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Summary

A society permeated by ever-present crises, among which we see the revitalization of imperial geopolitics, can be understood through the concept of desacralized cyclical time, coined by the Romanian American religious scholar Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). In the following analysis, we point out: 1) Eliade's concept of sacred space, and sacred time, and its application in a capitalist economy, 2) the structural logic of capital's reproduction, generated by geopolitical animosity, 3) illustrate the same dynamic with examples of geopolitical conflicts and tensions in the 20th and 21st century, 4) point to patterns of cycles and the justification of using desacralized cyclical time. The goal of the article is to present a cyclical movement of social processes that oscillate between creation and destruction. Discussing recent social developments and crises of this kind is an important social question, and the article addresses the problem of growing geopolitical tensions in a cyclical framework, derived from the structures of a capitalist economy. In doing so, it provides a historical review of the dynamics of macro-social and macroeconomic relationships from the 19th century to today. At the same time, the conceptual framework of the analysis is based on the geographic-historical materialism of the British American geographer David Harvey.

Keywords: Imperialism, geopolitics, capitalism, de-scalarized cyclical time

Introduction

Ceaseless social crisis is a constant preoccupation with the sociological theory of high modernity.¹ The crisis manifests in many ways, with geopolitical tension being one example. *Globality* – as a state of transnational networking- was created by the processes of globalization, led by the ideology of globalism, which set the market as the all-encompassing normative framework and stimulated capitalist competitiveness.² Given the conditions of global competition, the consequences of high modernity have become secondary to social actors. The reasons for this are seen in the naïve dogmatism about the necessity of existing social practices, or accommodation to the continued social crises, in which humans have accepted and naturalized ‘crisis’ as a constitutive and normal mode of social existence. The persistence and ever-presence of social tremors could not free people from the need to adjust their immediate lives to existing conditions, despite apocalyptic warnings about the upcoming ecological, political, or economic disaster, which is always around the corner but without real catastrophic effects. Consciousness

1 Regarding the phenomenon of social crisis in high modernity, see: Bauman, Zygmunt. (2011): *Tekuća modernost*. Naklada Pelago, Zagreb. Beck, Ulrich (2001): *Pronalaženje političkog: Prilog teoriji refleksivne modernizacije*. Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb. Giddens, Anthony (1998): *Posledice modernosti*. “Filip Višnjić.”, Beograd.

2 Beck, U. (2003): Što je globalizacija? Vizura, Zagreb. 26.

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of these risks is not truly aware of the potential chaos into which global society is heading, considering the dark prognoses fictitious, as they are always around the corner but never manifest.

In his book, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1961), Romanian American religious scholar Mircea Eliade offered an explication of sacred time from the perspective of a religious man.³ Discussing the cyclical character of *sacred time*, present in archaic society and ancient civilizations, he pointed out what the freeing of cyclical time from its religious substrate represents: a pessimistic image of social and historical existence. Developed in the circles of intellectual elites of ancient civilizations, the concept of desacralized cyclic time pointed to the pointlessness of existence that sees only cycles of creation and destruction, without any promise of resacralization, salvation, cleansing, or stable ontological reactualization.⁴

This concept allows us to analyze the existing circular trajectory of capitalist society and the potentially recurring experience of a societal catastrophe that history has already demonstrated in the context of imperial geopolitics of the twentieth century. Our thesis is, therefore, the following: *History, driven by the logic of similar social practices, leads to identical or similar outcomes*. The twenty-first-century society views the experience of the previous century as a reflection in a mirror. Perhaps the mirror image is not identical because the reflection is distorted by refraction, blurring it (it is blurred by the arrogance of believing we are wiser than our ancestors in a 'post-tragic' world of material abundance). Still, the contours of the blurred reflection are identical. In other words, the modern world, although realized in different social and historical circumstances, has been driven by the same logic of continuous capital accumulation and social practices derived from it, and sees in its past a warning in its unreflective insistence on these practices. Social crisis and the dread of an impending societal catastrophe, i.e., geopolitical tensions and the combustible ground created, remind us of the tragedy of the twentieth-century imperialist wars, offering us a warning and lessons from our ancestors.

The paper's goals are as follows:

1. Point to Eliade's concept of sacred space and time and their application to spatial and temporal determination and dynamics of transnational capitalism (with emphasis on desacralized cyclic time);
2. Point to the geographic determinism of capitalism and contradictions of reproducing capital in time and space;

³ Eliade, Mircea (2004): *Sveto i profano – priroda religije*. Alnari, Beograd.

⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

3. Highlight the ‘eternal return’ of social contradictions that are reflections of earlier historical experiences and show the inescapable conflict state within capitalist states;⁵

To do so, we draw on British American geographer David Harvey (1935-)’s geographic-historical materialism. Geopolitical tensions are interpreted in relation to the creation and reproduction of capitalist practices in relation to their geographic determination (movement of capital through space, necessity of space for realizing capital and modifying it in figurations of capitalist actors, with all the social, political and economic implications), and their temporal continuity (which creates frameworks and directs social, political and economic reproduction). This is further supported by the interpretation of various theoretical traditions, whose insights point to the soundness of the thesis and approach. In that regard, the historical method is significant for documenting historical events and interpreting the structural dynamics of the capitalist system. Our approach is dialectical and seeks to highlight the contradictory tendencies of the capitalist economy, their manifestation in geographic relationships, and the resolution of tensions that lead to new contradictions.

Eliade’s work is not an interpretive but a conceptual framework. His insights are a form filled with content based on the analysis of spatiotemporal practices of capital reproduction. Eliade provides a symbolic and illustrative structure for understanding the pattern that appears in developed capitalism, but the argumentation is strictly materialist.

Finally, we also add some conceptual notes. Throughout the paper, the concepts of imperialism and hegemony will be present. Such concepts are imbued with multiple meanings, depending on the theoretical approach. Therefore, we note:

- The term imperialism is used to denote the interaction and intersection between politics and economics, in which politics spreads its power through economic means and vice versa. In other words, it is political expansion through economics and economic expansion through politics. On the one hand, we derive this concept from Harvey’s concept of capitalist imperialism.⁶ On the other hand, we also rely on the ideas of Italian economist

5 The concept of ‘eternal return’ is found in the works of various authors. Here we refer to Eliade’s interpretation of the myth of the eternal return and Friedrich Nietzsche, who speaks of the ‘eternal return of the one.’ However, instead of using his interpretative schemes, we only adopted the conceptual framework that stresses the repeating structure of events, or rather its ‘circulation.’ For more, see: Elijade, M. (2004): *Sveto i profano – priroda religije*. Alnari, Beograd. Eliade, Mircea (2007): *Mit o vječnom povratku*. Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb. Niče, F. (2015) *Volja za moć*. Dereta, Beograd.

6 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 26.

Giovanni Arrighi (1937-2009) about the territorial and capitalist logics of power.⁷

- The concept of hegemony also relies on Arrighi's work, denoting the power of the state that is not carried out by force (even though the state is founded on it), but through leadership or by the power of example, as states that defend the common interests of the inter-state order. Hegemony therefore involves the consent of the dominated.⁸

Mircea Eliade: The Concept of Sacred Time and Sacred Space Through the Prism of Capitalism

Mircea Eliade believes that the *homo religiousus*' experience of the world is fundamentally different from that of an areligious man.⁹ While he notes that religiousness is in some ways immanent to humans, as the profane human existence in space and time periodically sees its own discontinuity, so characteristic of religious experience (seen in the examples of residual religious experience in expressive sentimentality towards places of special life and experience), he highlights that a religious person's worldview is incomparable to a profane worldview. *Crypto-religious behavior* is merely a fragment that only has momentary flashes of religiosity, while a religious human subsumes the world with his religiosity.¹⁰ That is especially noticeable in his relationship to space and time, whose purpose is determined by the presence or absence of the holy substrate that makes them real, ordered, and persistent in the face of the chaos, mirage, and inconsistency of profane, non-sacred space and time.

Homo religiousus desires to live at the center of the world, in contact with the divine, and the sacred character of space and time makes this possible. Sacred space and sacred time are real and eternal; they participate in the creation and realization of being, are rooted in the eternal order, and transcend the contingency of profane existence. Because of this, they seek out and discover manifestations of the sacred and strive to sacralize immediate life experience. A space-time framework that lacks a sacred character is chaotic and unstable, dangerous in its appearance, and the religious person experiences existence as real only when it is *ab origine*, near the world's cosmogonic forces.

Even though that experience is most expressed in archaic society, it persists in all forms of religiosity. Perhaps primordial communities strove for uninterrupted participation in the divine, but even many 'younger' religious systems create discontinuities in space and time, though they interpret them differently. What in

⁷ Giovanni, Arrighi (2010): *The Long Twentieth Century*. Verso, New York & London. 35.

⁸ Ibid, 29-30.

⁹ Elijade, Mirča (2004): *Sveto i profano – priroda religije*. Alnari, Beograd.

¹⁰ Ibid, 21.

archaic societies was uninterrupted participation in divine existence, for later religious systems (like Christianity), is seen in the special character of liturgical services and the special character of sacred buildings, which physically exist here, but whose special content transcends direct existence (the church is God's house, activities inside of it are a form of participation of communion with God and require a special approach and behavior). In short, the profane space is the world when it is manifest as the world, regardless of whether it seems as though nothing separates it from the profane, aside from a special sign or ceremony, which accords with hierophanies that manifest in the profane but do not belong to it.¹¹

So, it is also with time. The time of physical existence is different than its sacred *modus operandi*. That which for the archaic man was eternal, unchanging time, or rather time in which the real became. The holiday calendar presupposes points of temporal discontinuity that enable participation in *in illo tempore* ('in that time'), when the existing gained its existence, and when divine interventions modeled human practices. This time is cyclical, as the chaos of profane existence envelops it if it is not renewed. Hence, there is a certain ceremonial character to holidays that reactualize the sacred time and offer purification for the community and the individual, ridding them of sins, once again establishing the real character of the world, realized in closeness to the gods. Hence, time in archaic cultures was cyclical, as the myth about the eternal return means the resacralization of the human world and practice, enabling a 'new beginning' and purification.¹²

What, for older societies, was an unending cyclical nature of a new beginning, embodied in the trans-historical character of time that transcends the immediate world, has, in newer religious systems such as Judaism and Christianity, been interpreted and reflected in the context of historical existence and linearity. It all started with Judaism. God was no longer outside of historical time; He intervened within it, and for Christians, even soteriological promises are realized in historical existence through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Even if a Christian believer always returns to that moment in their liturgy, he is no longer trans-historical but represents a special sacred version of this-worldly existence.¹³

However, along with the development of cyclical sacred time in ancient Old-World civilizations, a desacralized conception of 'eternal return' also developed. For instance, in India and Greece, circular time was stripped of its religious foundation. Instead of its hopeful opportunity for purification, it took on a pessimistic tone of eternal cyclicity and destruction, without any foundation, stability, or promise of salvation. History follows an endless cycle, bringing the familiar – the good and bad, creative and destructive- and the growing chaos cannot be avoided.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Ibid., 59.

¹³ Ibid., 81-82.

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Cycles are not opportunities; they are a promise of both ruptures and disasters. History, in the conception of desacralized cyclic time, loses hope of engaging with the divine and takes on a pessimistic tone of pointless circling and a return to chaos.¹⁴

This interpretation is extremely important, and it is equally appropriate to apply the religious concept to the dogmatics of capitalist legitimations and to the unwavering insistence on capital accumulation. Capitalism is fundamentally both a profane and a religious phenomenon. As Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942-) notes, capitalism is one of the modern religions of the Western world.¹⁵ It is a conceptual framework of modern society through which the world is interpreted and understood. It offers a promise of salvation and insists on belief in its correctness. Despite generating crises, it demands patience from the 'martyrs' because the current difficulties are merely part of a 'secular test' that will be overcome through religious perseverance within dominant economic practices. In a neoliberal society, ideological conceptualists and technocrats religiously believe that existing economic models are correct, and that the 'punishment' in the form of market dysfunction is not the result of their flaws but a deviation from the 'sacred text' of neoliberal doctrine. People have 'sinned' because they did not adhere to the 'original text' of neoliberalism. Thus they suffer 'punishment' in economic tremors for which the 'eternal economic truth' of (deregulated) accumulation is in no way responsible. That is why American economist Joseph E. Stiglitz (1943-) calls the policies of the Washington Consensus, i.e., neoliberal policies, 'market fundamentalism.'¹⁶

As the sacred space presupposes the sources and existence that is real, creating a hierarchy and discontinuity of spaces, so too does the dynamic of molecular processes of capital accumulation create spatial differentiation, attracting value from all around the world towards the 'center' of the capitalist economy – the most powerful regions of the capitalist states. That pilgrimage of capital, moving from the center and back to it, is rooted in the dominant political and economic structures of capitalism. In the modern transnational phase, the circulation of capital differentiates the most economically powerful regions as 'sacred spaces' in whose center 'religious truth' of neoliberal capitalism is best practiced (even though, as practice has shown, the global disparity of wealth is the result of imperial structures that enable profiting of the *center* at the expense of the *periphery*)¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 78-81.

¹⁵ Agamben, Giorgio (2021): *Where Are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics*. ERIS, London.

¹⁶ Stiglic, Džozef, J. (2018): *Globalizacija i njene protivrečnosti: antiglobalizacija u Trampovoj eri – revidirano i dopunjeno izdanje*. Miba books, Beograd. 65, f. 73.

¹⁷ The center-periphery concept is one of the keys of the World Systems Theory, stressing disparities of power and level of exploitation between central states of the capitalist system and the rest. To become more familiar with the basics of the said theoretical approach and concept, see: Volterstin, Imanuel (2005): *Uvod u analizu svjetskog sistema*. OKF, Cetinje.

Furthermore, it takes with it the human capital, providing the best career opportunities in the *center*. The *regionalization* of the economy foreshadows the multiplication of key centers of capital accumulation as the ‘axis mundi,’ the pillar around which the world revolves and on which it exists.¹⁸

The ‘holy time’ of capital is evident in its circular demand for accumulation and realization, which requires a ‘ritual’ acceleration of these processes, because capital is not satisfied with merely fulfilling its realization but seeks it in an adequate (and as short as possible) time.¹⁹ However, the circulation of capital and its spatio-temporal determination suggest that the interpretation of capitalism is much more suited to the terms of a desacralized cyclical time. It provides us with a conceptual framework for what capitalism, in its religious persistence in its own eternity, correctness, and ‘material salvation,’ generates. And that is the continuous circulation within existing structural contradictions and developmental stages, which generate social instabilities and lead to war escalations due to their contradictory nature.

The Fateful Character of Capitalistic Imperialism: The Structure of Capitalism and Genesis of Imperial Geopolitics

Capitalism is laden with contradictions. The dialectical nature of capitalism creates structural tensions that, in turn, stimulate new structural contradictions and system dynamics that tend toward permanent dysfunction. Be it about the contradictory tendencies of driving labor costs down and the concurrent demand for an adequate degree of aggregate demand; falling profit margins caused by technological innovations created to boost competition, and/or extra profit; growing masses of capital that lack a profitable realization; the growth of fictive capital and machinations on the financial markets as profitable ventures, and the creation of ‘bubbles’ of debt with market breakdowns and economic collapses; the striving for the greatest degree of labor exploitation and the need for economic regulations for long-term sustainability; the interests of individual capitalists in contrast with the general interest of the capitalist class; the relationship of endless capital accumulation and a metabolic relationship with nature and such.²⁰ This creates ruptures that manifest in many dimensions, and the imperialist tensions are just the final consequence of the internal logic of capital accumulation.

