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A shift of the topic of 'civilizations' towards the center of broad public debates represents one of the important spiritual-political reorientations brought about by the collapse of the bipolar structure of the world order typical of the 'cold war' period, by the demise of Communism in East-Central Europe and by the self-assertion of capitalism as the 'only practicable' socio-economic system that has efficiently smothered its alternatives. The year of 2001 was distinguished both by the horrific terror of 9/11 which was perceived by many as the bloody evidence of the 'clash of civilizations' and by the fact that this same year was proclaimed by the UN to be the year of the 'dialogue among civilizations'.

The thematic and institutional expansion of the term 'civilization', that is, its permeation into the spheres of thought and practice which have hitherto done well without it, led to the appearance of the two analytically distinct discourses on 'civilizations'. Let us call one of them a 'big discourse'. It exists primarily within the confines of Academia and enshrines the richness of the controversies over 'civilizations' which has accumulated since the inception of the term in the heyday of the Enlightenment. I will call the other one a 'small discourse' because it represents a systemic conceptual and normative impoverishment of the idea of 'civilizations' and (in many cases) opportunist adjustment of it to serve the function of what Clifford Geertz dubbed a 'distinct cultural model of political action' (Geertz, 1973: 219). The 'small discourse' is decisively shaped by discussions of the two themes which are often viewed as a 'thesis' and an 'antithesis', to wit, those of the 'clash of civilizations' and the 'dialogue' among them. It is these themes that ushered the idea of 'civilizations' into the broad world of contemporary politics and journalism.

By thus opposing the 'big' and 'small' discourses on 'civilizations', I do not mean that the former embodies a 'pure theory' whereas the latter embraces nothing but an ensemble of ideological creeds. The academic theories of 'civilizations' are definitely not 'value-free' and thus, even setting other things aside, do contain an 'ideological component'. Nor are they immune to the influence of 'interests' stemming from politics. As for the 'small discourse', it is not bereft of certain elements of theoretical

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reflection and it does employ certain elements of the conceptual apparatus of its vis-à-vis. The major differences between these two discourses can be better captured through Parsons' concept of 'further selectivity' whereby ideology (referring to what Mannheim meant by 'particular ideologies') emphasizes, or neglects, those problems and phenomena which are treated as 'significant' by the social science of the time (Parsons, 1967: 153). Thus the balance between the explanatory function and that of *Sinnstiftung*, i.e. the construction of meanings which makes phenomena 'comprehensible', the balance which every social theory has to maintain in one way or another, gets radically tipped, in the 'small discourse', in favor of the latter at the expense of the explanation.

This manifests itself in the *de-problematization* of the category of 'civilization': the theories centered around it shun self-reflexivity, that is, they do not question themselves in terms of the limits of their heuristic resources, validity of their basic assumptions, consistency of their logics, soundness of their methodologies, etc. They spared themselves to self-reflect because they are not in the business of exploring *terra incognita*. Rather, their mission is to make the truths they already possess comprehensible for laypersons. Self-reflexivity and the acknowledgment of *terra incognita* are exactly the criteria whereby 'theory' can be distinguished from 'ideology' without naïvely considering 'objectivity', 'rigorousness', empirical verifiability, or falsifiability, and the like to be the trademarks of the former and their opposites to be the characteristics of the latter. The aforesaid criteria are crucial to discriminate between the theoretical 'big discourse' and the ideological 'small' one.

A first objective of this paper is to uncover the basic differences of the thematic and structural organizations of the 'big' and 'small' discourses. It is not my intention to (re-) examine the history of the term 'civilization' which, in fact, sets up the thematic and structural organization of the 'big discourse'. Nor am I planning to critique any particular theories which make up the 'small discourse'. Both of these tasks have already been carried out before me.[1] Rather, I will focus on the examination of these two discourses as 'wholes'. My intention is to demonstrate that the conflicting interpretations of 'civilization', within the 'big discourse', are complementary and that this is what generates the conceptual richness and historical dynamics of this category or, in other words, constitutes it as an 'essentially contested concept' (see Gallie, 1964). Contrariwise, both sides of the 'small discourse' endow 'civilization' with basically the same meaning, despite putting it in different ideological frames. Within the 'small discourse', the category of 'civilization' remains uncontested and this makes it 'motionless' and conceptually barren. It is in this capacity that 'civilization' serves the ideological functions which the 'small discourse' fulfills. The first part of the paper is devoted to the discussion of these topics.

A second objective of this paper is to fathom out what the actual political processes are that manifest themselves through the 'small discourse' on 'civilizations' or, more precisely, that make use of it as part of their *modus operandi*. The ideological mission of this discourse is not limited to concealing certain causes. More importantly, it consists in promoting them although, to accomplish this, their mystified appearances are to be preserved. Thus the 'small discourse' fulfills the function of a 'cultural model of political action' I alluded to earlier. The second part of this paper aspires to demonstrate that it is the projects of authoritarian hegemony, which are

by no means uniform, that the 'small discourse' furnishes with 'cultural models'. Both such projects and their essentialized 'cultural models' seem to be necessary offshoots of the global triumph of capitalism which has succeeded in (temporarily) 'ending history'.

Two discourses on 'civilizations'

Basically, the 'big discourse' is organized around four axes. Its major differences from the 'small discourse' arise from the latter's elimination of these axes and from the corresponding conflation of the opposite meanings of the term 'civilization' that represent the poles of each of the axes. The poles of a first axis are fixed by the interpretations of 'civilization' as (spiritual) 'culture' and, on the contrary, as a totality of the material and institutional 'techniques' of conducting social life. At the poles of a second axis, we find 'civilization' as a (the) high(est) stage/mature form of world history and 'civilizations' as inherently local and plural phenomena. The poles of a third axis are represented by the conceptions of 'civilization' as a macro-level and the most inclusive unit of human history (apart from the human species as such) and the vision of it as a 'civilizing process' which proceeds primarily on the micro-level of personalities and interactions between persons. 'Civilization' as a culturally homogenous entity determined, or even predetermined, by a specific set of 'values', on the one hand, and 'civilization' as an always (actually or potentially) contestable and conflict-ridden unity of the social-cultural diversity on the other establish the poles of a fourth axis. Let us look more closely at each of these axes and at what happens to them in the transition from the 'big discourse' to the 'small' one.

