illustrated in his critical ethos as a whole, which, seemingly, is often misinterpreted (2010: 546).

Whilst those who have funnelled their thought along the lines of a positivist ontology may oppose Foucault's anti-metaphysical approach (Han, 2002: 8); those who acknowledge the ideological embargo imposed by the historically, culturally and state-produced "truths" would claim that "disclosing the assumptions and limits that have made things as they are, [allows] that what appears natural and without alternative can be rethought and reworked" (Campbell, 2010: 224). Therefore, the understanding of poststructuralism's relevance within the realm of IR requires one to delve

Why Poststructuralism Is Central to the Study of International Relations
Written by Victoria Marcia Pereira-Ayuso

into one of the arguably chief themes advocated by its scholars: the rather paramount *pouvoir-savoir* relationship. In a critique of Hedley Bull, Ashley contemplates the way in which "knowledgeable practices [work] as productive relations of power" (1995: 101). This reflection alludes to the innate correlation between power and knowledge, suggesting that they both influence and shape each other in a somewhat concurrent process. It is through this procedure that the "reasoning man" perpetuates his sovereignty, by constructing and promoting certain meanings and "truths" (Ashley, 1995: 100, 101). Foucault, too, dedicates a great part of his work to the activities stemming from the power/knowledge relations. In *Prison Talk*, one of Foucault's pivotal essays, he builds upon his own account of the *pouvoir–savoir* relations:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; (…) it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power (1980: 52).

Intrinsically related to the power/knowledge tie is the poststructural anti-foundational approach to discourse. In *Écrits*, Lacan asserts – in a psychoanalysis-poststructuralist concoction – the importance of discourse and language as generators of an extensive sphere of meanings. By arguing that "speech, even when almost completely worn out, retains its value as a *tessere*", Lacan exposes the potential ascribed to language as a facticity-producer (2006: 252). The foundations upon which poststructuralism puts forward the transformative role ascribed to discourse, allude to the strength of the former in conditioning our philosophy and behaviour (Angermuller, 2014: 2). As Shapiro pertinently puts it, "it is the dominant, surviving textual practices that give rise to the systems of meaning and value from which actions and policies are directed and legitimated" (1989: 13) One common criticism of the poststructural stance on discourse analysis questions the critical validity of poststructuralism in itself. Indeed, it draws upon the claim that "power is everywhere" – a rather limited understanding of the complexity attached to the poststructuralist argument, in my opinion – claiming that if there is no valid reality, one does not possess the tools to analyse and criticise discourse per se. Accordingly, critics would say that "postmodernism cannot judge the validity (…) of a text like *Mein Kampf*" (Steans & Pettiford, 2001: 149). However, it is important to denote that poststructuralism does not constitute a merely nihilist ethos, as many would argue. Rather, it deconstructs the world of meanings perpetuated by discourse, adopting an anti-foundational approach for such. Yet, that does not implicitly mean that poststructuralists cannot scrutinise some views such as the ones promoted in Mein Kampf (Steans & Pettiford, 2001: 149, 150).

As Foucault puts it, "the manifest discourse (…) is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said" (1969: 28). To oppose and dismantle the "truths" and dogmas persistently upheld, poststructuralism developed a form of critical analysis whose central novelties are to be found, principally, in the work of Jacques Derrida. This deconstructivism – as Derrida denominated it – seeks to engage with the dichotomies entrenched in the modern discourse, in order to "denaturalise" them and withdraw certain meanings from their privileged position (Der Deriam, 1989: 4). It exposes the necessity of the Good to be understood as an antonym of Evil; of the West to exist in the presence of the East; of the Bible to be contrasted with the Quran. Without these binary relations, the ethical virtue, the long-perpetuated logocentrism, and the positivist-encouraged onto-theology lose their advantaged position in the whole process of meaning production. Ergo, the mechanism by which poststructuralist scholars spot and disentangle representations, as well as the politics inherent to them, undermines the influence of the modern discourse upon the construction of realities. It consequently allows for the inclusion of the notion of "multiple realities" in lieu of the traditionalist "ready-made synthesis" (Foucault, 1969: 24). "Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call" (Campbell, 1998: 23).