There are several reasons why the analysis of capitalism must be elevated from economics to geopolitics, and imperialism is the most important factor. The de-

¹⁸ Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 103.

¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

²⁰ For more on the contradiction between the reproduction of capital and the structural limits of capitalism in modern society, see: Harvey, David (2026): *The Story of Capital*. Verso, London & New York.

velopment of the capitalist economy has always been closely linked to state activity. Giovanni Arrighi, in his book *The Long Twentieth Century* (2010), pointed out the close interaction between the logic of capitalist power and territorial power, or their contradictory interaction. While the logic of capitalist power seeks profit and views territorial acquisition as an end, the logic of territorial power, bounded by national borders, treats capital as a by-product and as a means of acquiring territory and prosperity for the state. In practice, they often work together to create, transform, and reproduce capitalism.

It can thus be seen that the expansion of capitalist power over the last five hundred years has been associated not just with interstate competition for mobile capital, as underscored by Weber, but also with the formation of political structures endowed with ever-more extensive and complex organizational capabilities to control the social and political environment of capital accumulation on a world-scale.²¹

Arrighi stresses the genesis of the capitalist system as inseparable from the state, arguing how the creation and development of the world system, as the capitalist economy, proceeded along four cycles of capital accumulation (the Genoese, Dutch, British and American), marked by the domination of hegemonic states, each capable of governing and restructuring the existing system (whose development shows certain traits of development and always ends in financialization of the economy) during their ‘mandate.’

And when states interact with one another, especially for economic reasons, the question of geopolitics naturally arises. Access to resources, markets, trade routes, labor force, and so on becomes a constitutive part of national policy, which sees them as means and potential sources of power. Thus, the issue of geography takes on political and economic connotations and becomes a constitutive part of the global system.

Given the internal logic of capital accumulation, its geopolitical dimension is even more evident. Capital that operates in space and time, creating the regionalization of wealth, can never be satiated with the existing quantity of territory on which the accumulation, realization, and flow of capital occur. Given that the demand for growth cannot be stopped, the existing framework of accumulation becomes insufficient sooner or later. There are a handful of reasons: capitalism must spread the reach of its structures, as it depends on institutional backing that is compatible with the principle of ceaseless capital accumulation; internal markets face limitations and structural trends of limited resources, falling profits and/or aggregate demand, generating crises. Internal markets eventually prove insufficient to address the crises, as the endless desire for growth is incompatible with the limitations of existing territories (local, regional, or national markets).

²¹ Giovanni Arrighi (2010): *The Long Twentieth Century*. Verso, New York & London. 15.

The limitation of internal markets is evident in what is called *excess accumulation of capital*, i.e., surplus capital and/or labor without the possibility of profitable application or usability (the simultaneous surplus of both is the most critical manifestation of this).²² The contradictory situation in which the fundamental assumptions for smooth economic activity begin to pose obstacles to it, because they have exceeded the limits of their possible applicability within existing market frameworks (due to excess supply relative to demand or to market collapse, which degrades demand), generates a *spatio-temporal fix*.²³ These are capital strategies that, through investment in future projects, market expansion, or both, aim to overcome current difficulties caused by surplus supply relative to demand.²⁴ In the first case, investing in future projects means delaying profit realization, which may not be beneficial in all crises, given the increasing demand to compress the time for capital realization and return on investment. On the other hand, expanding markets in the case of internal market saturation (when a new market cannot be created within one's own borders) entails expanding capital beyond national borders, which is unlikely without government support in a competitive global system. Although in practice, this strategy often results from a combination of both approaches, it does not eliminate the root cause of extra-state expansion. And so, there is a transition from economics to geopolitics, giving rise to capitalist imperialism. This is the destiny of capitalist society.

Many authors have dealt with the phenomenon of capitalist imperialism. Due to the paper's limited scope, we will list only a few. Russian Soviet politician Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924) said that imperialism was characterized by the rule of monopolies, domination of finance capital, export of capital and not goods, and the partitioning of the global market followed by the partitioning of territory. For him, it is the highest, or dying stage of capitalism, emerging when monopolies (managed by industrial capitalists, bankers, and state officials, following one another in specific conditions of the monopolized market), out of economic imperatives (need for resources, capital realization, eliminating competition), partition the world market, in agreement with international capitalist caters, resulting in

22 More on the concept of excessive capital accumulation in: Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 88. Harvey, David (2026): *The Story of Capital*. Verso, London & New York. 152.

23 We decided on this translation given that Harvey's last book, where he explains what he means by the 'worldplay.' In it, the spatio-temporal fix is defined with respect to the term's multiplicity. Harvey points to 'fix' implying a spatial boundedness, repairs, but also *fixing* for when addicts consume narcotics, providing temporary relief, but not the removal of the root cause of his condition, born from his addiction. In other words, the spatial-temporal fix for capitalism is the same as narcotics are for addicts – temporary relief. However, given that 'fixing' the damage of capital accumulation is the most precise term we can use to understand it, the reader must always keep in mind all the meanings for a more complete understanding. For more details, see: Harvey, David (2026): *The Story of Capital*. Verso, London & New York. 150.

24 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 109.

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the division of the world led by the leading capitalist powers (be it in overt or covert colonialism).²⁵ German philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) believed that expansion was the central idea of imperialism, which solves the problem of excessive capital accumulation with the support of the state. By expanding its power, the state protects exported capital and minimizes risks related to foreign investment, guaranteeing profits. For her, imperialism is the political expression of capital accumulation.²⁶ Harvey sees the contradictory fusion of state and imperial logics (territorial logic of power) and the molecular process of capital accumulation (capitalist logic of power) within capitalist imperialism. From the perspective of capitalist logics of power, imperialism can be seen in capital's desire to uphold and exploit all asymmetrical advantages (created through spatial exchange and the molecular processes of capital accumulation) and the resources that state power can provide. On the other hand, imperialism, seen from the perspective of territorial power, means using such power asymmetries for the end of state power. Even though they are qualitatively different and potentially opposing logics of power, they intersect within imperialism, and that intersection makes capitalist imperialism.²⁷

Each of the thinkers mentioned associates imperialism with the structural development of capitalism, assuming that the limitation of internal markets and expansion are the solutions. As the demand for economic expansion grows, it is accompanied by the imperative to increase the political power and influence of the mother state of capital. The scramble for markets and resources presupposes the division of political zones of influence. And the market has never been divided along immutable lines; rather, the allocation of privileges and influence depends on the power of the most powerful capitalist states. From the molecular processes of capital accumulation, centers that aspire to a dominant position inevitably emerge, thus multiplying imperialist states from existing economic structures. The *regionalization* of the world market segregates it into the most politically and economically influential regions or states. Over time, relations between them become more tense because not all participate in the initial agreements on market division (some imperialists are only born later), and there is also an increase in the ambitions of individual states. Rising imperialists or imperialist powers thus turn the world into a theater of their power game, creating tensions, ruptures, and ultimately wars. We saw something like this in the twentieth century, and we see traces of it today.

25 Lenin, Vladimir Iljič. (1975): *Imperijalizam kao najviši stadij kapitalizma*. Svjetlost, Sarajevo.

26 Arendt, Hana. (1998): *Izvori totalitarizma*. Feministička izdavačka kuća 94, Beograd.

27 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

The Imperialist Wars of the Twentieth Century

The disasters of the 20th century were preceded by a 'century of peace,' never seen in European history.²⁸ It coincided with the apogee of the British Empire's power and created the naïve belief, confirmed by theories, in the dawn of a promised age of prosperity. We only need to see the bulk of early-modern sociological theory, which held that, despite the clear elements of (transient) social crises, we were heading along the path of irrevocable progress.²⁹ Society, it was believed, freed from the shackles of tradition, would achieve progress not just in terms of material wealth (enabled by the capitalist economy and the Industrial Revolution), but also in the perfection of human nature, with material wealth coinciding with that perfection. That faith, as history documents, was demystified in the bloodiest of ways, in worldwide carnage whose roots grew in the 'age of prosperity.' The age of peace hid contradictory tendencies whose later consequences emerged when wealth was concentrated in a few capitalist states.

Great Britain, at the height of its power during the nineteenth century, established an imperial structure based on free trade, legitimized and strengthened by a metaphysical interpretation of the global market. Formal and informal colonial possessions guaranteed her access to resources, cheap labor, markets, and strategic areas. The system of free trade positioned Britain on the imperial throne. Acting as the main market and the primary creditor upon whose prosperity other states depended, Britain operated as a hegemonic state that simultaneously managed the system and benefited from it. Success was interpreted as the result of market laws rather than military-political power, and of wealth concentration rooted in Britain, whose capacities enabled unprecedented direct or indirect territorial control over the world.³⁰ The system functioned, other countries prospered under British dominance, and interest-based cooperation promised to transcend past barbarisms that the 'civilization's' intelligentsia was so ashamed of.

The American Civil War (1861-1865), the obstruction of Transatlantic trade, the growth of political problems in Europe, the increase in speculative investments, internal obstructions, and market saturation since 1870, generated massive economic and political expansion.³¹ This coincided with a general crisis of the system that Britain dominated. A major wave of colonization of Africa began, with growing competition between the capitalist colonial states. This wave of European imperialism was founded on racial theories as legitimating tools for the most inhumane exploitation of the African population and its resources. Racial theories, combined with doctrines of social evolution and progress, were needed

28 Giovanni, Arrighi (2010): *The Long Twentieth Century*. Verso, New York & London. 56.

29 Durkheim, Emile (1984): *The Division of Labour in Society*. Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire.

30 Giovanni, Arrighi (2010): *The Long Twentieth Century*. Verso, New York & London. 55-57.

31 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 43.

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to mobilize a larger number of indifferent actors, who came to see colonization as profitable. This absolved them of moral responsibility, justifying their actions by arguing that they were dealing with sub-humans or conducting a civilized mission. At the same time, in Arendt's words, along with a special kind of colonial administration that ruled the territories not as a part of national territory, it obscured the contradictions between a territorially bounded national state, whose existence was justified by subject/citizen assent, and endless expansion and conquest of other peoples without their consent.³²

Imperialism provided European powers with raw materials, labor, and markets, while simultaneously enabling profitable capital realization and intensifying future processes of capital accumulation. At the same time, it created a highly competitive interstate system, in which large capitalist states—established early in the twentieth century as owners of an enormous share of the world's wealth—sought to protect their territorial (colonial) possessions, viewing each other as existential threats. Latecomers to the 'Scramble for Africa,' such as Germany, sought to change the status quo and seize a share of the territorial spoils, thereby creating conditions for their own growing national wealth. Within this imperial system of domination, tensions between capitalist states intensified, with conflicts between those wishing to maintain the existing global distribution and those striving for a redistribution of the world, in accordance with Lenin's observation that the territorial and market division of the Earth depends on the strength of the forces involved in this 'scramble.'³³ A series of smaller political crises foreshadowed the outbreak of World War I among imperialist states, caused by the colonial division of the world and driven by the structural logic of continuous expansion, conditioned by the needs of perpetual capital accumulation.

'The Great War' (World War I, 1914-1918) shattered the British position, ruined centuries-old empires, territorially refashioned the world, and created the preconditions for new imperialist conflicts. The United States of America, which spent the period conducting internal imperialism on the North American continent, emerged from the war on the victors' side. It found itself in a much stronger position in international decision-making, with strong influence in Latin America. American imperialism too was racially determined (evidenced by racial oppression of non-white populations as conquests of the North American continent unfolded). Still, its sphere of influence was legitimated by the universalization of American values. Domination over Latin America was carried out covertly: political lobbying, client regimes, trade privileges, and covert force.³⁴ On the other hand, post-war sanctions imposed on Germany proved to be counterproductive. They enabled the rise of a totalitarian regime, which was further boosted by the

32 Arendt, Hana. (1998): *Izvori totalitarizma*. Feministička izdavačka kuća 94, Beograd.

33 Lenjin, Vladimir Ilijić. (1975): *Imperijalizam kao najviši stadij kapitalizma*. Svjetlost, Sarajevo.

34 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 46-47.

economic crisis known as the Great Depression (1929-1939). There were also states like Italy that saw the current imperial structures as unjust, due to missing out on an adequate postwar 'reward,' despite being part of the winning side of WWI. With growing imperialist appetites in Japan, the scene was set for a reprise of the carnage.

World War II (1939-1945) was another imperialist war. Germany wanted to try its luck with a different strategy in search of what it dubbed *Lebensraum* ('living space'), i.e., resources and open markets that it could not get in the existing closed imperial structures. The difference is that, instead of the existing and unsuccessful maritime strategy from WWI (modeled on the UK), Nazi Germany pursued continental expansion (as the USA did).³⁵ Japan, too, had its vision of *Lebensraum*, and Italy, as we discussed, saw the lack of adequate rewards from WWI as an injustice.

It was, coincidentally, the three powers that were pushing hardest to expand geographically and overcome their hitherto restricted imperial ambitions – Germany, Japan and Italy – that formed the Axis alliance that launched the Second World War. Their path to a spatial fix was blocked by imperial preferences on the part of others, so they sought to unblock it by resorting to war to assert their own imperial expansion.³⁶

The century that inherited the optimistic visions resulted in two carnages (culminating with the Holocaust), led by the logic of capital reproduction. Endless growth requires endless access to resources and endless markets that are limited and politically differentiated. This competitive principle of the capitalist economy creates tensions that escalate into open conflicts and wars.

The Return of Imperial Geopolitics in the 21st century

The end of World War II meant redefining political and economic structures. The United States definitively took over from Great Britain the role of the world hegemon.³⁷ They initiated a process of decolonization through which they further weakened war-weakened imperial competitors. They created a system that called for greater international openness, aiming to prevent the protectionism of capitalist countries that escalated into World War II. By raising economic prosperity and integrating defeated countries, they sought to prevent the fanaticization of the population, as seen in the rise of totalitarian regimes, whose victory was contributed to by severe economic conditions and intense wartime sanctions. Such a strategy was also a 'countermeasure' against the communist alternative, because after two inter-imperialist wars, the capitalist world needed stability and the res-

35 Giovanni, Arrighi (2010): *The Long Twentieth Century*. Verso, New York & London. 61.

36 Harvey, David (2026): *The Story of Capital*. Verso, London & New York. 334.

37 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 49.