1.

Within the 'big discourse', 'civilization' can be either identified with 'culture' or opposed to it as a designation of the totality of the institutional and material 'techniques' of social life. The very tension between these two readings of 'civilization' determines that a question about how 'culture' 'materializes' in institutions and, conversely, how institutions impact 'culture' becomes critical. Max Weber's 'sociology of religion' and its countless ramifications are permeated by this question. It is pivotal for Shmuel Eisenstadt's more recent definition of 'civilization' as 'the attempts to construct or reconstruct social life according to ontological visions that combine conception of the nature of cosmos, a transmundane and mundane reality, with the regulation of the major arenas of social life and interaction – the political arena or authority, the economy, family life, and the like' (Eisenstadt, 1992: 13).[2]

Any serious attempt to grapple with the aforesaid tension historicizes all aspects of 'civilization' and, moreover, shows their dependence on what goes on in the *present*, however varying the degrees of such dependence can be in terms of different components of a given 'civilization'. Static images of 'civilizations', their 'immovable essences', or metaphysical 'laws' of their motion (like those which Oswald Spengler described) cannot stand any longer. Furthermore, the exploration of parameters,

models and vectors of the historical transformations of 'civilizations' emerges as the ultimate concern of the 'analysis of civilizations' (Kroeber, 1963).

In contrast to this, the 'small discourse' unreflectively identifies 'civilization' with 'culture'.[3] Moreover, it does this in such a way that institutions are put outside of the brackets.[4] It seems that, within the 'small discourse', a vigorous development of capitalism in India, for example, has nothing to do with the 'Hindu civilization'. But, similarly, the institutional transformations of Western polities and economies appear to be inconsequential for the 'core values' of the 'Western civilization' and for how the latter have been modified in the course of its history.

Such a sidestepping of institutions is performed in congruence with the logic of Parsons' 'further selectivity'. Some institutions which have been ideologically 'emphasized' are sublimated and elevated to the status of 'values'. Some others which, historically speaking, were no less important than the former for the shaping of a given 'civilization' are neglected. This is why all those lists of the 'core elements' of the 'Western civilization' which have been spawned within the 'small discourse' celebrate the rule of law, human rights, 'democratic choice', etc. and bypass colonialism, patriarchy, militarism, class inequality, and so on.

Who, in whose name and on what grounds is entitled to dissect the actual history in such a way? Who has the authority and power to catapult some facets of historical events to the normative heaven while precipitating some other facets of the same events into oblivion? These questions touch on the most basic premise of the theories of the 'small discourse': 'civilizations' are the products of the Legislator(s) as distinguished from interpreters (Bauman, 1987). The most important mission of the Legislator is to 'naturalize' what, in fact, belongs to the realm of history and politics. Through such 'naturalization', historical institutions (along with historical memories generated and supported by them) are transfigured into immovable 'values' as what shapes 'civilizations'. Equally, the Legislator's ideological utterances get 'naturalized' as the Truths delivered from the heights of something akin to the viewpoint of eternity.

The 'dialogue among civilizations', which claims to be *the* alternative of the 'clash of civilizations', fully accepts the logic of 'naturalization' typical of its 'opponent'. The 'dialogue' admits that the 'clash of civilizations' is *the* major threat to the well-being of humankind. Such a 'clash' is described as bearing an 'existential' rather than a functional character (*pace* Huntington's dismissal of institutions).[5] A theoretical similarity between the two allegedly rival approaches is further bolstered up by their equal incapacity to explain the logic of the 'clash of civilizations'. Huntington fails to demonstrate why and how 'cultural differences' would culminate in 'clashes'. This leaves the central thesis of his book about the 'clashes of civilizations' as the crux of international policy hanging in the air.[6] The 'dialogue' reciprocates this by pointing to such mysterious things as the 'fear of diversity' or the 'perception that diversity is a threat' as the (only) causes of the 'cultural' conflicts. More 'tangible' contradictions, such as those represented by the cleavages between East and West, North and South, etc. are pronounced no better than 'assumed dichotomies' (*Crossing the Divide*, 2001: 31, 51). Unfounded 'fears of diversity' and its misperceptions as a threat are believed to be curable and the 'dialogue' is presented as a correct medication to treat such maladies.

Ironically, what does distinguish the 'dialogue among civilizations' from the 'clash of civilizations' is also anchored in a similarity between them. To wit, Huntington does not deny the existence of 'certain basic values' shared by 'most societies' which, within the 'dialogue', are believed to serve as a universal foundation of mutual understanding and as an antidote to the aforementioned phobias (Huntington, 2003: 56; *Crossing the Divide*, 2001: 37). Huntington, however, maintains that such 'shared values' help explain 'some constants in human behavior but [they] cannot illuminate or explain history, which consists in changes in human behavior' and this renders them useless for our efforts to grasp politics (Huntington, 2003: 56). The 'dialogue' ignores this consideration and posits 'shared values' as a fountainhead of a totally new kind of politics capable of replacing the 'politics of domination' as such (sic!) with the 'politics of communication, networking, negotiation, interaction, interfacing and collaboration' (*Crossing the Divide*, 2001: 23).