Adopting a somewhat Derridean deconstructive approach, I will now draw attention upon a rather delicate and controversial international issue that remains open-ended to this day – the Palestinian/ Israeli conflict. One may pertinently argue that poststructuralism, as a critical ethos and not a theory per se, constitutes a paramount means to truly grasp the deep-seated relations of power/knowledge hailing from the Palestinian conflict. Discourse analysis, as well as the dismantling of the sovereign ready-made representations, allow for an anti-foundational and therefore unbiased stance on the study of this precise conflict. As Leep puts it, "the representational practices that constitute the (…) Israeli-Palestinian conflict [and] the ways in which Israelis and Palestinians are produced through an affective discourse (…) are legitimated through an emotional episteme" (2010: 336). To begin with, the very question of identity

Why Poststructuralism Is Central to the Study of International Relations

Written by Victoria Marcia Pereira-Ayuso

constitutes a problematic question both domestically as well as internationally, for it promotes certain meanings over others. Identity-definers such as "Palestinians", "Israelis" or "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" embody the build-up and boost of certain meanings, which will seemingly have social, educative and political repercussions (Leep, 2010: 336). Ergo, the very definition and understanding of the conflict constitutes a "silent murmuring" (Foucault, 1969: 30) that shelters intertwined binary relations. Within these dichotomies, the projection of "us" against "them" prevails, as discourse is exploited and manipulated in that precise direction. For example, Camelia Suleiman's critical conceptualisation demonstrates how the privileged stratum of meanings emerges in function of the marginalised and excluded discourses. Hence, in this case, the facticity constructed around the logocentric notion of "us" generally refers to "the USA and its allies – including (…) Israel", while "them" is impromptu used to "include unidentified terrorists as well as the collective mass of Palestinians and Iraqis" (2011: 58).

By the same token and apropos of scholarship and its influence, Edward Said argues that "the critical and anti-Orientalist discourse" ascribed to a traditional line of scholars, portrayed "Arabs as basically, irrecusably, and congenitally 'Other'" (1994: 260, 261). Zionist interpretations of the conflict too, urge to "the oppressed to forget the past, avoid becoming 'stuck' in it and focus on the present situation instead" (Massad, 2010: 41). If one is to adopt an à la Derrida method of deconstruction, the bigotry of this argument becomes rather evident. It does so for it alludes to their (the Jewish communities) undoubtedly tragic past in order to provide legitimacy to the "illegal" occupation of Palestinian territories (Makdisi, 2008: 18, 19) – a stance to which my opinion adheres.

The lack of a theoretical response to the representational ambiguities scrutinised by poststructuralism has provided the grounds for many criticisms. Several authors such as Habermas or Nancy Fraser have founded their critique upon the apparent hermeneutic nihilism inherent to the poststructural ethos. In his critique of the structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies, Merquior claims that "Foucault and Derrida have not just transmuted the disillusionment of the structuralist world-view into nihilism – they have also directed nihilism against truth" (1986: 238). However, the peculiarity of the poststructuralist approach resides precisely in its "lack of theory"; in its detachment from the traditional problem-solving method. By granting an ontology and epistemology that abandon the positivist realm, poststructuralist scholars have provided IR with the tools to dismantle its constructed "truths". It is in this context that, free of limits, poststructuralism becomes "dynamic, political, and ethical" (Sikka, 2008: 239) and therefore central to the field of IR. In Der Deriam's words:

International relations requires an intertextual approach, in the sense of a critical inquiry into an area of thought where there is no final arbiter of truth, where meaning is derived from an interrelationship of texts, and power is implicated by the problem of language and other signifying practices (1989: 6).

In conclusion, the field of IR has been markedly dominated by the meanings attached to notions as anarchy, sovereignty, war and peace. The leading theories within the positivist tradition have enforced certain structures and agencies upon the IR sphere, leaving no space for the analysis of the "untold" realities (Belsey, 2002: 15). Poststructuralist scholars such as Foucault have revolutionised the field, by inquiring into unquestioned truths deriving from uncontested fields. History, as demonstrated, is looked at through Foucault's poststructural lenses in a critique based upon genealogy. Besides dismantling the truths perpetuated by history qua meaning-manufacturer, Foucault's anti-metaphysical approach also unveils the ingrained nature of the power/knowledge relations. As illustrated throughout this essay, authors such as Foucault, Lacan, Ashley and Derrida have provided the realm of IR with anti-foundational tools to investigate and deconstruct the discourses conceived by the *pouvoir/savoir* relations. Derrida, especially, offers a detailed study on the process of deconstruction – process through which the dichotomies that govern the world are finally disclosed. Whilst a traditional theory would limit itself to study the possible solutions for the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, a poststructural ethos allows us to go beyond positivism and thus, grasp the relevant relations of power and knowledge, evident in the advocacy of certain discourses over others. As a concluding thought, "power is often most pervasive and effective amidst the silences of received wisdom" (Walker, 1993: 13). It is in this sense that one may argue that the criticisms posed against poststructuralism are, at best, based on a misinterpretation of the latter's novelty (Campbell, 2010: 235). Indeed, no other approach offers such "engaged, rigorous, criticism-conscious exploration of events and activities" (Ashley, 1996: 246), which ultimately makes poststructuralism central to the study of international relations.

Why Poststructuralism Is Central to the Study of International Relations

Written by Victoria Marcia Pereira-Ayuso

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Why Poststructuralism Is Central to the Study of International Relations
Written by Victoria Marcia Pereira-Ayuso

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