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toration of legitimacy. Inherent market imperfections, with the potential to escalate into major economic crises (such as the Great Depression), were overcome through government interventionism (Keynesianism). This system worked for a time, creating a 'golden age' of the capitalist system (at least in the environment of Western countries and their close allies), raising the standard of living, strengthening the middle class, and seemingly (but only seemingly) resolving the contradictions of capital reproduction. Structural problems in the Keynesian model, based on stimulating aggregate demand through state intervention, once again raised the problem of excessive capital accumulation. Inflationary tendencies of the economy, bureaucratized political apparatus, inefficient solutions in certain sectors, fear of corruption, a sense of statization of society caused by an increasing role of the state in an individual's life, and the militarization of society as a means of driving aggregate demand made it possible to dismantle the wide post-war economic structures. Social welfare was based on a high rate of taxation, tolerable in the post-war years and when the symbolic value of capitalism needed to be revitalized. But when they became connected to the system's crisis and threatened capital's profits, they were discarded. Social oversaturation, state intervention, fear of state overreach, and fears of the Soviet alternative intensified these processes. Calling for individual freedom and promising prosperity and wealth, neoliberalism triumphed as the desirable model of economic organization.

As mentioned, the USA also had an additional reason for the neoliberal shift. They aimed for economic restructuring out of a need to protect their position of power, as West Germany and Japan, within the contours of the post-war order, quickly climbed the ladder of success. Therefore, the neoliberal shift occurred during the administrations of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013, PM 1979-1990) and US President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004, President, 1981-1989), motivated by the restoration of class power or even the formation of new class structures, which deregulated and privatized the economic sphere, accompanied by the financialization of the economy, breaking down barriers that obstruct the movement of capital, which persisted in the previous structures established under the Bretton Woods economic system.³⁸

Neoliberalism quickly became the dominant model of capital accumulation around the world. Its spread is the result of structural reforms that many states are subjected to (known as the Washington Consensus policies), often as the terms of extending credit lines or debt write-off. The neoliberal institutional framework figures as a new imperial structure, enabling the realization of capital by the most powerful capitalist states. Even though it is interpreted as an era of transcending the national state, the allocation of wealth and utility remained quite politically segregated. But the system was laden with many crises (the largest occurring

³⁸ Harvey, David (2005): *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press.

in 2008). Even though it successfully created global connection through supply chains and partial pacification of the international system, it did not merely result in the expected extraction of value from the *periphery* into the *center*. However, it has created China, due to the need for capital expansion and new market creation, and the need to produce a new geopolitical competitor to the hegemonic state, whose potential would only show decades later.

Hence, following WWII, the capitalist world, led by the USA, entered the epoch of stability and prosperity. The neoliberal turn undermined prosperity and stability, yet society still functioned optimistically, hoping to transcend the ‘temporary’ difficulties. With the dissolution of the USSR, the USA became the sole global superpower; there were loud proclamations of the ‘end of history,’ with unwavering faith in the system. More than thirty years later, the system, plagued by crises, faces many problems: economic, ecological, political and geopolitical, with massive wealth concentration and market oligopolies.

The existing tensions in the system result from the crisis of American hegemony. They are a consequence of the dialectical nature of hegemonic rule, the development of the capitalist system, and the logic of capital reproduction. Out of the necessity of institutional structures under which capital will continuously expand, various geopolitical rivals emerge, who profit from this system because they have become a constitutive and vital part of its reproduction. This shatters the illusion of a post-state world of domination by transnational corporations. It disappears amid escalating conflicts among states that have profited from neoliberal-based globalization. At those moments, states emerge as creators of order and demonstrate their vitality.³⁹

A contradictory process follows: State-creators of neoliberal institutional frames, having seen the counterproductivity of the existing rules and endangerment of their pre-eminent position of power (unimaginable decades prior), nullify the institutional frames, stimulating protectionist policies (which are not possible in the era of globalism). Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn discusses three moments in the crisis of neoliberal capitalism: a) the global 2008 financial crisis, as a moment of delegitimation of the system; b) redefining American policy, as the US is losing the long-term globalization game to China; c) the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁰ From that emerge new imperial geopolitics, whose traces (still merely

39 The idea that globalization occurred in the interest of state actors and not despite them is supported by Stiglitz’s idea that the most powerful capitalist states wrote the rules of globalization. Perhaps at that moment, the capitalist logic of power profited. Still, it does not detract from the fact that the institutional system was supported by state structures of the most powerful capitalist states, their actions, and influence in international economic institutions, and the fact that the benefits of globalization are politically regionalized. For more, see: Stiglic, Džozef, J. (2018): *Globalizacija i njene protivrečnosti: antiglobalizacija u Trampovoj eri – revidirano i dopunjeno izdanje*. Miba books, Beograd. 22.

40 Therborn, Göran (2022): *The World and the Left*. New Left Review, (137), 36.

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traces) we see in the growing violence and conflicts around the world and in open displays of force; the cases of Ukraine, the Middle East and Venezuela are the most evident, together with continued Sino-American tensions.⁴¹ The dominant powers base their strategies on how to reconcile endless capital and influence expansion in the context of competing social actors. Some actors are satisfied with regional domination (even though weakened, American hegemony still has unmatched military, political, and economic capacities). At the same time, the established order, operating through transnational networks used to the global projection of influence, does not accept a serious multiplication of political and economic decision-makers.

Although these trends have intensified in recent years, the crisis of order was foreshadowed not only by the frequency of economic crises but also by the American military intervention in Iraq. At that time, the imperialistic nature of American policy was evident, along with resistance to it, as well as imperialist strategies that made control over oil reserves a primary goal of the invasion, both for economic and political reasons (influence on the global economy and thwarting imperialist competitors – oil is essential for a functional military).⁴² The crisis continued with a series of local hotspots in the Middle East, growing tensions in US-China relations, manifested in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and American intervention in Venezuela.

All these political practices were derived from the logic of capital accumulation, demands for protecting political and economic interests, and the spread of economic and political influence. The contradictory logic of territory and capital was at work, whether directly or indirectly realized, and was always followed by complementary political and economic influence. The enormity of the global economy places excessive capital accumulation front and center, while the growth aspirations of certain states endangered the established power centers. Be it tariffs, invasions, or the protection of democracy, the reason for these events lies in

41 Ukraine, the Middle East, and Venezuela are completely understandable given a materialist interpretation of social processes, especially within a historical-geographical approach. Even though we will encounter different interpretations of the events, our approach becomes understandably justified if we examine the social processes from which existing social practices are generated. Economic and political interests, tied with the dynamics and logics of the global capitalist economy, become visible. Recommended for future reading: Čomski, Noam. (2016): *Ko vlada svetom?* Akademska knjiga, Novi Sad. Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press. Ishchenko, Volodymyr (2024): *Towards the Abyss: Ukraine from Maidan to War*. Verso, London & New York. Kagarlitsky, Boris (2024): *The Long Retreat*. Pluto Press, London & Las Vegas. Loewenstein, Antony (2023): *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World*. Verso, London & New York. Mearsheimer, John. J. (2014) *Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault*. Foreign Affairs. Yurchenko, Yuliya (2018): *Ukraine and The Empire of Capital: From Marketization to Armed Conflict*. Pluto Press, London.

42 Harvey, David (2003): *New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press. 23-25.

the expansion of political and economic power: obstructing competition, securing access to geostrategically important resources, expanding markets, and such. That is the logic that guided the actors of the 20th century, dividing spheres of influence. Once the division of the global market excluded rising powers, whose ambitions grew as their economies did, the order crumbled. Today, in a global society in which protectionist policies are emerging once again, more stable internal markets are being built. With doctrines of regional influence, the potential for disaster is not waning. This is all followed by the export of capital and the concentration of wealth in a few oligopolies, and the pretension to control the most important geostrategic resources and/or to build symbolic and diplomatic power.

Desacralized Cyclical Time and Imperial Geopolitics

Returning to Eliade's concept of desacralized cyclical time: history repeats itself in new circumstances, without any higher meaning or promise of salvation. The only present thought is that a new cycle is approaching its end, that the period of creation has finished and destruction is just beginning. The pattern is noticeable: the developed stages of capitalism (in which advanced processes of accumulation, concentration, and centralization of capital are underway, with a pronounced level of social modernization and the international dissemination of institutional frameworks) oscillate between periods of stability and chaos. Comparing macro-social development from the nineteenth century to today: the period of prosperity is collapsing (19th century British hegemony and post-war American hegemony), centers of the capitalist order multiply (the rise of competing capitalist states based on the logic of capital reproduction and established imperial structures), and generated crises create geopolitical tensions (in the case of the twentieth century, resolved through two world wars). The path taken begins with a creative phase (prosperity and economic growth) and ends in destruction (imperial geopolitics). Although we have only seen this trajectory once, it is enough to understand that the system's structural logic leads to the same outcomes, and the experience of the 21st century demonstrates this. The path is not identical, but the structural pattern is, and it resembles the concepts of ancient civilizations that in history saw no higher meaning than the cycle of events in which they 'eternally return' to the same outcomes.

The new cycle of capital accumulation that began after WWII did not mean a chance at a new beginning. Still, it opened the possibility of re-playing the 20th century under new conditions. Nothing else should have been expected, considering that developed capitalism, in which wealth was concentrated, leads to imperialist tensions via the contradictory logic of *uneven combined development (UCD)* (Desai, Freeman and Kagarlitsky, 2016, 494), while the logic of capital pushes

towards endless expansion from which geopolitical tensions then emerge.⁴³ Nobody can know the outcomes. But the unconditional and unreflective insistence on the logic of capital is certainly leading the world towards familiar endpoints. That is not make-believe, but the decision of global society, decisions that become fateful with the tragic 'eternal return.'

Capitalism is a system that simultaneously prefers creation and destruction. However, imperialist wars in high modernity are an existential threat not just to the economic system, but to humanity. If the world wars of the first modern era showed the potential of modern warfare and destruction, we cannot even imagine what would happen in a great-power escalation in high modernity. Narratives about the low probability of direct conflict are mere consolation, as the worst (nuclear) scenario need not occur for humanity to feel its enormous consequences. The modernization of society progresses constantly, and the modernization of war is one of the main branches of industry and pillars of power. Chances of compromised solutions are quite small. Even should they be realized, they will only be temporary. One need not be an oracle to see that the social postulates of capitalism are incompatible with stable social existence. Once again, the logic of capital's endless expansion and the demand for resources, labor and markets, remains in contradiction with the demand for stability.

If AI minimizes the need for labor, it will open new contradictions of aggregate demand and falling profit rates, which will find their resolution in opening new markets or seeking new profitable investments. And this is spatially and temporally determined and assumes positioning capital within specific social and territorial frameworks, which perpetuates the curse of geopolitics.⁴⁴ As the imperialist provocateurs grow, the market, resource, and other capacities (always in some way territorially determined) will become increasingly important, and the struggle for access to them will intensify. And this is a recipe for chaos, about which we can never know the extent to which it will materialize. Nevertheless, there are sufficiently clear signs that the current global social order is not sustainable on its existing foundations. The crisis of the neoliberal order is visible, geopolitical tensions are noticeable, and a new world order is emerging.

In short, there is nothing metaphysical in the cyclical drama of capitalism, as was the case in ancient civilizations' interpretations of history. That circular trajectory is derived from the circulation of capital, the market, and their *reification*. For alternate social development, or rather, an alternate model of modernity, capitalism must be replaced with a different economic system. The task of the humanities and social sciences is to find alternative socio-economic concepts. Otherwise, the

43 Desai, Radhika, Freeman, Alan, Kagarlitsky, Boris (2016): *The Conflict in Ukraine and Contemporary Imperialism*. International Critical Thought, 6(4), 494.

44 The race within the AI sector itself, between the leading technological giants, the US and China, is one of the major signs of how the world order will develop.

pacification of social tensions and the stability of social reality will not be possible in the long term.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the analysis are as follows:

1. STRUCTURAL TENDENCIES AND THE LOGIC OF CAPITAL RE-PRODUCTION GENERATE CYCLICAL PRACTICES, UNDERSTANDABLE IN TERMS OF DESACRALIZED CYCLICAL TIME: Capitalism as a system based on continuous accumulation of capital is a system of ongoing economic and political expansion. The structural logic of the system, therefore, produces geopolitical rivalries and tensions because the process of capital reproduction is spatially- and temporally- determined and ultimately geopolitically oriented. The contradictory development of the system, exploiting foreign markets, resources, and labor, leads to the multiplication of centers of accumulation through the dialectic of uneven and combined development, creating economic and geopolitical competitors (and hegemonic states do not dominate forever). Thus, a cyclical path emerges, as in Eliade's description of desacralized cyclical time, because the social order oscillates between the point of creation (economic growth) and the point of destruction (imperial geopolitics), opening a new cycle of circular movement driven by the logic of capital reproduction.
2. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ILLUSTRATE THAT CIRCULAR NATURE OF TIME: The prosperity of the 19th century, under the hegemony of Great Britain, having encountered problems generated by excessive accumulation of capital tied to obstructions in the transatlantic economy and the political crisis in Europe, set the stage for an imperialist scramble for colonies and escalated with World War I. However, soon after, the unsatiated appetites of certain states, war sanctions and the economic crisis of the 1930s led the world into a new imperialist war. The post-war economy, stabilized by models of optimizing capitalism, under the hegemony of the USA, generated a new 'age of prosperity.' Structural tendencies of the capitalist economy led towards the neoliberal turn and permanent destabilizing of the system, despite proclamations about 'the end of history' and transnational connections following the Cold War. The system that oscillated between promising stability, relative pacification, and crisis cycles in the 20th and 21st centuries has revitalized the imperial geopolitics of the most powerful capitalist states, still in their infancy, but heralded by a series of social escalations that we have witnessed or are witnessing. They are seen in local wars, the largest war on

European soil since the mid-20th century, the revitalization of protectionist policies, and great-power economic showdowns.

The results of this cannot be foreseen, but, considering the lessons of history, the genesis of current macroeconomic processes, and the ever-present crisis of globality, apocalyptic scenarios are no longer unthinkable.

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The Role of Education, Trust
and Values in Modern Bosnian
Herzegovinian Society

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Summary

Social changes in the last 60 years – transitioning from an industrial to a post-industrial, modern to a post-modern society – have changed the concepts of knowledge systems and education. Instead of knowledge and education being goals for improving society, they have become means of achieving economic growth and profit, devoid of critical thought. Societies across Southeastern Europe continue to experience outward migration, especially of the highly educated and qualified, while unsuccessful political, economic, and cultural elites further complicate their predicament. The concept of a ‘society of knowledge’ that once promised advancement and social justice is crumbling today. Instead of being a means to a general good, knowledge has become a tool for market goals and economic profit, thereby marginalizing its broader social significance. Trust and values, key to social cohesion, are undermined, while education is increasingly distant from its emancipatory potential.

Keywords: Culture of trust, cultural trauma, society of knowledge, disinformation society, critical transitivity

Introductory Context

The existence of society depends on its members’ identification with the social community. When an individual is excluded from a community, his human existence is brought into question. A society that fails to secure the loyalty of its members ceases to be a real community. A society’s success is not measured exclusively by its material wealth or economic power. Stability, peace, lack of corruption, the rule of law, and functioning institutions that prevent the abuse of power are key to a society’s maintenance and advancement. Social changes in the past decades, including the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society, along with a transformation into a postmodern, information, consumer, and risk society, changed the foundational concepts of knowledge and education. In a modern context, knowledge and education are no longer seen as tools for advancing society, as in classical sociology. Instead, they have become means of achieving economic profit, advancing market mechanisms, and promoting the mobility and growth of services, without the need for deeper reflection, thereby justifying their utilitarian function. In every society, what is crucial is how available resources are activated and skillfully utilized, not just their wealth or scarcity.