The arguments put forth by both sides of this controversy are apparently self-defeating. If the static 'shared values' are useless for the explanations of 'moving' history, as Huntington asserts, what makes the no less static 'values' inherent in particular 'civilizations' useful for the understanding of their specific histories? On the other hand, if the unchanging 'shared values' can exert such a miraculous impact on politics today or tomorrow, as the 'dialogue' contends, what prevented them from doing this yesterday? It is futile, however, to address these questions to the 'clash of civilizations' and the 'dialogue among civilizations' types of theories: unless the operation of 'values' in politics is discussed on the level of real actors' strategies and counter-strategies, of the making and unmaking of their 'cognitive maps', of conflicting methods of inclusion and exclusion which shape 'us' and 'them', of institutions of 'valuing' and 'disvaluing' and their political effects, etc.,[7] we would have but metaphysical homilies about 'values' dressed to kill as 'philosophies of history'.

2.

A major difficulty cropping up from a second axis of the 'big discourse' is not a stark difference between the representations of 'civilization' as a universal 'stage of history', on the one hand, and as a diachronic and synchronic plurality of local 'civilizational' formations on the other. Rather, it consists in that these ostensibly antithetical representations permeate one another and this quite often passes unnoticed by those who champion one or the other version of 'civilization'.

It is well known that 'civilization' emerged in Western Europe in the Age of Enlightenment and from the outset it was crafted to serve two basic purposes – those of self-reflection of the rising bourgeois society and of its self-assertion. Both pursuits implied discernment and avowal of its distinctive features *vis-à-vis* those formations that preceded it or coexisted with it but were different from it. The logic of self-assertion, however, necessarily endowed these features with positive normative meanings which consolidated in the idea of supremacy of *the* 'civilization', identified with the Western bourgeois society, over its diachronic and synchronic Other(s).[8]

'Civilization' appears as a universal 'stage of history' only on one side of this category. This, however, implies 'civilization's' contradistinction to what it is *not*, that

is, to the historical and contemporaneous Other. 'Civilization' bestows on the Other what can be called a 'temporal two-dimensionality': the Other shares the *present* with 'civilization' and at the same time embodies the *past*, i.e., what is yet to be overcome and triumphed over. But, reciprocally, the Other confers the same 'temporal two-dimensionality' on 'civilization' itself: it is yet to actually become a universal stage of history (in the future); nonetheless it exists as the embodiment of such a stage (in the present). Moreover, the reciprocal 'temporal two-dimensionality' makes the connection between the 'civilization' and its Other ambivalent: as a 'yet-to-become' stage of history 'civilization' fully *depends* on the Other since it is exactly the latter's transformation that can fulfill the 'civilization's' aspiration to emerge as the universal highest stage of history (beautifully depicted, for example, by Condorcet in a chapter on the 'Tenth Stage' – Condorcet, 1979: 172–202). However, as an 'already-materialized' stage of history 'civilization' *hauls* the Other towards the developmental plateau it embodies.

This reciprocal 'two-dimensionality' engenders a series of theoretically irresolvable contradictions which *logically* can be rid of only in one way – through the transfer of the 'civilizational' discourse from the temporal system of coordinates to that of eternity. This is exactly what Francois Guizot did when he openly proclaimed that the 'European civilization' (earlier identified with the 'idea of progress') 'has entered . . . into the *eternal truth*, into the plan of Providence; it progresses according to the intentions of God. This is the rational account of its superiority' (Guizot, 1997: 16, italics added). This approach reduces time and history to the status of residues which linger only in the backwaters of humankind wherein something really important and transformative can still happen. This is another version of the 'end of history' reserved for the privileged cohort of humankind who *are* 'civilization'. Thus the aforesaid contradictions are removed and 'civilization' shines simultaneously as the highest stage of history and as a local particular phenomenon. Huntington also offers his version of Guizot's 'eternal truth', albeit a more diffident one, in tracing the emergence of the 'distinctive features' of the 'Western civilization', skirting modernity, back to the eighth and ninth centuries AD – 'The West was the West long before it was modern' (Huntington, 2003: 69).

Nowadays, few would subscribe to this method of resolving the contradictions which spring from the 'temporal two-dimensionality' of 'civilization'. In the twentieth century the identification of 'civilization' with the 'highest stage' of history was deemphasized. 'Civilization' openly admitted its particularity under the appellation of the 'Western civilization' and morally, but not otherwise, upgraded the relevant Others, albeit not all of them, to the status of 'other civilizations'.[9] The construction of 'non-Western civilizations' was partly a product of Western self-criticism, partly it resulted from 'stretching' Western notions of 'civilization' in the attempts to 'make sense' of the new objects of research,[10] but, most importantly, it was brought about as a response of non-Western intellectuals to the supremacist implications of the older unabashedly Eurocentric versions of 'civilization' (for more on this, see Mazlish, 2001: 296 ff). In all such cases, the construction of the 'non-Western civilizations' involved a recycling and reworking of the themes and ideas familiar from the Western 'civilizational' discourse and particularly from its romantic component (for more detail, see Al-Azmeh, 2002: 30–33, 40–41).

Within the 'small discourse', the fusion of the two aforesaid representations of 'civilization' is carried out in the crudest forms directly serving the apology of the West. In Huntington, 'Western civilization' appears as *the* source of the global modernization which, from the viewpoint of its repercussions and consequences, has determined the present stage of the world-historical process in its economic, technological, scientific, and military dimensions (Huntington, 2003: 68). Moreover, the ethical-political institutions and phenomena which emerged as the specific fruits of *modernity*, like the rule of law, representative government, 'human rights', 'democratic choice', etc., are attributed to 'Western civilization', in the form of 'values', as its unique possession. Thus, 'Western civilization' usurps the ethical-political contents of modernity. As a result, the 'clash of civilizations', which supposedly are not normatively assessed, assumes the meaning of a confrontation between the ethical-political 'principles' of modernity enshrined in the West, on the one hand, and those of backwardness, or 'barbarity', on the other.[11]

Such usurpation of the ethical-political contents of modernity implicit in Huntington's theory has been explicated in the ideas of likeminded but *more radical* thinkers. In Lee Harris, for example, the West appears as the most robust embodiment of 'civilization' as a *universal* standard. Perhaps this is why the West ignites the fury of 'civilization's' enemies, 'the eternal (sic) gang of ruthless men', 'whose origin goes back to the dawn of history' and who irrationally desire nothing but murder and destruction (Harris, 2004: 3, 216). In Harris, 'civilization' oversteps the limits of the local 'Western civilization' and regains its status as a universal standard applicable across historical times and cultural spaces. But its life-and-death struggle against the 'eternal gang' of 'barbarians' loses all vestiges of ethical-political content and degenerates into the quasi-biological fight for sheer survival. Moreover, it appears to be hopelessly unwinnable: what makes the 'gang' of 'civilization's' foes 'eternal' is, by definition, their invincibility.