Societies in Southeastern Europe have experienced significant and ongoing emigration, especially of their most qualified labor force. Their societies are dominated by unsuccessful political, economic, and cultural elites who fail to implement public policies that would bring these societies closer to modern, successful ones. Modern, democratically organized societies should foster the emergence

and sustainability of successful, reputable elites, especially respectable political elites. If the system of social promotion is built on the rise of wrong, low-quality people, and on rewarding those who do not deserve rewards, it has a kind of ‘cancerous’ effect on other spheres of society. Expertise, competent knowledge of the specific area in which one must operate, including appropriate, often multi-year experience in that area, is no longer considered a decisive factor in selecting people for important positions. This creates a certain paradox: modern societies, which aim to establish themselves as ‘knowledge societies,’ undermine one of their fundamental pillars of success: genuine professionalism across all spheres of social activity.

Processes of Social Shaping of Trust – *Culture of Trust and Cultural Trauma*

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Human action, through individual and group choices and decisions, is a key motor of any society and its social processes, and it occurs within the frameworks that enable existing social structures. Social practice, composed of everyday events, is the result of mutual interaction between actors’ traits and structural characteristics, in which actors make use of the opportunities provided by structures. The structural framework and opportunities it provides are not permanent; they constantly change through continued social action and often reflect unintentional but lasting consequences of earlier actions. Results of those earlier actions, shaped into structural traditions, become the basis for future processes and, at the same time, are used as resources for new action. This cycle continues infinitely, making social processes changeable and unpredictable, and as noted by Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka (2003), the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the support of the media, scientific institutions, political organizations, and international actors, call for an increase in trust in society. Still, for many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, trust has become an abstract term, devoid of concrete content and application. Hence, it is important to precisely determine the assumptions for the entire process of social shaping trust. Building a culture of trust requires a continuous process that builds on previous experience, through present activities, towards future expectations. Observing the present moment, we can conclude that the practice of trust encompasses individual and group actions through which people express trust, place it in others, seek it, or perceive it. Reflecting on the past, we see that those activities are rooted in a tradition of trust or mistrust, shaped by the dominant cultural context. Such a normative climate can make it easier or harder to express trust, depending on specific conditions. Looking to the future, trust is tested by the results it yields. When predictive trust is confirmed, the entrusted values are returned, and the mutuality of trust is strengthened. However, in contrasting cases, trust can be betrayed, misused, or ignored. Such col-

lective experiences create patterns of trust or mistrust that influence future actions and decisions, thereby perpetuating the process. Hence, Sztompka states,

Looking ahead, we will see that ‘expectation for fulfilled trust’ yields certain results: predictive trust is affirmed, entrusted resources are returned, and the ensuing trust is restored. However, the inverse is also possible: Predictive trust can be betrayed, trust can be misused, and direct trust ignored. Cumulative experiences of this type, if they are widely spread and experienced together, become routine and, in the end, normative rules. Positive experiences of affirmed trust generate a culture of trust, while negative experiences of broken trust generate a culture of mistrust. This creates a normative climate for future ‘trust bets,’ transmits a tradition of trust or mistrust, and the process continues without end.¹

British sociologist Anthony Giddens writes about certain aspects of trust and the process of developing individuals and social groups by bringing ontological security into the context of modern cultural forms. Hence, he stresses how ontological security is “an important form of feeling security widely.”²

Such a form of security and trust largely determines the overall impression, the form, and the content of the social system, as well as the sustainability of the social order, the strength of society, and the functionality of political or economic regimes. Therefore, systemic trust is closely related to the concept of legitimacy. According to German sociologist Max Weber’s (1864–1920) classification, charismatic legitimacy relies on personal trust, or what can be described as virtual personal trust – the illusion of closeness and emotional connection with distant individuals. In contrast, legal legitimacy is based on institutional trust or its specific variant. The development of a culture of trust is an example of a broader process in which cultures, social structures, norms, institutions, and organizations are shaped and stabilized.³

The process of trust renewal is a universal and unavoidable occurrence that accompanies generational change. Cultures of mistrust, deeply rooted in historical circumstances, emerge from accumulated frustrations over betrayed trust and further solidify through social inertia. Their maintenance depends on generations that grew up and lived in that environment. Still, with new generations shaped by new conditions that offer more favorable foundations for building trust, the negative legacy can gradually weaken. Trust in social processes is often not a conscious choice, but the result of imposed ideological frameworks that lead to war, poverty, and the crumbling of functional social systems needed for renewal

1 Sztompka, P. 2003. *Trust: A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge, University Press, 120.

2 Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 9.

3 Sztompka, P. 2009. „The Return to Values in recent Sociological Theory“. In: P. Hedstrom, B. Wittrock. 2009. *Frontiers of sociology / (Annals of the International Institute of Sociology)*, Boston, Brill, Leiden.

and building a post-conflict society.⁴ Regardless, building democratic institutions on its own is not sufficient. It is crucial to reaffirm the functional practice of prior political experiences, connected to the disrupted yet lively cultural specificity and tradition of Bosnian Herzegovinian society, to lay the foundations for a sustainable renewal of a community.

Considering that the actions of members (individuals and social groups) of any society are a condition *sine qua non* for the existence of that society, it follows that the character and structure of every society are shaped through the actions/activities that people undertake, guided by their own beliefs. These beliefs shape their motives, reasons, and justifications for action. Among these beliefs, values stand out, motivating people to act to protect or affirm them. When values spread and become integral to culture, they become ‘social facts’ that significantly influence human behavior and, consequently, society itself. Numerous examples from history show how people, inspired by values such as justice, equality, sovereignty, and solidarity, fundamentally changed societies, often through revolutionary processes. Thus, values sociologically imply concrete and real aspects of social life. Sztompka unambiguously directs the sociological mind toward sociologically grounded values, and on this intellectual foundation, he will state:

Choice is the fundamental human predicament; values as criteria of choice are indispensable components of human existence. People draw values from various pools, articulate values, apply values, and make choices in incessant dialogue, debate, and conversation with their fellows—both direct and indirect, both with the living and the dead. In this way they give meaning, make sense of their personal situations and biographies, social environments, and the history of their society. There is no reason why sociologists should stand aside, excuse themselves from this universal human game of meaning-construction, and remain passive, detached onlookers. According to the new conception of valuations that I have tried to present in this article, they should rather engage their wisdom—together, aside or against other voices—in the public axiological debate, contributing with their sociologically grounded values to higher collective rationality.⁵

It is worth stressing, as Sztompka notes, that only in recent times has sociology posed questions directly connected to understanding the nature and importance of values and accepting them as a legitimate constituent of sociological research and interests. Sztompka reminds us how “it does not indicate a simple return to the masters who were torn—as we have seen—by ambivalence, because the riddle of valuations is approached in an entirely new way.”⁶ To return to understanding and the sociological perspective in the context of the *novelty* we call values,

4 Sztompka, P. 2003. *Trust: A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge, University Press.

5 Sztompka, P. 2009. “The Return to Values in Recent Sociological Theory”. in: P. Hedstrom, B. Wittrock. 2009. *Frontiers of Sociology / (Annals of the International Institute of Sociology)* Boston, Brill, Leiden, 55.

6 Ibid, p.40.

Sztompka abandons the model of historical overview and presents an analytical typology of three ways in which values have been treated in sociology, namely: “(a) as a bias, (b) as an ideology, (c) as a part of meaning.”⁷ In that sense, values should not be treated merely as individual preferences but as foundational parts of the social construction of reality. Hence, thanks to this analytical typology, we can trace an evolution in the sociological approach to values, from viewing them as obstacles to scientific work to their inclusion as an essential part of social meaning and structure.

Keeping in mind the tripartite analytical typology and evolution of sociological understanding of values, values are no longer treated as biases or ideologies, but “as the immanent part of meaning that informs human individual and collective action” (Sztompka 2009: 49). Sztompka explains four positions when discussing the role of values but mentions a fifth one as a conclusion.

First, an obvious point for the whole humanistic, anti-positivist sociology—that people endow their actions, situations, institutions with meaning. Second, that meaning is drawn from various sources (tradition, religion, mass media, etc.). Third, that meanings are shaped in dialogue and debate—what I like to call “meaning industry”—both directly through conversation and indirectly through mass media, literature, art, movies, and dramas. The scope for such dialogue is growing. Fourth, that one of the sources of meaning attaining growing importance in this dialogue, an important component of “meaning industry” in our time, is sociology: its data, concepts, models, and theories. And fifth, that sociological research results of all kinds include or at least imply values.⁸

Sztompka adds how approaching values as bias and ideology has been delegitimated and superseded. Attention today is directed to the values of members of society and the way those values help them in shaping their lives, instead of values that sociologists possess. In this context, the value of sociology in promoting values as a means of regulating the ways people use to build meaning remains recognized. Conversely, the role of sociology has become redefined. Initially, the sociologist was seen as a researcher, a pure theoretician, who spoke to other sociologists and had his results reviewed by *peers*. This function was typical of the pure social sciences, which drew on the *epistêmê* of the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC). On the other hand, the expert sociologist was seen as an advisor who offered the ruling elite sociologically justified approaches for achieving goals they set. This service role is related to applied social sciences, social engineering, and socio-technics, corresponding to Aristotle’s *technê*. Today, in a third role, the sociologist is a mentor who collaborates with a wide circle of people, communicating with them not only through facts, but also through axiomatic messages. One of the goals of the latest engagement is to reconcile

⁷ Ibid, p. 40

⁸ Ibid, pp. 49- 50.

specific values. The second goal is to expose false premises and dangerous consequences of prejudice and stereotypes. In that process, the sociologist serves as a source of prudent practical wisdom, in line with Aristotle's *phronesis*, or, to put it differently, he provides guidelines for making sensible practical decisions.

The experience of the 20th century, marked by social changes on an incomparable scale, left a different mood, neither overly optimistic nor progressive. Although the changes that occurred during the period are often understood as progress, they also revealed a dark side, with the costs, pain, and suffering they brought. Our perception of change has grown more skeptical, as we have come to realize that it does not necessarily mean improvement, but can also bring significant social, political, and economic challenges. When we look at how sociological theories perceive and conceptualize historical change, we can recognize three dominant discourses that have shaped our interpretation of these changes. In the 19th century, the discourse of progress prevailed, which followed the birth and spread of modernity. During that period, it was believed that human societies constantly advance, becoming better, more efficient, and more just through technological development, scientific innovations, and the expansion of human rights. The idea of progress was deeply rooted and celebrated as a fundamental principle of social change. However, by the mid-20th century, confidence in unimpeded progress diminished, and a discourse of crisis emerged. The idea of progress began to lose its power, as changes often brought not only improvements but also crises, wars, social inequality, and new questions arising from these changes. During that period, it became clear that change can be ambiguous and that progress is not always painless or beneficial for all members of society. This discourse of crisis emphasizes that change can bring uncertainty and severe consequences, making us skeptical of unquestioned progress. Therefore, social changes in the 20th century cannot be viewed simply through the lens of progress, because although they often carried positive aspects, they also brought painful consequences. This shift in our understanding of historical change reflects our growing awareness of the complexity and uncertainty that social progress can entail. It is entirely justified to interpret the process of unconditional belief in unquestioning progress also through the lens of traumatic or, more specifically, a field of cultural trauma. Cultural trauma is nothing other than a cultural shock to the social fabric—a special form of the traumatic state. Hence, Sztompka, as one of the significant theorists of cultural trauma, states:

Cultural trauma is treated as a link in the ongoing chain of social change; depending on the concrete circumstances, cultural trauma may be a phase in the constructive morphogenesis of culture within the destructive cycle of cultural decay.⁹

9 Sztompka, P. 2000. "Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change". *European Journal of Social Theory* 3(4): 449.

A key variable in analyzing trauma is the management of different resources, like social and cultural capital. This variable helps recognize, define, and actively face trauma. The central factor in researching cultural trauma is education. The higher the level of education, the more people become sensitized to cultural trauma, but at the same time, are better equipped to express it and understand it. It is not surprising that intellectuals, philosophers, and social scientists first recognized and diagnosed subtle and more hidden types of trauma, offering definitions and symbolic frameworks that others later adopted. More educated groups usually have better skills in facing cultural trauma, but other factors also play an important role. For example, types of trauma that emerge from cultural conflicts or multiculturalism, just as tolerant and relativistic attitudes (that oppose ethnocentrism and dogmatism), can help people better deal with trauma. Social rootedness can also be an important variable. For instance, in studies of postcommunist states, it has been noted that people with extensive social networks, many friends, and strong family ties better deal with the traumatic changes that accompany the transition to a capitalist system, free markets, and individual responsibility. Apart from education, factors like social connectivity and cultural attitudes play a key role in how people face trauma. Understanding cultural trauma, therefore, requires a broader approach that includes social, cultural, and educational resources.

Traditional Sources of Expertise in Question

Questions such as global politics, environmental degradation, social and economic inequality, and cultural changes pose key research areas in today's social sciences. Modern development, which includes concerns such as global terrorism and the growth of transnational corporations, brings about changes with greater intensity, especially through technological advancements and shifts in work practices. These issues form the foundation of social sciences and deeply influence our daily lives, shaping our identity through contacts with friends, family, and colleagues. The connection between global changes and everyday experience allows us to give meaning to our lives and to answer questions about what is truly important to us. These areas of experience, which are constantly changing, often become the center of debates and conflicts. The concepts of social sciences, which help us understand and classify social phenomena, play a key role in interpreting these changes. The speed of these changes within a single generation can be observed in various aspects of family life, paid work, sexual relationships, and ethnic and cultural diversity. Increasing life expectancy raises questions about how to organize care for older people and fund the services they need. The rising number of older adults, along with population growth due to immigration, is also driving demographic change. Additionally, the decline in birth rates, postponement of marriage, and greater participation of women in education and the labor market are changing family dynamics.

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These demographic changes are linked with wider social, economic, and political transformation. The labor market is changing amid shifts in production and expenditure, especially with the decline of heavy manufacturing and full working hours, and the transition towards the service sector. The growth of multicultural societies raises questions about national identities, prompting demands to question traditional ideas about who we are. These changes not only shape daily life but also significantly alter the sources of information that help us understand these processes. All traditional sources of expertise are suddenly brought into question. So, sociologist Kath Woodward states in her book *Social Sciences: The Big Issues* (2003):

Traditional sources of expertise through the institutions of the state and of medicine, science and established religion are supplemented by an abundance of alternative and complementary sources of knowledge, involving the new expertise of self-help and relationship counseling.¹⁰

Education plays a key role in modern society, as applying and attaining knowledge is not the same as it was in the past. In the second half of the 20th century, there was a significant increase in the number of students, tied to growing social mobility, which enabled children from less privileged families to achieve better social and economic outcomes than their parents. At first, education focused on class differences. But today the emphasis has shifted from education as such to the process of lifelong learning, which encompasses not just the schooling years but one's entire life. Compulsory education lasts from one's fifth to sixteenth year, while many begin attending school before they reach that age. Education is vital to the experiences of youth in modern society. In Western countries, education is considered a right, and education expenses are a significant part of the state budget and a prominent concern in the public eye. Educational qualifications have become a precondition for full participation in social, cultural, and economic life. In a fast-changing society, education is the most valuable resource for creating wealth.

The position and significance of education in a sociological context should be seen and analyzed only in terms of social relations, processes, and practices, and its fit within the broader social system. Therefore, education is not an isolated phenomenon but a relatively autonomous functional system within society, and it must be studied in connection with broader social structures and phenomena. When we state that education should be treated as an area of social relations and practices, or as part of a larger social system, this primarily means that the educational system is not separate from society, but is an integral part that influences broader social dynamics, and vice versa—social factors shape the educational system. Education is considered a relatively autonomous functional sys-

10 Woodward, K. 2003. *Social Sciences – The Big Issues*. London/New York: Routledge, 4.

tem, meaning it has its own specific functions, structures, and processes within society. Still, it cannot be fully understood independently of other social factors. In sociology, this is often analyzed by examining how educational reforms and social conditions influence one another. Education can be analyzed on two levels: macro and micro. The macro-level involves exploring the broader social picture, such as the interaction between social conditions and educational reforms, especially in transitional societies. At this level, structural changes, policies, and the educational system's effects on society are studied. In the second approach, the micro-level, everyday educational processes are examined, such as students' social experiences within the school environment and the social status and functions of teachers. Sociological analysis of education can also focus on structures (e.g., educational policies, social stratification) and actors (e.g., teachers, students) involved in the educational process. In this sense, the analysis can examine how institutional changes affect the educational system or how specific actors, such as teachers or students, shape educational outcomes and experiences.

Perserving and Reproducing Existing Social Structures – *Disinformation Societies and Critical Transitivity*

When discussing French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), especially his work with philosopher Jean-Claude Passeron (1930–) on education and the reproduction of class differences, we see that education is not neutral but can contribute to the maintenance of class differences. Education systems often favor certain social groups, thereby reproducing class differences through education. Sociological research on education, as a form of scientific practice, is inherently socially shaped. That means researchers, even when they try to be objective, cannot escape the influence of social currents such as hierarchies, class differences, cultural values, and social norms that shape their approaches to and interpretations of education. We can analyze the goals of sociological education so that we value descriptive, but critical intentions in understanding and interpreting educational models. Keeping in mind how sociological education research is bifurcated, descriptive research deals with the characteristics of the educational system, its weaknesses, advantages, and potentials, often to suggest corrections for its better functioning. On the other hand, critical analyses examine existing educational models through a critical lens and suggest alternatives that could be better or more humane, often in the context of reducing social inequality and promoting social justice. Therefore, the sociological approach to education includes understanding how the educational system functions within the broader social structure, researching how educational processes influence individuals and societies, and analyzing how education can exacerbate or mitigate social inequality. Through micro- and macro-analyses, as well as actor- and structure-based

research, the sociology of education seeks to understand the role of education in modern society and its potential for change.

The phenomenon of fictive communication, as Bourdieu and Passeron write, “the illusion of being understood and the illusion of understanding,” is a type of critical perspective on an educational system, suggesting that education is not a tool for social change, but a tool for preserving and reproducing existing societal structures and relationships.¹¹ In reality, in a school environment, students engage in a form of fictional communication, creating an illusion of understanding between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves. Students are presented with the illusion that they are understood and that they understand others, even though such communication does not sustain a real exchange of meaning or critical understanding. This fictional communication contributes to maintaining the status quo, as the students are not encouraged to question or think more deeply about social structures, which is the system’s end goal. In the context of confirming existing social conditions—social conditions outside of school that shape students’ lives—these conditions are not only not nullified or changed within the school environment but are also reinforced there. The school, as an institution, operates in ways that solidify dominant social patterns, making them even more visible and deeply ingrained in the consciousness of those subjected to educational policies. The metaphor of students as living memories, which best reveals the tendency to preserve and reproduce the system’s chosen relations and connections in society, suggests that students are viewed as passive recipients of social norms and patterns that the school system transmits and consolidates. Students do not act as active agents of change but as subjects who absorb and internalize what the system wants to preserve and/or reproduce. In the context of educational policies and processes as specific modes of maintaining the status quo or generating desired relations, it can be concluded that, from this critical perspective, the educational system does not act as a catalyst for social change but instead serves to preserve and reproduce existing social relations. The school becomes a space where social inequalities and hierarchies—existing outside of it—are further legitimized and transmitted to a new generation. This view of education, based on Bourdieu’s and Passeron’s analysis, emphasizes that the school system does not function as a neutral or liberating institution but as a place where dominant social values and structures are transmitted and reinforced. Instead of empowering students to think critically and pursue social change, education socializes them into the existing order, preventing the challenge and transformation of social norms and power relations.

Austrian philosopher Konrad Paul Liessmann (1954-) critically examined the concept of the *information society* and suggested that a *disinformation society*

¹¹ Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J-C. 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 112.

might be a more fitting term for modern societies. Liessmann points out that the growth of information and communication capabilities can lead to confusion, surface-level engagement, and forgetting rather than deeper understanding and greater informedness. Liessmann writes how,

The membrane of this definition makes it clear why the *disinformation society* suits society much better than the *information society*. The rise of information and communication capabilities—this mere multitude of impressions, tones, numbers, and images hidden under the guise of information that today inundates the average city dweller—leads to the confusion of differences first. If they become visible, then, considering some later event, they no longer make any difference, because due to capacity limitations, they can only be perceived peripherally or are generally immediately forgotten again.¹²

Liesmann's suggestion that a *disinformation society* better describes the present state is well founded. Instead of a society where information helps us better understand the world, we live in one in which information, due to its overabundance and often questionable quality, creates confusion, disinformation, and superficial understanding. When discussing the difference between information and impression, the author stresses that the multitude of information we get daily is not always real, but often just a collection of impressions, numbers, tones, and images. This information can be overwhelming, hiding its true value behind an illusion of usefulness or importance.

Such a multiplicity, instead of keeping us better informed, makes it more difficult to differentiate between the important and the unimportant. This gives rise to a *blurring of distinctions: information overload leads to a state in which the distinction between the important and the unimportant becomes blurred*. People struggle to see relevant information, as the sheer quantity overwhelms and makes it difficult to focus on the essential. This is another argument supporting the position that a modern society should be dubbed a *disinformation society*. The other side of this issue is peripheral noticing and forgetting. If some differences in information become visible, their significance quickly disappears because they are processed superficially. People do not have the capacity to analyze and remember all information they receive thoroughly, so they often forget it. This creates a paradox: even though a wealth of information surrounds us, we become less capable of making sense of it and using it. We can conclude that the extensive outpouring of information in modern society poses an undeniable danger. Instead of the information revolution leading to higher transparency and understanding, it often leads to the opposite – increasing confusion and inability to separate the important from the unimportant. Hence, it is crucial to call for modes of critical

12 Liessmann, K. P. 2008. *Teorija neobrazovanosti: Zablude društva znanja*. Zagreb: Naklada Jeksenski i Turk, 22- 24.

questioning of how information is made, distributed, and consumed in modern society.

Education should be considered and researched through a realistic lens, recognizing its ambiguous nature, which includes emancipatory and conservative aspects, as well as the positive and negative values it may entail. As a social institution, education is neither a universal good nor neutral; it reflects and shapes broader social dynamics, often serving to empower individuals while also maintaining existing social relations and inequalities. On one hand, education has a strong emancipatory potential. It can enable individuals to acquire knowledge, develop critical thinking, and expand their social and economic opportunities. Examples of this include facilitating social mobility, raising awareness of dominant norms and ideologies, and empowering marginalized groups. When inclusive and fair, education can catalyze social change, allowing individuals and communities to question existing structures and work toward their improvement. On the other hand, education can have a conservative role, preserving current social structures and inequalities. Often, the dominant ideologies and values that favor ruling classes, languages, or cultures are transmitted through the educational system, limiting opportunities for marginalized groups. Additionally, educational systems can force individuals to conform to standards that reflect the interests of dominant social groups rather than fostering creativity, individuality, and critical thinking. In this way, education can serve as a mechanism for reproducing social inequalities and maintaining the status quo. The positive values of education include freedom of thought, equality, justice, and empowerment, while negative values may include discrimination, exclusion, elitism, or the transmission of ideologies that sustain social injustice. Therefore, education is not inherently good or bad—it is shaped by the social, cultural, and political context in which it occurs. A critical reflection on trends in education requires recognizing that it is a space where opposing forces—emancipation and preservation—intersect. It can be a space of resistance and innovation, but also a space of adaptation and reproduction of existing systems. Since education does not exist in a vacuum but is rooted in broader social and political frameworks, it is important to continually reassess its goals and functions to ensure it helps create a more just and inclusive society for all community members.

In closed, mass societies, as Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1921-1997) writes, “dehumanized, fanaticized consciousness characteristic of massification”,¹³ people become passive objects, simply susceptible to social norms, laws, and practices, with no real possibility of influencing them. In such societies, individuals are often immersed in the daily routine of life that shapes them. At the same time, they themselves do not recognize the possibility of

13 Freire, P. 2005. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London, New York: Continuum, 16.

changing or shaping their own social context. These are often societies that do not allow for the free expression of opinions, criticism, or even other forms of active participation in social questions. In such conditions, people recognize the world around them as something that exists, without the possibility of transforming it or understanding it at a deeper, critical level. However, in the process of transition, when society begins to open, people leave that passive state and begin to actively participate in social and political consciousness, a transitive consciousness develops towards a “critical transitivity” (Freire 2005: 16). This transition towards a consciousness of the ability of change and engagement marks the beginning of transitivity, or rather the movement away from a passive observer to an active participant. Transitivity in this context refers to the ability of people to recognize and engage in processes that shape society, as well as the ability to develop a critical view of social processes and to assess social norms and power relations critically. When people become critically conscious, known as *conscientização* for Paulo Freire, they no longer see society as something that is a given and unchanging, but something *unfinished* that can and should be changed.¹⁴ Freire’s idea stresses the importance of developing consciousness that enables people to understand how social problems are not just the consequences of individual misfortunes, but are deeply rooted in a wider social context. This consciousness enables people to recognize their own potential for change and to contribute to social transformation actively. One of the key elements of this process is the development of critical optimism, which is not a naïve belief that everything will turn out well, but a position that entails approaching problems seriously, recognizing society’s imperfections, and believing in the possibility of change. Critical optimism means people become conscious of existing social injustices and problems but do not give up on the idea that those injustices can be corrected through active engagement and political responsibility. In societies that underwent transitions, this form of optimism becomes a basis for creating change, as people do not passively await improvement but actively take part in shaping it. To successfully overcome transitional processes and achieve desired social changes, developing a transitive consciousness is key. This form of consciousness entails a deep understanding of social dynamics and awareness of one’s power to influence social processes. Educational programs are key to developing this consciousness. The education system must be adapted to these transitional processes so that it not only transmits knowledge but also encourages critical thinking, reflection, and personal responsibility. Education should enable people to become conscious of their roles in society, recognize social injustices, and develop the capacity to change them. Therefore, transitive consciousness is not just the passive acceptance of the existing state, but an active participation in shaping new social orders. That consciousness enables people not to see society as something that is

¹⁴ Freire, P. 2005. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London, New York: Continuum, 15.

locked and unchanging, but something that is always in the process of becoming, something that can be changed and something that must be susceptible to critique and transformation. This process of transformation is long-term and requires individuals and societies to adapt – from deeper reflection about their own values and convictions, to active engagement in political and social life.

Conclusion

Our goal was to point out a deep problem that arises in societies striving for modernization and democratic organization but facing serious challenges in building and maintaining successful, competent, and reputable elites, especially in the political, social, economic, and educational spheres. Changes in who holds office or leads government within institutional frameworks are often seen as a key element of social transformation. Still, that change alone is not enough to bring about the desired results at the social and political levels. Although there may be changes in the political scene, with new politicians taking power, this does not necessarily guarantee improvements in social living conditions or the stabilization of society. The problem is much deeper and lies in the foundations of the social system, especially in the way society chooses its leaders and elites, or rather, in how it generally understands these processes and their essence.

Systems of value that shape society play a key role in the formation and maintenance of elites. In democracies, it is expected that the social system produces successful, professional political leaders who are chosen for their competence, expertise, and ability to govern well. This process, known as social promotion, should be based on criteria such as expertise, experience, and ability, not on political connections, interests, or superficial criteria. The problem emerges when society begins to elect people to key positions without care for their qualifications, and expertise becomes second to other factors. When a system entrusts higher functions of state to the incompetent, it has negative consequences for an entire society. That system becomes cancerous, as the effects of incompetence spread to other spheres of social life. In a society that strives towards improvement, in which education is key to building a successful future, the selection of political, economic and social leaders should be based on objective criteria – expertise and experience, informed decision-making and leadership towards the common good. If a society chooses leaders based on political interests, incompetence, or nepotism, it not only reduces the quality of governance but also weakens the foundational values and principles on which a stable and prosperous society should be built.

In the educational context, this becomes even clearer. If a society that proclaims itself a knowledge society does not base itself on values that support true expertise and professionalism, then a key factor in its success begins to collapse. In the

educational system, this means that instead of genuine development of competency, a superficial approach is favored that fails to prepare students and learners to become experts in their fields. In this way, the educational system cannot produce quality leaders needed to guide society forward. Although educational institutions are often considered the foundation of social change, if these institutions do not apply high standards of expertise and competence themselves, society will not be able to generate political and social leaders capable of effectively managing modernization processes. If the education system does not foster true professionalism and competence, it has negative long-term consequences for society by failing to produce qualified individuals capable of assuming responsible roles in political, economic, and social life. Ultimately, a paradox arises—modern societies striving to become knowledge societies begin to undermine one of their fundamental pillars of success: professionalism and expertise. This leads to a serious problem: the people’s potential is not fully realized, ultimately limiting society’s ability to create a sustainable and prosperous system. In this context, education becomes crucial not only for individual personal development but also for the overall well-being of society. It is worth noting that we have tried to think about and warn of the importance of major changes in social and educational systems aimed at creating competent experts and leaders. Continuing to promote incompetent people in various positions could, in the long run, threaten society’s stability and progress. Accordingly, the educational system must provide the foundations for developing critical thinking, expertise, and professionalism so that society can advance in accordance with real needs and the challenges ahead.

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A Short Reflection on Music Criticism in
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Summary

Discussing music criticism is a complex theoretical and social challenge, aimed at a deeper understanding of the essence of a musical work. Analyzing its position in Bosnia and Herzegovina is inseparable from the broader framework of art criticism and from the broader social standing of art in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. The paper outlines ideas grounded in the sociology of music and in a sociological understanding of critique. The concluding part points to the need for the systemic development of higher-quality musical critique, problematizing the reasons for its insufficient institutional and social development.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, society, social values, music, music criticism

Dedicated to Prof. Dr. Hidajet Repovac (1945-2018)

Introduction

All modulations of sound take their rise from the mind of man; and music is the intercommunication of them in their relations and differences.