The 'dialogue among civilizations' adopts Harris's reconstitution of 'civilization' as a universal standard although it retains a pluralistic reading of 'civilizations' as local 'cultural' formations (a contradiction arising from this has never been reflected on within the 'small discourse'). The 'dialogue's' hallmark in this respect is that 'civilization' as a universal standard does not have Harris's relentless enemies – curable phobias and misunderstandings cannot give rise to them. The 'dialogue', however, ingeniously enriches the content of 'civilization' as a universal standard. It affixes such 'universal aspirations' as 'market economy, democratic polity, civil society', etc. to the clichéd set of 'shared values' associated with a universal standard (Harris, 2004: 56). How were such 'aspirations' found in the depths of the immutable 'civilizations', whether 'Western' or not? This remains an enigma. A more interesting question is why the aforesaid *institutions* are represented as *aspirations*, moreover, as universal ones. In *whose* culture is such transmogrification possible?

In nearly all currents of thought which can be nebulously rubricated as 'socialistic' market economy does not appear as an 'aspiration', however strongly it can be endorsed from the angle of expediency. On the other hand, conservatism, if we are not to descend to the most vulgar levels of political rhetoric, admits of democracy as a 'method', to use Joseph Schumpeter's trope, and definitely not as an 'ideal' or 'aspiration' (Schumpeter, 1975: 242–243). It seems that the aforesaid institutions

emerge as 'aspirations' but in a peculiar current of thought which, for lack of a better appellation, I will call 'liberal-democratic idealism'. However trendy it may have become, partly because of its utilization by the so-called 'Davos Culture', it certainly does not get as far as the universal creed harboring 'shared values'. If so, is it not plainly apologetic to portray such idealism as an element of a universal 'civilizational' standard?

3.

The poles of a third axis of the 'big discourse' are occupied by the already familiar notion of 'civilization' as a macro-level cultural whole and by the conception of 'civilization' as a 'civilizing process' which proceeds primarily on the micro-level of personality structures and human interactions.[12] Within the 'big discourse', the interpenetration of these two versions of 'civilization' is quite visible. From the Enlightenment onwards, 'civilization', on the macro-level, has been associated with 'refinement of manners', inculcation of 'virtues', promotion of peaceful modes of human interaction. On the other hand, such writers as Elias or Jaeger showed how the growth of 'civility' on the micro-level feeds into and, reciprocally, is fed by the transformations of such macro-structures as social power and the mechanisms of its distribution and by such macro-processes as the overall 'rationalization' of social life (Elias, 1994; Jaeger, 1995).

The 'small discourse' abandoned the association of 'civilization' with the 'civilizing process'. At best, it distortedly represents some outcomes of the 'civilizing process' as immovable 'values', such as 'tolerance', 'respect for human dignity', etc. The reification of 'values' prevents one from posing the most important and topical questions: How does 'civilization' function to enhance 'civility'? Does 'civilization' always and necessarily succeed in 'civilizing' humans and their interactions? What can cause its failures in this respect? What should be inferred from such failures regarding the nature of 'civilization' itself? Do they evidence the degeneration of 'civilization' as such, or even its 'breakdowns' (Elias, 1996: chapter 4), rather than just its accidental setbacks?

The absence of such questions within the 'small discourse' is revealing indeed. After all, the crux of the 'civilizing process' consists exactly in the domestication and reduction of violence. If so, one may wonder how the 'civilizing process' can be compatible with the permanent war against the 'eternal gang' of 'barbarians' discussed in the previous paragraph. How can 'civilization', being a side in such a war, escape the 'de-civilizing' effects of it?

Such an escape looks impossible. All conflicts tend to transform their participants. This has been known at least since the Hegelian 'master – slave dialectic'. But it does make a difference whether a conflict is brought about by the ethical-political rise of the slave above the status quo or by the endlessly repetitive attacks of the 'eternal gang' against 'civilization' which are devoid of any ethical-political content. Conflicts of the second kind are *regressive* by definition: 'barbarity' appears in them as an active force which sets up 'the rules of the game' – with everything that follows from this for 'civilization'. Lee Harris is perfectly consistent when he writes that 'it

is the enemy who defines us as his enemy, and in making this definition he changes us, and changes us whether we like it or not. We cannot be the same after we have been defined as an enemy as we were before.' The most important change which thus happens to us is that 'we' are compelled to behave illiberally, that is, in a way which is incongruent with 'our' liberal values, such as tolerance, individual liberty, etc. (Harris, 2004: xiv–xv).

If so, what is left of 'civilization' in its capacity of a 'civilizing process'? What does it defend against 'barbarity' if it has 'de-civilized' to such an extent itself? Such questions cannot even be posed within the 'small discourse' because they defy the monolithic and static image of 'civilization' which it sticks to. Nonetheless, they seem to be invited by the intrinsic logic of the 'clash of civilizations' and its radicalized modifications.