Liji, (The Book of Rites – Chapter Yue Ji, The Record of Music)¹

When discussing the character and position of a society, we must consider its cultural context, comprised of a variety of elements. Those elements can explain how members of a society understand their roles and position in each socio-cultural space. This also means considering a society's relationship to art, music, and, finally, music criticism.

Discussing music criticism today is extremely complex if one wants to understand the most important aspects of music and of musical art criticism as an authentic expression inspired by such a work. Expressing thoughts is possible, although it is quite demanding, but without any pretensions of making final judgments.

Furthermore, discussing music criticism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is complicated, especially given what music criticism once was and what it is today, and the value it holds as a form of expression. This paper does not aim to thoroughly present the development of musical criticism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather to offer some considerations on the subject.

On the other hand, many contemporary theorists believe that there are two prevailing approaches to researching music. According to Serbian art theorist Miško Šuvaković (1954-), this is the musicological approach, which sees music as a category of the spirit free from social frameworks, while the other approach

¹ Translator's note: The text can be found at: <https://ctext.org/liji/yue-ji>.

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relates to social and humanistic aspects that see music as inseparable from the social world and the meaning it creates—regardless of whether music is merely a reflection of society, whether it expresses it, arises as its construct, or as its symptom.² Music is a specific social activity and is not viewed solely as a set of notes, sounds, or melodies, nor only in terms of its aesthetic value. Instead, it is a particular social activity that emerges from a specific culture, time, and space. In sociological terms, musical criticism is precisely one of the ways music communicates with society, and vice versa.

Hence, when discussing music criticism, it is important to reintroduce terms such as value systems, tastes, musical education, cultural needs, ideas, imagination, vision, desire, and will, to free the ‘buried’ possibilities through critical thinking and questioning existing paradigms, to overcome and change them. Without broader meaning, understanding, and reception, even with music criticism, the human world becomes poorer in general, and cannot become more humane nor more civilized.

Some of Ivan Focht’s Main Ideas about the Art of Music Criticism

The basic fact of transience is the alibi for art.

Ivan Focht (1927-1992)

The essence of music, according to Yugoslav philosopher Ivan Focht, is that it is one of the paths to achieving aesthetic consciousness, if it itself was not already an aesthetic consciousness.³ As such, in an empty, superficial, senseless world, music also acts as a critical consciousness. Music as such does not have to be a critique of social reality, and it most often is not. Still, the differentiation and distance that exist and are made through an aesthetic worldview are also a form of critical differentiation and distance.⁴ Hence, the search for universal, basic human values should be understood today as a critique. Where intention is present, the greater the collapse of values; if there is an intention towards critique, then it is an added element to aesthetic value but also proof that music is socially grounded.⁵ The social context is the inevitable setting for the creation and shaping of a musical work. Musical works, however much they build their aesthetic principles, criteria, and values, cannot be entirely freed of different levels and forms of social

2 Šuvaković, Miško (2004). Višak vrednosti: muzikologija i etnomuzikologija u polju diskursa o Womusic. Novi zvuk-internacionalni časopis za muziku, no. 24., 32-33.

3 Focht, Ivan (1976). Tajna umjetnosti, Školska knjiga, Zagreb.

4 Repovac, Hidajet (2013). Eseji o književnosti i umjetnosti. Univerzitet u Sarajevu Fakultet političkih nauka, Sarajevo, 389.

5 Ibid.

conditionality and prevailing ideologies and politics, which especially pertain to the musical arts.

For most theoretical considerations, a musical work is a complete whole (harmonic progression with a cadence) within binary/ternary rhythmic units (meters) with a melodic line that forms the work's primary content. This would be the general framework for our understanding of music today, where there is some universal agreement.⁶ According to Ivan Focht,

music is an artistic creation whose meaning consists solely in the relationships between real or imagined tones, which can be approximately expressed and fixed mathematically, repeating small patterns that govern the larger order, so that the spirit recognizing and accepting these patterns directly feels a kinship of its being with the whole of the world.⁷

However, there are also different concepts for which music is no longer an autonomous structure but follows spoken or sung text. In such forms, clear rhythmic definitiveness is absent, and the musical work loses its closed, stable character. Instead, emphasis often shifts to other dimensions, such as visuality, which becomes the dominant element of expression. The musical work is no longer a persistent system of relationships, but is shaped as an open, changeable whole, often the result of random choices made during the performance.

Contemporary music differs from earlier forms because it no longer emerges within stable aesthetic and social frameworks. While traditional musical systems rest on clearly defined rules of harmony, rhythm, and form, modern music emerges in a context of pluralism, in which the rules are not fixed but are constantly reassessed and redefined. Already during the 20th and 21st centuries, there came a loosening of boundaries between genres, styles, and musical practices, making music a hybrid, open, and often experimental form of expression. At the same time, changes in society, hasty modernization, globalization, and the transformation of cultural identities are reflected in music. It is therefore not just an aesthetic object, but also a space of cultural communication, expression of identity, and symbolic struggle.⁸

The development of technology played a key role in that change, radically altering the means of creating, distributing, and listening to music. From the moment music could be recorded, reconstructed, and digitally processed, it stopped being tied to a singular performance, becoming a commodity that could be endlessly altered. Modern musical expressions include electronic sounds and algorithmic production, as well as visual elements, blurring the line between music, media, and performance. In that context, a piece of music is no longer a closed-off whole

⁶ Bužarovski, Dimitrije (2016). *Sociologija muzike*, Samizdat, Niš, 29.

⁷ Focht, Ivan (1976). *Tajna umjetnosti*. Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 60

⁸ DeNora, Tia (2004). *Music in Everyday Life*, Cambridge University Press, 6.

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but an open process that emerges through the interaction between the author, technology, and the audience, reflecting the complexity and fragmentation of modern society.⁹

On the other hand, art criticism, and therefore artistic music criticism, as once imagined and suggested by Ivan Focht, is impossible today, especially in the context of musical critique *per se*. There were near attempts to achieve such seemingly critical thought, creativity in beautifying situated in criticism as an external form, but they are exceedingly rare today.¹⁰ The focus lies mostly in presenting musical content in varied ways, based on the critic's individuality, yet they all end up with a shared orientation towards a widely adopted schema. And still, there are attempts to reach this envisioned goal or to understand it, because it does not really exist with clearly defined characteristics. The problem lies in setting the criteria for evaluating art in general.

Further developing the question of value and humanism in art, Ivan Focht stresses that "criteria lie in that which is specific, which makes art art, or according to what art is art."¹¹ This is art's aesthetic moment. Aesthetic value might not be the most important value for humans, but without aesthetic value, art cannot exist. Hence, the criteria for 'criticism' of music in this paper are based on Focht's idea of 'the artistic in art.'

Following the development of Focht's reflections on artistic musical criticism, they are closely intertwined with the discovery of the essence of an artistic work, and his question: "Does the critic need to create the same kind of work they critique if we expect them also to reveal the artistic core of the work as a whole?"¹² It is important to emphasize that the issue here primarily concerns artistic criticism of musical creation, i.e., musical works, and can take on a particularly interesting dimension when considering contemporary and still undiscovered musical creativity. Additionally, the problem becomes even more delicate in artistic criticism of musical performance, where the specifics of musical art are involved.

Focht does not see art criticism as expressing judgments whether a work is 'good' or 'bad,' nor as the personal experience of the critic, but as a deeper attempt to understand the nature of art itself. For him, art is not just a collection of elements that we see, sounds, words or images, but a complex whole in which material, formal and spiritual aspects intertwine. Hence the task of criticism is not to stay on the surface, but to reach into the internal structures of a work and discover the logic by which it is shaped, rather than the way in which it 'exists' as an artistic

9 Gere, Charlie (2011) Digitalna kultura, CLIO, Beograd.

10 Focht, Ivan (1972) Uvod u estetiku, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, Sarajevo.

11 Ibid.

12 Focht, Ivan (1972) Uvod u estetiku, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, Sarajevo, 247.

being.¹³ In that sense, Focht particularly stresses that art should not be reduced to emotion, ideology, or social function, as we then lose its specific character. Criticism that focuses on those layers misses the point of art. Real art criticism, in his eyes, should be directed to its very being, its relationships, forms, and internal necessities. Through that, we can show how art uncovers a special dimension of reality.¹⁴ The critic, therefore, is not a 'judge' but an interpreter. His role is to make clear and visible what lies in the work but is not immediately visible.

In a modern context, marked by technological development and the rapid production of cultural content, the criteria by which we judge art slide towards superficiality and media commentary. Counter to this tendency, Focht's aesthetic thoughts remind us that criticism should return to the very art form as a special form of existence, whose meanings cannot be reduced to subjective feeling, nor to social function. With the dominance of kitsch and standardized forms of production, and art conforming to market demands, criticism should renew its interpretative role – uncovering the internal structure and necessities of the work and distinguishing authentic artistic expression from its imitation. In that way, it goes beyond ordinary commentary and once again becomes a deliberative act through which we understand art as a carrier of deeper meaning in a contemporary society. Furthermore, music criticism is often reduced to short reflections, recommendations, and popular ratings, losing its analytical depth and interpretative value. From Focht's aesthetic point of view, we should not approach music from a position of personal impressions or market success. Still, we should aim to understand the internal organization of the work as a special form of existence.¹⁵ Given the dominance of industrially produced sound and standardized forms of listening, the task of music criticism should be to shed light on the relationships, structures, and internal logic of the composition, to separate clearly the authentic artistic expression from its simplified and banal variants. In that way, criticism surpasses pure evaluation and becomes an act of interpretation through which we discover the deeper purpose of musical creativity in modern culture.

Art Criticism in a Sociological Context as a Form of Social Engagement

The critic should share neither in society's sorrows nor in its joys; he should know neither friendship and love nor hatred and envy. He should reign in solitude, from which only occasionally the laughter of the Olympian gods at the world's wrong-headedness will issue from his lips.

¹³ Focht, Ivan (1976). *Tajna umjetnosti*. Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 64.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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Today we see critique itself being critiqued, which Russian literary critic Vissarion Grigor'evich Belinskii (1811-1848) pointed out long ago.¹⁷ In other words, as soon as humans realized that they have the freedom of choice in terms of their engagement, cultural and artistic creation, many questions emerged, pointing to one thing: the human's need to evaluate their entire creative output.

In a sociological sense, criticism is humane. In other words, criticism makes sense only when it concerns human creativity. Furthermore, criticism, like art, has a social character because it concerns the work and creativity of every individual, which indirectly affects the well-being of the community. One of the most important characteristics of artistic criticism, including musical criticism, is that we are talking about genuine humane criticism (since it can also be anti-human). This includes its responsibility—personal and social—for all consequences arising from the criticism, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. None of these characteristics is discrete because criticism cannot be just a personal matter for the critic; the critic must also feel and bear responsibility. That very responsibility has multiple dimensions. First and foremost, there is the critic's responsibility to themselves, and then to society. Every act of criticism serves a purpose, and since it is an integral part of a whole and influences its outcomes, criticism cannot be immune to critique or evaluation.¹⁸ Solely personal criticism, which we often encounter in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is at its lowest form because it is largely misplaced and offers the least opportunity for improvement. It is most often based on subjective impressions, emotional reactions, and individual preferences, lacking an analytical dimension and a broader understanding of the artistic work. Such a form of criticism does not contribute to the development of artistic practice or to the establishment of relevant value criteria. Still, it often leads to the relativization of aesthetic standards and to deepening confusion in the cultural space. Instead of acting as a corrective and an incentive for the advancement of artistic creation, personal criticism remains at the level of impression, thereby losing its social and professional function.

Belinskii was one of the critics who most strongly criticized personal criticism and claimed that nothing can be based on personal self-will, direct feelings, or individual convictions: judgment belongs to reason, not to personalities, and per-

16 Translator's note: The quote is taken from Marx's letter to Ludwig Feuerbach, of August 11, 1844, in which he cites Bauer. The text in German can be found at: <https://thecharnelhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/megac2b2-iii-1-karl-marx-friedrich-engels-bis-april-1846-text.pdf>, p. 65.

17 Bjelinski, Visarijon Grigorjevič (1988) *Književno-kritički članci (Govor o kritici)* Kultura, Beograd

18 Silbermann, Alphons (1998) *The Sociology of Music*, Greenwood, UK, 56

sonalities must judge in the name of universal reason, not in their own name.¹⁹ Art criticism for Belinskii is “the intellectual consciousness of a society.”

Furthermore, examining the problem from a sociological position, criticism acts like an incentive for many artists, including musicians. Music criticism can mean support and understanding from society. It also signifies acceptance or rejection. An artist can be very sure that he has found and expressed something of value, or doubt whether he is on the right path or merely conforming. In these cases, art and music criticism acts based only on their expert values, or rather, professional authority. Art criticism must strive to separate the elements of value of a musical piece from the elements of artistic non-value. However, a more talented critic will not conform, and will still look for value within a work where it was not sought after, or where only its less important elements have been found.²⁰

In this sense, we can conclude that engaged practices of art criticism position themselves within contemporary societies, continuously questioning their fundamental assumptions, while also reflecting on the broader social, political, and economic circumstances in which the artist operates. Such criticism does not remain confined to the aesthetic. Still, it becomes a way of understanding the relationship between art and social reality, pointing to the shifting positions of the artist as well as to the transformations of the very concept of art in the contemporary context. At the same time, it creates space to distinguish between authentic forms of artistic expression and their simplified or instrumentalized variants, thereby affirming its important interpretive and critical function.

Beginning with the sociological perspective developed by Bosnian sociologist Hidajet Repovac (1945-2018), art criticism cannot be examined outside the social context, but as part of a wider symbolic production of culture.²¹ In that sense, criticism is not just an aesthetic evaluation, but a form of social consciousness that reflects power relations, ideology, and dominant values of a given society. During transformations induced by modernity, Repovac warns of the dangers of conformity and of subordinating culture to political and social interests, in which critical thought becomes marginalized or neutralized.²² Hence, the role of art criticism becomes twofold – on the one hand, it analyzes and interprets an artwork. On the other, it acts as a corrective to social practice, pointing to crises of values and degradation of cultural space.

19 Bjelinski, Visarijon Grigorjevič (1988) *Književno-kritički članci (Govor o kritici)* Kultura, Beograd, 351.

20 Silbermann, Alphons (1998) *The Sociology of Music*, Greenwood, UK, 12.

21 Repovac, Hidajet (2003), *Sociologija simboličke kulture*, Magistrat, Sarajevo, 42.

22 Ibid., 43-44.

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What of Music Criticism in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

In Bosnia and Herzegovina's current cultural context, we cannot expect a developed music critique or musical critical thought that would approach the stated ideal. Not because there are no qualified people for it, although their number is smaller, but because efforts are not directed toward that type of critique. Because there are no objective stimulating opportunities, because the relevant resources are not distributed, nor are there narrower specializations according to types of musical creativity and within different types of critique.

There certainly are good, well-described critiques with analytical depth on certain issues, but they are sporadic. Given this situation, the Bosnian Herzegovinian cultural public, authentic music audience, and especially artists and music creators are not satisfied. Criticism is expected, especially from the audience (no matter how small), which will be more complete and better informed, delving into the phenomenon of musical art and creation, artistic performance, and art in general. Creators and performers expect criticism that will thoroughly and objectively explain their works, and above all, they expect regular and proper critique that will characterize their artistic activity.