Blind to such questions, the 'small discourse', however, attempts to 'legitimize' the 'de-civilization of the civilization': the effects of 'de-civilization' are portrayed as a much desired recovery of the 'true essence' of the 'Western civilization' and this is what would supposedly enable it to prevail in the 'clashes of civilizations'. 'The supremacy of the liberal identity has been for only a short moment in the long history of Europe, but if it continues, its effect will be to abolish Europe's future and therefore to bring its long history to an early end. The best way for Europe to regain its future is to reclaim its history, and that means to return again to the Christian faith that attended and vitalized Europe for almost two thousand years' (Kurth, 2006: 70). Here, the reciprocally transformative logic of the conflict is brought to fruition: a fundamentalist degeneration of the 'Western civilization' appears as a perfect match to the 'barbaric' fundamentalism of its enemy.

4.

The poles of the fourth axis of the 'big discourse' are represented by the monolithic and culturally homogenous 'civilizations', on the one hand, and by 'civilizations' perceived as highly internally differentiated and irremediably contradictory formations on the other. Moreover, the second approach posits 'civilizations', to use Marcel Mauss's wording, as 'to some degree, the work of the collective will' and, consequently, as something 'fundamentally *arbitrary* in nature' (Mauss, 2004: 28).

If so, one of the central tasks of the 'analysis of civilizations' turns out to be the clarification of how a given 'collective will' which 'to some degree' produced a 'civilization' in question was shaped and how it was being modified by the changing constellations of social forces. This implies a series of more specific questions: What were the political-ideological centers which contributed to the emergence of a given 'civilization' and how did their competition affect its later evolution? What were the processes and circumstances which led to the codification of what later emerged as the normative nucleus of a given 'civilization'? How did its actors adjust this nucleus to the changing social, economic, political conditions of its existence? How did the interactions of a given 'civilization' with its 'civilizational' and 'barbaric' environments impact the construction and the later metamorphoses of this nucleus (Nielson, 1991)?[13]

These questions are foreign to the 'small discourse' because it adheres to the monolithic image of 'civilization'. The contestation of interpretations of the 'civilization's' normative nucleus can be explained (away), within its ambit, only as the transfer of the 'clashes of civilizations' to the inside of a given 'civilization'. This is why 'multiculturalism' is so severely censured by the majority of the 'small discourse's' contributors (Huntington, 1993b: 190; Blankley, 2005: 186). It remains unexplained, however, how and why the monolithic 'Western civilization' succumbed to 'multiculturalism'. This should not surprise us: any attempt to explain this would have resulted in shedding light on the connections between cultural identities and socio-economic processes and their inherent contradictions. But this is exactly what has been tabooed within the 'small discourse' by dwarfing the role of institutions in determining 'civilization's' identity, as this has been explained earlier.

But who, after all, decrees what the canon, or 'civilization's' normative nucleus, consists of? At this juncture, a figure of the Legislator of Truth resurfaces in the 'small discourse' fulfilling the only function which it is good for, i.e. a function of the *deus ex machina*. However concealed in the depersonalized statements about the (deceptively) 'self-evident' nature of 'civilizations' and/or appeals to 'unanimity' ('common values' and 'universal aspirations'), it stands as an intimated pillar of the 'small discourse'.[14] Without this pillar, it simply disintegrates.

'The clash of civilizations' and the 'dialogue among civilizations' as 'reality'

The phenomena which are subsumed under the category of the 'clash of civilizations' are so miscellaneous and dissimilar that it is hard to discover what they have in common apart from that they are all glossed with the rhetoric of the unique 'civilizational' identity. What do Al-Qaeda's terrorism or the Taliban's bellicose fundamentalism share with, for example, Singapore's or Malaysia's struggle for their places in the sun of the global economy which proceeds under the banner of 'Asian values' (see Zakaria, 1994; Mohamad, 1998; Chua Beng Huat, 2003)? What does all this have to do with the efforts of the religious-conservative forces in India to impose the mythical homogenous 'Hindu civilization' on the infinitely diverse country in order to establish a 'nation-state' congruent with the Western conception of it (for more, see Gupta, 1997: 67)? Or with a craving of Russia for full admittance into the club of the 'rulers of the world' beautified and justified with the help of the ideology focused on the 'multi-polarity' of international politics and on the unique identity of the 'Russian civilization' (Gromyiko, visited on 11/10/07)? And so on. The political economies of these projects and their international strategies could not be more different. A closer inspection, however, discerns some important features which they do have in common.

1. Normatively, all these projects are legitimated through their appeals to the 'traditional values' which are *essentialistically* depicted as the true foundations of their cultural and 'civilizational' identities. Quite often such 'values' are legally instituted and thus backed, in one way or another, by the political and ideological apparatuses of the state. Some of these projects, such as those pursued in

Singapore and Malaysia, may be futuristic in their techno-economic orientations. But even this cannot hide their *anti-modernist* character. If modernity is normatively constituted by self-reflexivity and self-generation of its 'principles' and by the following transformation of the status of traditions which are forced to 'explain themselves' and thus to become open to questioning and critical scrutiny (Habermas, 1987: 7, 19, 31, 55; Giddens, 1994: 5) then the essentialized phenomena of 'civilizations' are contrary to modernity.

2. The mandating of 'values' implies that it is 'order' rather than 'freedom' which lies at the center of such projects. More precisely, they promote an anti-modern conception of order which cannot grasp it as what is *based on* freedom (as distinguished from licentiousness) rather than what curbs freedom.[15] Objections to the idea of 'human rights', which the proponents of the 'non-Western civilizations' are famous for, are but a particular manifestation of a broader anti-modern conception of order. It is because this conception is alien to the idea and practice of collective autonomy as a reflexive self-constitution of the 'we' (whatever the scope of such 'we' can be and however it can be related to other 'wes'), i.e., alien to 'positive freedom', that it causes deficits of 'negative freedom'.[16] It is the suppression of collective autonomy that makes the figure of the Legislator of Truth (whatever its institutional incarnations may be) indispensable for such 'civilizational' projects. And this is what typifies them as the projects of *authoritarian hegemony*.[17]
3. The structures of authoritarian hegemony result from and remain susceptible to political-ideological conflicts and instabilities. Acknowledging their vulnerability and trying to forestall potential attacks against them, these structures can and do, from time to time, embark on reinterpreting 'traditional values' by themselves which, in turn, can bring about strife amongst the elites running a given 'civilizational' project. The very discourse on 'traditional values' and even the eye-catching instances of the 'clashes of civilizations', like nearly all recent most blatant acts of terror, are intended for 'domestic' consumption in the first place, that is, they serve to weaken, outmaneuver or just 'outdo' rivals and to reinforce the hegemony over the led.[18]
4. In most of the 'civilizational' projects issues of social-economic justice are subservient to issues of cultural identity. Within the ideology instilled by the authoritarian hegemony, it is impossible to stand up for social rights as *rights* without being denounced for (Western) individualism and personal or group selfishness which allegedly undermine the unity and integrity of the essentialized 'us'. The politics of redistribution and social welfare is couched in the logic of patronage. In other words, it appears to be part of the same strategy of consolidation of the authoritarian hegemony.
5. The 'civilizational' projects can be perceived as a subtype of the politics of identity, or recognition, well known from the contemporary Western experience. This politics differs from the other kind of the politics of recognition, typical of the classical (Hegelian-Marxist) projects of emancipation, by its emphasis on the defense (or expansion) of the *already-existing* identity instead of its *negation* in favor of a new and ethically enriched identity obtainable in the course of the struggle against oppressors, as envisaged by the projects of emancipation. Since the 'civilizational'

projects do not embrace the perspective of *Aufhebung* of the existing identity they are devoid of a tendency towards 'universalization' which implies the inclusion of the Other(s) into new and broader formats of 'mutual recognition'. Hence such projects represent the 'abstract particular',[19] in the Hegelian sense of the term, in which the universal (of global capitalism) manifests itself only as *compulsion* which makes them struggle for survival and compete among themselves while they retain the cultural shape of 'self-subsistent particularities' (Hegel, 1967: 124). History- and ethics-wise, such struggles are futile: they only feed into the reproduction of the global-capitalistic status quo thereby perpetuating themselves as 'abstract particulars'.

How can the de-modernization of discourses and practices which unfolds under the banners of 'civilizations' be explained? What has reversed the modernist thrust of what Eric Hobsbawm called the 'Short Twentieth Century' which extended from 1914 to 1991 (Hobsbawm, 1996: x ff)?

Probably, the most succinct answer would be that the 'Short Twentieth Century' passed over into (another) 'end of history' or into what Goran Therborn aptly called a period 'after dialectics' (Therborn, 2007: 65 ff). The 'end of history' or, better, its stoppage has been caused by the disappearance of a credible alternative to the status quo which means a closing of the horizon of the ethical-political future as qualitatively distinguishable from the present. This implies that 'history' has degenerated into 'evolution' within which the techno-economic growth uncouples itself from the ethical-political transformability of social structures. Thus, the future is replaced by the (prolonged and expanded) present.

Fukuyama's 'end of history' and Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' are complementary rather than antagonistic conceptions, as they are often portrayed (Huntington, 2003: 31 ff; *Crossing the Divide*, 2001: 56 ff). Certainly, a global triumph of the liberal ideology predicted by Fukuyama did not happen. But the conflicts which typify the period 'after dialectics' have lost their transformative potential. They are unfolding in accordance with the logic of what Hardt and Negri called a 'form of rule' which is 'war'. 'War' has become a 'general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination' and it ensures reproduction of the status quo of the 'Empire' (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 13, 30–37). If deconstruction of the ethical-political dialectics of history was a prerequisite of the ascendancy of global capitalism (and this is what lends truth to Fukuyama's 'end of history') then a *practical* consequence of this had to be, by definition, the 'naturalization' of the forms assumed by the forces active in the global arena. *The 'naturalness' of the 'civilizational' forms strictly matches the 'inevitability' of capitalism as the 'natural' condition of humanity*. This is a *practical* truth of Huntington's doctrine, however poorly theoretically crafted it may be. From this angle, Huntington's question addressed to his opponents 'If not civilizations, what?' (Huntington, 1993b) is justified and sound. That is, in the world devoid of *historical* ethical-political meanings (Laidi, 1998) only essentialized meanings, like those enshrined in the 'civilizational' projects of authoritarian hegemony, have become possible.

In general, it is well known how essentialized identities are politically constructed – it is not for the first time that capitalism resorts to such techniques in the period

'after dialectics'. Nowadays, however, this seems to have assumed a 'form of rule' rather than that of the regressive 'detour' history could occasionally make.

The invention of 'race' in the USA *after* the Civil War can serve as an example of this.[20] The dismantling of the *overt* legal structures of slavery sanctioned by the patriarchic ideology of the 'beneficence of slavery' for the slaves necessitated '*re*-naturalization' of domination in a new way. The novelty of 'race' consisted in its direct appeal to the physical differences as independent of and precedent to any political, economic, regional, ideological, etc., distinctions. Such primeval differences cannot be removed by any political-historical practice while they remain decisive for (Huntington's) 'What are you?' and therefore for how people are treated. The 'naturalness' of 'racial' differences pulled them out of the realm of law and politics and made them 'unfit' for legal regulation. This is what contrasts 'race' to the classical slavery which belonged to the realm of (the then existent) law. Such novel 're-naturalization' of domination enabled the US Supreme Court to justify and legalize the segregation of 'races' in the verdict in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) which put forth a notorious formula of 'separate but equal': 'the absence of any difference *grounded* in law became powerful testimony to the irreducibility of a difference *reflected* in the law' (Michaels, 1988: 189; 'Plessy v. Ferguson', 1973: 159).