To what extent is that possible, in terms of organization, professional engagement, and objectivity? It is difficult to say. Certainly, for something to start, perhaps a deal that would have significant social reach, and find support from the social and cultural public. In the case of Bosnian society, the political public as well.

It is important to emphasize the need for education programs once again, as well as public discussions at cultural institutions that relate to the affirmation and actualization of a critical discourse on contemporary culture. This pertains especially to artistic practices, primarily in the public media space, but also to the affirmation of criticism and critical thinking as participation, reflection, social engagement, and involvement in society and its processes. Therefore, we need more experts who will broaden others' horizons, enrich them with valuable, diverse knowledge, and sensitize them to the appropriate interpretation of content in culture, art, and music, thereby enabling them to understand social processes and relationships. Music critics, in this specific context, should not only know musical art but also be friends of art, because only through their creativity and the groundedness of their analysis and evaluations do they encourage the development of art and music, and thus of society itself.

In conclusion, we stress that social values and good art (and especially music) criticism are deeply interlinked and interdependent. A society that nurtures clear value criteria creates room for the development of authentic art, as well as for serious, argument-based criticism that goes beyond superficial judgments and market imperatives. At the same time, good music criticism acts as a corrective. It not only interprets and evaluates artworks but also helps shape aesthetic con-

sciousness and preserve cultural integrity. Given the modern tendencies towards the commercialization and banalization of artistic expression, the role of criticism becomes even more significant, as it helps differentiate between lasting artistic values and transient, often simpler forms. It is precisely this dialogue between society, art, and criticism that shapes the space in which art can persevere as a relevant and thoughtful component of contemporary life.

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Ibn Khaldun: The Idea Of Society
And Sociability

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Summary:

This paper discusses the medieval Arab scholar Ibn Khaldun's (1332-1406) thought as the pre-sociological basis and analyzes its significance for the development of classical and modern sociology. The starting point is the thesis that Ibn Khaldun's masterpiece, The Muqaddimah (1337, Al Muqaddimah, ar. for Prolegomena/Introduction), should not be considered merely a historical text but rather a theoretical framework that anticipates key sociological concepts. Special attention is given to his concept of 'aṣabīyyah (lit. 'group cohesiveness') – social cohesion and strength of collective action – and the comparison with sociologist Émile Durkheim's (1858-1917) theory of solidarity, Marx's (1818-1883) dialectics of class struggle, and Max Weber's (1864-1920) idea of rationalization and the 'iron cage.' The paper shows that Ibn Khaldun's innovative methodology and empirical approach make him a central author for understanding the genealogy of sociological thought. Beyond his historical significance, Ibn Khaldun's theory offers relevant insights for interpreting modern social crises, inequality, and disintegration, confirming its universal and interdisciplinary value.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun; Al-Muqaddimah; society; sociological thought; asabiyyah; solidarity; class struggle; rationalization; social cohesion

1. Introductory Remarks: Ibn Khaldun and the Genesis of Sociological Thought

The development of sociology as a separate academic discipline relates to social upheaval and intellectual achievements of the European 19th century, and we take Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber as the founders of the discipline. They are often presented as pioneers of the scientific study of society. This standard narrative, although correct in describing the institutionalization of sociology, unfortunately precludes the rich and diverse tradition of social thought that preceded the modern era. Centuries before Durkheim formulated the idea of a 'social fact,' and Marx coined the term 'class struggle,' thinkers from various civilizational backgrounds thought about the structure, dynamics, and futures of human communities. Modern sociological theory is increasingly questioning the traditional narrative that sociology is exclusively the product of Western European modernity. Even though the institutionalization of the discipline is tied to the European 19th century, this overlooks that reflections on society, its structures, and laws existed in various civilizational contexts that occurred much earlier. In that sense, sociology cannot be understood as a sudden intellectual invention of the West, but a product of a long-term accumulation of social knowledge. As British sociologist Martin Albrow (1937-) stresses, there is a strong tendency to equate sociology with modern society, thereby tying its origins to specific historical processes, such as industrialization, urbanization, and the development of

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the nation-state.¹ However, such an understanding both limits the reach of sociological imagination and neglects the rich traditions of social thought outside the European context.

Of the early social analysts, the life and work of Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) stand out. He was a historian, jurist, and political advisor whose masterpiece *Al-Muqaddimah* was a revolutionary attempt to establish a new science of society. According to Egyptian philosopher Abdel Rahman Badawi, “The *Muqaddimah* was the greatest work of its kind ever created by a single mind!” (Abd al-Rahman Badawi). Writing in the 14th century, at the border between Arab al-Andalus and the Berbers of the Maghreb, Ibn Khaldun sought to discover universal laws that govern the rise, blossoming, and seemingly inevitable decline of empires and civilizations. His approach was expressly rational and empirical, grounded in careful observation of historical facts and society, making him the founder of the modern sociological method. Ibn Khaldun’s central concept is the *asabiyyah*, the strength of collective feeling, social cohesion, the will to act together, and it offers a deeper analysis of mechanisms of social integration than is often recognized.

The starting point of this paper is the thesis about Haldun’s pre-sociological nature. We believe that he can—and should—be read not only as a historian or Islamic scholar, but also as a thinker whose theoretical framework anticipates many themes that would later become central to classical sociology. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to use a systematic comparative analysis to relate Ibn Khaldun’s concepts to the ideas of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber. The paper focuses on three thematic fields: first, the question of social cohesion and the strength of collectivity, in which we compare Ibn Khaldun’s *asabiyyah* with Durkheim’s theory of solidarity. Second, we compare Ibn Khaldun’s model of cyclical collapses with Marx’s dialectics of class struggle. Third, we compare Ibn Khaldun’s descriptions of decadence and loss of life force in later phases of civilization with the processes of rationalization and institutional rigidity, which Weber dubs ‘the iron cage.’

Albrow’s reinterpretation of sociology as a discipline not necessarily tied to a specific historical place or time allows for a more inclusive approach to its history. Such an approach allows us to see Ibn Khaldun not only as a ‘precursor,’ but as an equal theoretical interlocutor to classical sociologists. In this sense, his analysis of social cohesion, political dominance, and the cyclical nature of history can be understood as part of a broader global intellectual project to understand society. This perspective also has an important methodological implication: it requires overcoming Eurocentric frameworks in sociological research and enables dialogue between different epistemological traditions. Thus, sociology is not seen as a closed canon, but as a dynamic field continuously shaped through encounters with various cultural and intellectual experiences. This work also has

¹ Albrow, M. (2007). *Sociology: The basics*. Routledge.

a broader, practical goal — to demonstrate how Ibn Khaldun's thought can serve as a valuable framework for understanding contemporary social phenomena. In an era of global crises of (dis)trust in institutions, increasing inequalities, social fragmentation, and pervasive feelings of stagnation, Khaldun's theory offers not only a description but also a deeper explanation of the mechanisms underlying these processes. It is a work that has contributed to Ibn Khaldun being regarded as one of the drivers of global thought.² Thus, the *Muqaddimah* becomes more than a historical record — it becomes a living and relevant theoretical source that can help us better understand the challenges of modernity. In the following chapters, we will first provide an overview of Ibn Khaldun's life and intellectual context, then analyze the structure and main themes of the *Muqaddimah*, and subsequently, through three chapters, undertake a detailed comparative analysis with the three classical sociologists mentioned. Concluding reflections will summarize the findings, evaluate Ibn Khaldun's contribution, and point to directions for future research.

Ibn Khaldun is undoubtedly one of the most versatile thinkers, not just of the Islamic world but of the history of social thought. Sociologists Pitirim Sorokin, Carle Zimmerman, and Charles Galphin believed that Ibn Khaldun was a historian, statesman, sociologist, and founder of sociology.³ He was born in Tunis to a reputable Sephardic Jewish family that had emigrated from Granada. From his early childhood, he was immersed in a culturally and intellectually rich environment. He received a classical Islamic education in his early childhood, which included memorizing the Quran and studying Arabic linguistics, Quranic studies, Hadith studies, and Sharia law. He was also educated in mathematics, logic, and philosophy. This breadth of education enabled him to synthesize various traditions of knowledge. His life's journey was marked by direct participation in the volatile politics of the Maghreb and Andalusia. As a young man, he entered politics in the service of many North African rulers. His last function was as head judge of the legal school in Cairo. This proximity to power – but also to its fragility – deeply shaped his understanding of society. As noted by Malaysian sociologist Syed Farid Alatas in his study *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology* (2014), his practical experience in politics and administration was key to the formation of his theories about the cycles of civilization.⁴ He often faced adversity; he was jailed and exiled, which taught him much and allowed him to see social laws from the inside and outside.

2 Karić, Enes. (2008). *Ibn Haldun: uvod u čitanje Al-Muqaddime*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 64.

3 Soyer, M.; Gilbert, P. (2012). *Debating the Origins of Sociology: Ibn Khaldun as a Founding Father of Sociology*. International Journal of Sociological Research, no. 1-2, p. 13.

4 Alatas, S. F. (2014). *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology*. London: Routledge. p. 57.

Most of his opus – the *Kitab al- 'Ibar* (Book of Lessons) – was written in isolation, having withdrawn into a fortified village near modern-day Fez in Morocco. The introduction to this work (the *Muqaddimah*) became his most famous and influential piece. In it, as Ibn Khaldun himself explains, he did not seek to offer merely a chronology of events but rather to discover the subtle cases and hidden pores at the root of things.⁵ With that, he laid the foundations for what we recognize as sociology, i.e., the science of society today (*ilm al- 'umran*). Ibn Khaldun believed that history cannot be reduced to a collection of narratives about governments and individuals, but that it is an analytical discipline that studies the causes and consequences of social processes. He discarded the traditional approach to the past and set the criteria for a scientific interpretation of historical events. Such an understanding is especially relevant in the modern context, in which narrative and mythological patterns are presented as scientifically grounded discourses.

Ibn Khaldun's thought, therefore, remains an ever-present warning for the need to differentiate between an ideological telling and an objective analysis of social events. Ibn Khaldun's work was rooted in a broader Islamic intellectual tradition, yet he also represented its radical transformation. He stressed the importance of studying sociological thought and historical observations.⁶ Opposed to speculative philosophy or mere journalling, he represented a rigorous and critical approach to the sources. His critiques did not, however, reject philosophy; rather, they attempted to ground a method of historical research philosophically. Ibn Khaldun sought to use philosophy's unstructured and speculative nature in interpreting historical events. His critique was directed towards a lack of method and rational grounding in earlier approaches to history, and not to philosophical reflection itself. Quite the contrary, his insistence on a method testifies to his philosophical approach to history, as only a systemic inquiry into social causes and consequences can discover the 'internal meaning' of history. He writes precisely that history is deeply rooted in philosophy and should be considered as a branch of it.⁷ For Ibn Khaldun, the question of methodology is also ontological: the way in which we research history shapes our relationship with the reality of the social world. Hence, his critique is not an abjuration of philosophy, but an attempt to establish a method of historical research. He called for 'questioning and verification' (*tahqiq*), discarding unverified information and searching for universal patterns. As American religious scholar Bruce Lawrence wrote, Ibn Khaldun elevated Islamic historiography to the level of a scientific discipline. Still, his method was so universal that it transcended the confines of his own culture.⁸ This methodological revolution was not an accident but followed from his deep

5 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 79.

6 Ritzer, G. (1997). *Suvremena sociologijska teorija*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 7.

7 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 6.

8 Lawrence, B. B. (1984). *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology*. Leiden: Brill, 112.

insight into the dynamics of social processes. Ibn Khaldun believed that social phenomena cannot be described through abstract and philosophical musings, but through careful observation of concrete historical causes and mechanisms. His approach meant a strong, empirical discipline – every theoretical conclusion had to be founded on proof and subject to verification. He thus not only transformed Islamic historiography but also anticipated foundational postulates of social science, setting the standard of scientific objectivity and critical analysis that would only centuries later become the norm in the Western academic tradition.

So, there is a tendency to think of sociology as exclusively a modern Western phenomenon. However, as we noted, scientists in other parts of the world have long been engaged in sociology. One such example is Abd-al Rahman Ibn-Haldun.⁹ His biography, therefore, is not just a series of life events – it is itself a key to understanding his theories. Experiences of political instability, personal ambitions, economic stratification, and cultural diversity became raw material for his analysis. As social anthropologist Ernst Gellner (1925-1995) pointed out, it was Haldun's ability to observe social processes from above and below – both as a participant and as an observer – that enabled the development of one of the earliest and deepest sociologies of power, solidarity, and change.¹⁰ Therefore, he cannot be confined solely within the framework of an Islamic scholar – he is, above all, a thinker whose reflections on society continue to challenge and inspire.

2. The *Muqaddimah* as a Theory of Society and Civilization

Ibn Khaldun's masterpiece, the *Muqaddimah*, is one of the deepest and most complex texts in the history of social thought. The name of the work, translated as 'Introduction' or 'Prolegomena,' obscures its true depth. As we noted, the *Muqaddimah* was to be just the introduction to Ibn Khaldun's wider project, called *Kitab al- 'Ibar* (Book of Lessons). Still, this introduction became an autonomous work that overshadowed the main text with its theoretical and methodological contributions. As Bosnian Islamic scholar Enes Karić stresses, the *Muqaddimah* is more than an introduction; it is a systematic development of a social science.¹¹ This work was created during a period of retreat, when Ibn Khaldun retreated from public life into the fort of Ibn Salama (in modern Algeria). During that period of isolation (1374-1378), he had the opportunity to synthesize his experience in politics, law, and travel across the Maghreb, Andalusia, and the Middle East. The *Muqaddimah* followed, dubbed by English historian/philosopher Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) as the single greatest work on the philosophy of history

9 Ritzer, G. (1997). *Suvremena sociologijska teorija*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 7.

10 Gellner, E. (1981). *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7.

11 Karić, Enes. (2008). *Ibn Haldun: uvod u čitanje Al-Muqaddime*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 45.

ever written.¹² It is not just a chronicle; it is an attempt to discover the universal patterns of human behavior through critical analysis.

Structurally, the *Muqaddimah* is divided into two books, which are further divided into sections. The first book deals with general theories of society and civilization, including concepts such as *umran* (society or social organization) and *asabiyyah* (social cohesion). It also analyzes political forms of governance and addresses economics, education, and science. The second book is dedicated to culture, art, and the spiritual development of societies. This comprehensive structure shows that Ibn Khaldun did not want to leave almost any aspect of social life unexamined. As Iraqi American Islamologist Muhsin Mahdi (1926-2007) emphasized in his study of Ibn Khaldun, the *Muqaddimah* is an encyclopedic attempt to encompass all dimensions of human society within a coherent theoretical framework.¹³ Methodologically, Ibn Khaldun introduced a revolutionary approach to studying history. Instead of relying on traditional narratives or theological explanations, he insisted on empirical verification of facts and rational analysis of causal relationships. In the introductory part of the *Muqaddimah*, he writes: “History requires extensive knowledge, good judgment, and in-depth research because its goal is to establish the truth.”¹⁴ This methodological rigor anticipated the principles of modern historical criticism and sociological methods. For example, Ibn Khaldun criticized earlier historians for unverified claims and exaggerated figures, referring to principles of credibility and consistency with natural laws.