Such 're-naturalization' of domination confers on the oppressed a form of identity which obstructs their self-expression in their capacity of the *oppressed*. As a representative of a 'race' an oppressed person can demand his/her identity to be 'recognized' and 'respected'. But this would imply 'recognition' of and 'respect' for the symbolic-ideological mechanism of his/her oppression. Contrariwise, a protest against oppression as such can be articulated by the oppressed only in his/her changeable, historical-political and potentially universalistic capacities, such as those of a 'worker', or a 'socialist', or a 'wronged', etc. All these capacities are meant to be 'effaced' or downplayed by the essentialized cultural identities as the basic 'ontological frame' within which the self-consciousness of the oppressed is to be shaped. I will call putting the identity of the oppressed into such an 'ontological frame' 'misframing', borrowing this term from Nancy Fraser and stretching it a bit to cover the problem I am dealing with, to highlight a major and specifically political form of injustice (Fraser, 2005: 76–77).[21]

Such misframing has been made use of throughout the space of global capitalism although the ways it has been practiced in different sectors of it are marked out by remarkable peculiarities. This misframing appeared as a 'natural' reaction to the climax of the democratic and emancipatory struggles which had taken place in the 1960s and 1970s. These struggles brought about the downfall of the old colonial empires and created a more pluralistic and democratic world order than had ever existed before. They started crippling the authoritarian structures of the former Soviet bloc and introduced important changes into the *modus operandi* of capitalism which resulted in a considerable decommodification of the labor force and socialization of the state.[22] A reverse movement towards the establishment of the neo-imperial global hegemony, desocialization of the state, recommodification of the labor force implied, besides other things, a deconstruction of those political identities whereby the agencies of emancipation constituted themselves. This is where the essentialized cultural identities and 'civilizational' projects enter political life.

These essentialized identities destroyed the universalizable patterns of solidarity of the dominated, whether of anti-capitalistic or anti-imperialistic types. Contemporary confusion and powerlessness of the anti-war movement, no matter how widespread the discontent with the war in Iraq has become, is one example of this (see on this, Cockburn, 2007). Probably to a comparable extent, the dissolution of the class and democratic solidarities explains why the present onslaught of capitalism is *not* accompanied by the rise of resistance on the part of the laboring masses. It is the weakness of such resistance that made possible such capitalistic feats as restoration of the once-believed-to-be-outdated model of *laissez-faire* and a concomitant unstoppable and nearly ubiquitous growth of socio-economic inequalities which has become a prevalent political-economic tendency since the 1980s (see Silver, 2003: 176 ff; Therborn, 2007: 65; Giraud, 2007: 33–38).

This justifies Fredric Jameson's doubt whether it is still useful to keep on applying the term 'modernity' to the world we are living in. Is it not appropriate to substitute 'capitalism' for 'modernity' (Jameson, 2002: 214–215)? 'Modernity', however diversely interpreted, implied openness in relation to the future, that is, a continuation of 'open-ended' history. It also designated a formation irreducible to capitalism, however important a capitalistic 'causality' for social life has been. If 'open-ended history' is no longer here, at least as long as the period 'after dialectics' lasts, if capitalism has managed to colonize the social-cultural spaces which have been shielded from it hitherto and to create considerably de-modernized and essentialized 'civilizational' practices then the reasons to uphold a distinction between 'modernity' and 'capitalism' seem to have disappeared.[23]

What are the implications of this for those discourses on 'civilizations' which we discussed in the first paragraph of this article? The term 'civilization' as it exists within the 'big discourse' has been a characteristic product of modernity and an instrument of its self-reflection. Its conceptually impoverished and normatively emasculated version typical of the 'small discourse' is a no less characteristic product of the de-modernized modernity. This version of 'civilization' has to be critiqued exactly in this capacity. Such critique of it is not equal to its theoretical lambasting. Critique has to explain why such academically unsound concepts as the 'small discourse's' version of 'civilization' can persist and, moreover, thrive in the intellectual milieu of our contemporaneity. It has to remind us of the difference between an action of critique and a critique through action.

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Notes

1. On the history of 'civilization', see Arnason (2003: chapters 1–4); Mazlish (2004: chapters 1–4); Starobinski (1993); Braudel (1980). For critique of the concepts which comprise the 'small discourse', see Said (2000); Said (2001); Senghaas (2002: chapter 7); Al-Azmeh (2001); Dallmayr (2002); Mezhuev (2006).
2. It is noteworthy that the same problem arose in Russia in the specific context of the crisis of official Soviet Marxism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The monopoly of the theory of 'social-economic

formations' to explain history was challenged by placing the theory of 'civilizations' as its opposite intended to capture those aspects of the world-historical process(es) which the theory of 'formations' could not fathom. Thus, 'civilization' was associated with the 'mode of communication' and historical continuity whereas 'formation' was related to the 'mode of production' and historical ruptures. Hence, 'civilization' became roughly correspondent to what Western writers mean by 'culture' and 'formation' was assimilated with 'material civilization' (not dissimilar from what, for example, V. Gordon Childe meant by it). Such a distinction between 'formation' and 'civilization' unavoidably involved a problem of their interaction which pushed the Soviet/Russian writers in the direction epitomized by Eisenstadt's formulations cited above. In the concrete circumstances of confrontation with official Marxism, the Soviet/Russian writers, however, tended to stress dissimilarities between 'formation' and 'civilization' at the expense of their interaction which quite often resulted in an unpromising *de facto* dualistic approach to history (see Reisner, 1993; Yerasov, 1994).

3. In relation to Samuel Huntington, this identification was scathingly critiqued by W. Schafer (2001: 304 ff).
4. This is particularly visible in how Huntington systematically downplays all those distinctions and conflicts, such as economic, political, ideological, which are rooted in institutions and are explainable only through institutional analysis. He privileges 'cultural' distinctions and conflicts (declared to be the 'most pervasive, important, and dangerous', at least since the end of the Cold War) which are determined by our belonging to his institutionally undetermined 'civilizations' (Huntington, 2003: 21, 28).
5. This is how the 'dialogue' describes, for instance, the conflicts which devastated the Balkans in the 1990s (*Crossing the Divide*, 2001: 43).
6. Clearly, 'differences' and 'contradictions' are not the same: 'differences' can imply mutual indifference whereas 'contradictions' cannot. Huntington never elaborated a *theoretical derivation* of his 'clashes of civilizations' from 'cultural differences', nor did he clarify whether or not they operate in the mode of 'contradictions'. This makes the 'clashes' look fortuitous and inexplicable theoretically. This is by no means accidental. If 'cultural differences' are detached from institutions, as they are in Huntington, no source of their formation and development can be shown and hence they cannot logically be presented as 'contradictions'.
7. Outlining this incomplete list of problems which pertain to a political mode of being of 'values' I was bearing in mind such conceptual approaches to them as those developed by Carl Schmitt (1996), Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2000a, 2000b) and others.
8. For more detail on this, see Mazlish (2001: 293–296). The critique of this society, from Rousseau and Adam Ferguson to the early romantics, was developing almost simultaneously with the setting up of this 'civilizational' self-conscience. A critical disclosure of tensions and 'vices' which were brought about by the progression of this society, however, underscored its uniqueness and its unprecedented accomplishments. Such critique, in fact, enhanced its self-reflexivity and, through turning this self-reflexivity into one of its constitutive features, facilitated its self-assertion. This is also true for the dissociation of 'civilization' from 'culture' which was introduced by Kant in a form of the opposition between 'outward decency' and 'morality' (Kant, 2006: 12).
9. The Others which are still inferior to 'civilization(s)' deserving to be properly called so include, using Toynbee's terminology, 'abortive civilizations', 'arrested civilizations', 'satellite civilizations', not to mention the 'pre-civilizational societies' (Toynbee, 1961: 551–554).
10. By 'stretching' I mean what Toynbee referred to as a basic element of his method, that is, his employment of the Hellenic civilization as a 'model' for his 'cross-civilizational' comparisons (Toynbee, 1957: 548 ff).
11. Some leading 'war-on-terror' mongers were quick to capitalize on this particular implication of the 'clash of civilizations' ideology. To quote from Tony Blair, 'This is not a clash between civilizations. It is a clash about civilization. It is an age-old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace and see opportunity in the modern world and those who reject its existence . . .' And so on and so forth. (Cited in Durodie, 2007: 431).
12. The difference between these two approaches to 'civilization' is edifyingly illuminated in Szakolczai (2001: 369–370 ff).

13. The foundations of this approach were laid down by Benjamin N. Nelson (1981).
14. Edward Said pinpoints this figure of the Legislator in his description of Huntington's perspective as the one 'which is to survey the entire world from a perch outside all ordinary attachments and hidden loyalties <. . .> as if everyone else were scurrying around looking for the answers that he has already found'. The adoption of such a perspective is a trademark of an ideologist (Said, 2001: 12).
15. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss whether such an anti-modernist conception of order is but a transient feature of the regimes undergoing a process of 'modernization' which is expected to deliver the fruits of the specifically modern political culture to them (Senghaas, 2002: 94 ff).
16. Regarding a contentious issue of the 'positive freedom' – 'negative freedom' nexus, I side with Charles Taylor (1979).
17. Certainly, collective autonomy cannot be metaphysically contrasted to hegemony as such. The latter seems to be a general operating principle whereby political agencies are constituted. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between 'authoritarian' and 'democratic hegemonic practices' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 58 ff).
18. Quite likely, '9/11' was a provocation of gigantic proportions meant to spark off a similarly gigantic retaliation from the West which could be portrayed by the diehard fundamentalists as another crusade against the Muslim *Ummah*. This could (and partly did) legitimate their claim to serve as the 'natural' leaders of the faithful in their confrontation with the 'impious invaders'. It is exactly a lack of any significant political successes after the rise of the first wave of Islamic fundamentalism in the late 1970s – early 1980s which could make such a gigantic provocation 'expedient' from the perspective of the fundamentalist leaders (Kepel, 2002: 4 ff).
19. What characterizes the 'abstract particular' is that it imagines itself to be absolute and its boundaries to be natural and unchangeable. This feature of the 'abstract particular' is translated by Huntington into (quasi-) political statements: 'In the former Soviet Union, communists can become democrats, the rich can become poor and the poor rich, but Russians cannot become Estonians and Azeris cannot become Armenians. In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was 'Which side are you on?' and people could and did choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is 'What are you?' That is a given that it cannot be changed' (Huntington, 1993b: 27). Thus Huntington eloquently expresses the opposition between the 'concrete particular', like 'class', for example, and the 'abstract particular' typified by 'civilizations'. The 'concrete particular' embraces the universalistic tendency of self-transformation, which is *politically* mediated by the *freedom* of self-determination ('Which side are you on?') whereas the 'abstract particular' *enslaves* through the immutability of its preordained definitions (invariable meaning of 'What are you?'). Such immutability is certainly a product of the authoritarian 'civilizational' projects. More democratically oriented 'civilizational' projects, contrariwise, did envisage the transformation of the cultural identities of *both* sides of the conflict. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, envisioned a possibility of the 'Indianization' of the English as much as that of the ethical elevation of his fellow-countrymen as the *sine qua non* of their genuine self-rule. (Gandhi, 1997: 26–29, 39–41, 73).
20. In what follows, I draw heavily on the analysis of this phenomenon provided by Walter Michaels (1988: 187–193).
21. I agree with Fraser that the problems ensuing from 'misrecognition' are not reducible to those stemming from 'maldistribution' and what I called 'misframing'. To avoid reductionism, however, does not mean to be blind to the political economy of culture. This has to be emphasized because of the myopia of the conventional 'identity politics' to how (certain) cultural differences serve domination and are caused by it.
22. On the categories of commodification/decommodification of the labor force, see Esping-Andersen (1990: chapter 2). On the institutional forms of the process of decommodification and its democratic ramifications, see Castel (2002).
23. From a different theoretical perspective the problem of de-modernization of modernity has been approached by Claus Offe (1996: 15–16).

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