The central concept of the *Muqaddimah* is *asabiyyah* – social solidarity that arises from a sense of togetherness and shared interest. According to Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyyah* is the foundation of all political power and the motor of all political change. He explains that nomadic societies have a stronger *asabiyyah* than urban societies, which enables them to conquer and establish empires. However, once they establish a civilization, *asabiyyah* weakens amid the opulence, corruption, and loss of collective spirit. This cyclical model of history, from nomadic unity to urbane decay, is one of Ibn Khaldun’s lasting contributions. As Ernest Gellner noted, Ibn Khaldun’s model of the cyclical breakdown of empires remains one of the most potent theoretical frameworks for understanding social dynamics.¹⁵

The significance of the *Muqaddimah* also lies in its interdisciplinary nature. The work crosses the boundaries between history, sociology, economics, political science, and cultural studies. A modern reader can find analyses of educational systems, debates about the role of faith in society, theories of urban development, and the psychology of collective behavior within it. Because it anticipated so

12 Toynbee, A. J. (1934). *A Study of History, Vol. III*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 322.

13 Mahdi, M. (1957). *Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 176.

14 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 15.

15 Gellner, E. (1981). *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 91.

many modern disciplines, Ibn Khaldun is often called the ‘first sociologist’ or ‘father of social sciences.’ Labeling Ibn Khaldun as the ‘father of social sciences’ should be understood in the context of his theoretical contribution, not as a metaphorical expression of admiration. Such a designation implies that Ibn Khaldun was the first to systematically think about social processes through rational and empirical categories, aiming to establish their laws. His grounding of history as a science of social causes and mechanisms of change makes him a precursor to modern sociology, as he goes beyond descriptive narration to enter the realm of theoretical explanation. Ibn Khaldun is not the ‘first sociologist’ because he preceded sociology in time, but because he anticipated its fundamental epistemological principles. As Syed Farid Alatas concludes, *Al-Muqaddimah* represents the earliest attempt to study society systematically and scientifically, independent of theology or mere philosophical speculation.¹⁶ Ibn Khaldun sees humans as beings who cannot survive in isolation. Humans are inherently social beings. Their existence depends on community with others because only through collective effort can they meet basic survival needs, such as food, shelter, and protection from threats. It is therefore impossible for all, or part of it, to be sufficient with the ability of just one person.¹⁷ Ibn Khaldun emphasizes that human society is the result of necessity, not choice. Humans cannot produce everything they need for life on their own — they lack the strength and ability to fulfill their existential needs independently. Only through cooperation with others is it possible to achieve division of labor, which enables efficient production and security. He also highlights the importance of political authority and laws as mechanisms for regulating human relations. Without them, conflicts and chaos would be inevitable, as human ambitions and desires often clash. According to Ibn Khaldun, authority acts as a force that ensures order and stability within the community, thereby enabling the survival and development of society.

The universal value of the *Muqaddimah* is reflected in its ability to grasp thematic fields that surpass their historical context. Ibn Khaldun discusses processes central to the social sciences today: mechanisms of social cohesion, power relations, causes of economic inequality, and patterns of cultural decay. His analysis of social forms is not merely descriptive but theoretically oriented, as it aims to identify universal laws governing the rise and fall of civilizations. Precisely with that dimension, the *Muqaddimah* transcends the boundaries of its time and shows its lasting relevance – reminding us that questions about the creation, stability, and breakup of social orders are as relevant in contemporary society as they were six centuries ago. Ibn Khaldun’s thought, therefore, creates dialogue between

16 Alatas, S. F. (2014). *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology*. London: Routledge, 112.

17 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddimah*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 88.

classical and modern sociological theory, showing that thought about social laws has universal importance, regardless of the epoch in which it emerges.

3. Ibn Khaldun and Classical Sociology

The concept of *asabiyyah* lies at the center of Ibn Khaldun's theoretical contributions; it is not only the key to understanding his philosophy but also a precursor to modern sociological discussions of social cohesion. Ibn Khaldun defines *asabiyyah* as the strength born of a sense of togetherness and blood ties, or of some other closeness among people.¹⁸ This strength is not merely emotional bonding, but a dynamic political factor that enables a group to act collectively, seize power, and maintain it. For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyyah* is a founding assumption for establishing any political order – without it, ruling is impossible. He clearly stresses that a kingdom cannot be established without *asabiyyah*.¹⁹

Centuries later, Émile Durkheim, in his work *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893),²⁰ develops the concept of solidarity that displays curious parallels to Ibn Khaldun's thinking. Durkheim differentiates between *mechanical* and *organic* solidarity, where mechanical solidarity is based on similarities and the suppression of individual differences.²¹ In contrast, organic solidarity stems from the differentiation of functions and the interconnection of specialized parts of society. Even though Ibn Khaldun differs in terms of theoretical frameworks, both recognize that social cohesion depends on the strength of collective bonds that surpass individual interests. The parallel between the two thinkers becomes especially obvious when we analyze the causes of social disintegration. Ibn Khaldun describes how *asabiyyah* weakens as the society becomes more urbanized and complex. When an empire consolidates and expands, when people enjoy luxury and opulence, *asabiyyah* slowly disappears.²² This process inevitably leads to the demise of a dynasty and a cyclical return to the start of a social cycle. Ibn Khaldun claims that injustice (*zulm*) is one of the key factors causing the fall of every civilization. When an unjust rule is established in a society that is not based on justice and fairness, it creates deep social and political disagreements. Injustice can mean the misuse of power, the exploitation of the lower classes, or the unjust division of resources. According to Ibn Khaldun, every form of government that allows for an unjust distribution of power and wealth causes social instability and weakens moral values within a society. Such systems cannot last long, as they undermine social solidarity and cause a lack of trust among members of a community. Seeing as injustice heralds the demise of the human species and leads

18 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 123.

19 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 135.

20 Durkheim, Emil. (1972). *O podeli društvenog rada*. Beograd: Prosveta.

21 Durkheim, Emil. (1972). *O podeli društvenog rada*. Beograd: Prosveta, 97.

22 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 189.

to the downfall of civilizations, it is important and wise to prohibit injustice.²³ When people lose trust in a government and justice, an internal breakdown occurs, which leads to the demise of civilizations. Ibn Khaldun also stresses that injustice leads to corruption and the reduction of a society's efficiency. When people experience injustices, they become discontented; rebellions and violence follow. Ibn Khaldun concludes that justice and morality are the foundations for the long-standing survival of society. Durkheim, on the other hand, warns of the danger of *anomie* in modern societies – the state of normative disorientation that emerges when social regulations cannot keep pace with changes in social structures. In his work *Suicide* (1897), he highlights that *anomie* follows from the inability of social institutions to regulate and direct human desires.²⁴ The key difference between these two approaches lies in their understanding of time and social changes. While Ibn Khaldun purports a cyclical model of history in which societies necessarily start from a strong *asabiyya*, weaken and break down, Durkheim sees an evolutionary progress from a mechanical towards an organic form of solidarity. However, both share the insight that societal stability rests on maintaining strong collective bonds. Both Ibn Khaldun and Durkheim recognize that the social order requires more than the mere functioning of institutions – it requires a shared moral foundation. Curiously, both authors point to economic factors as central to maintaining social cohesion. Ibn Khaldun stresses that excessive taxation and economic exploitation weaken *asabiyyah*: when rulers become greedy and seize their subjects' property, *asabiyyah* breaks down.²⁵ Durkheim warns that economic differentiation without a fitting moral regulation leads to *anomie* and social destabilization. This similarity in the analysis of economic causes of social disintegration further strengthens the theoretical proximity of the two thinkers. Syed Farid Alatas, reflecting on Ibn Khaldun's heritage, stresses that *asabiyyah* can be read not just as the precursor of Durkheim's solidarity, but also as a modern theory of social capital.²⁶ The concept subsumes elements of trust, reciprocity, and collective action that will later become central to theories of social capital. It is important to stress that Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyyah* has a distinct political dimension that Durkheim less clearly expresses. While Durkheim focuses on functional aspects of solidarity, Ibn Khaldun clearly sees *asabiyyah* as a source of political power and potential for conquest. This difference reflects their different intellectual contexts – Ibn Khaldun wrote in an unstable multicultural space and time. At the same time, Durkheim developed his theory in the context of a consolidating Third French Republic (1870-1940). Despite the differences, comparing Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyyah* to Durkheim's solidarity highlights significant theoretical

23 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 472.

24 Durkheim, Emil. (1997). *Samoubistvo*. Beograd: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 214.

25 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 267.

26 Alatas, S. F. (2014). *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology*. London: Routledge, 89.

similarities, underscoring the universality of the question of social cohesion. The strength of a society does not lie in its material resources or in its military power, but in the quality of the social connections that connect its members.

When investigating the causes of social collapse, Ibn Khaldun and Karl Marx represent two fundamentally different, yet equally important approaches. While Ibn Khaldun focuses his analysis on the dynamics of social cohesion and its inevitable weakening, Marx explores the material foundations of social antagonisms that lead to revolutionary transformations. These two seemingly incompatible approaches open the possibility of a richer dialogue about the mechanisms of social change. Ibn Khaldun, in the *Muqaddimah*, develops a sophisticated theory of the cyclical nature of civilizations, whose rise and fall follow an internal logic. The central concept of his analysis is *asabiyyah*—the strength of collective identity and solidarity that enables a group to achieve political dominance. Ibn Khaldun explains that an empire cannot be established without *asabiyyah* but warns that success itself leads to decline.²⁷ When a dynasty consolidates power, its members gradually abandon the virtues that enabled its rise—humility, courage, mutual trust—and indulge in luxury and comfort. Khaldun describes this state as an inevitable process, which leads to the loss of political will and military capability. As a result, society becomes vulnerable to internal uprisings and external invasions, thus closing the cycle and preparing the ground for a new uprising.

Karl Marx offers an entirely different approach in his critical analysis of a capitalist society. For Marx, history is not a cycle of rise and fall, but a linear process conditioned by material contradictions. In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), he categorically claimed that the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class conflict.²⁸ The essence of Marx's argument lies in the claim that social relationships of production produce a structural antagonism between the ownership class and the class deprived of ownership of the means of production. Capitalism, according to Marx, generates its own contradictions through exploitation and alienation, which necessarily lead to a radical transformation of the social order. Unlike Ibn Khaldun's moral decay, Marx's collapse stems from economic contradictions that intensify until the existing order becomes unsustainable.

Despite different starting points, we can say that these two thinkers share fascinating similarities. Both recognize that the social order contains the seed of its own downfall – in Ibn Khaldun's case, in the form of moral degeneration that accompanies success, and in Marx's case, in the form of economic contradictions arising from the very nature of production relations. Both Ibn Khaldun and Marx offer theories of social change that emphasize internal contradictions

27 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 135.

28 Marx, Karl; Engels, Friedrich. (1977). *Manifesto komunističke partije*. Mostar: Prva književna komuna, 35.

as the driving forces of historical movement. Both also recognize the key role of conflict in social dynamics. However, they locate it at different levels – Ibn Khaldun at the level of moral and political cohesion, Marx at the level of economic interests. The main difference between these two approaches lies in their understanding of time and historical progress. While Ibn Khaldun sees history as an eternal cycle in which patterns repeat without real progress, Marx sees history as a dialectical process leading to a higher form of social organization. This difference reflects their different philosophical positions. For contemporary sociological analysis, both concepts offer valuable insights. Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyyah* provides a framework for understanding legitimacy crises and the loss of social capital in modern societies. As American political scientist Robert Putnam notes in his work on social capital, Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyyah* anticipates modern theories about the importance of social networks and trust for the functioning of democracies.²⁹ On the other hand, Marx's analysis of class antagonisms continues to provide a powerful framework for understanding economic inequalities and structural disparities in globalized capitalism. Integrating these two approaches can offer a fruitful space for analyzing contemporary social crises. The value of this comparative reading lies in its ability to expand our theoretical repertoire for understanding the complexity of social reality. Instead of facing a false choice between the moral and the material, between culture and economy, we can recognize that social collapse is always the result of a complex interplay of multiple factors.

When exploring the internal mechanisms of social stability and crises, Ibn Khaldun and Max Weber offer two important, albeit historically distant, voices whose analyses reveal deep structural similarities. Both thinkers deal with the paradox of social institutions that, emerging as tools for organizing and stabilizing social life, over time become the source of rigidity, alienation, and finally collapse. While Ibn Khaldun sees this process through the cyclical model of civilizations, Weber analyzes it through the process of rationalization, which defines the modern Western world.

Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* describes in detail how dynasties in the later stages of their development became victims of their own bureaucratic machinery. He notes that when the empire stabilizes and expands, rulers introduce increasingly complex administrative mechanisms to maintain control and collect taxes.³⁰ This bureaucratization, although initially serving to make administration more efficient, over time becomes a burden on society. He emphasizes that excessive taxation and bureaucratic expansion weaken *asabiyyah* because people lose trust

29 Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 21.

30 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 312.

in the rulers' justice.³¹ At this stage, the state becomes rigid and unresponsive to challenges, making it vulnerable to internal uprisings and external threats.

Centuries later, Max Weber developed a theory that bears striking similarities to Ibn Khaldun's insight, albeit in a completely different historical context. In his work, *Economy and Society* (1921), Weber defines bureaucracy as the most rational form of organization, stressing its precision, unambiguity, and smoothness.³² However, precisely that rationality carries within it the seed of crisis. Weber warns that bureaucracy, once established, tends towards self-reproduction and expansion, creating what he calls "the iron cage of rationality."³³ In this cage, humans become prisoners of formal rules and procedures, losing their autonomy and creativity. The parallel between the two thinkers is especially apparent when examining the consequences of institutional rigidity. Ibn Khaldun describes bureaucratized dynasties losing their ability to adjust and becoming victims of their inertia. When the administration becomes too complex and expensive, it devours itself. Weber, on the other hand, writes about the paralysis of society amid overly extensive regulation.³⁴ Both authors recognize that institutions made to serve people can become their masters. The key difference between the approaches is their understanding of time and historical change. While Ibn Khaldun sees history as a cyclical process in which patterns repeat, Weber sees rationalization as a linear, cumulative process that characterizes the modern world. This difference reflects their different historical contexts – Ibn Khaldun writes in the context of dynastic cycles in the Islamic World. At the same time, Weber observes the irreversible process of modernization in the West.

For modern social analysis, this comparative perspective offers a rich framework for understanding the crisis of modern institutions. Weber's iron cage and Ibn Khaldun's cycle of decline together provide a powerful framework for understanding why modern institutions often feel like a burden rather than a relief. For example, the phenomenon of bureaucratic inertia in contemporary states can be analyzed through Ibn Khaldun's view of institutional degeneration and Weber's rationalization. Here, we can see how Ibn Khaldun's theory of the loss of *asabiyyah* through bureaucratic expansion and Weber's theory of the iron cage together offer a framework for understanding why these institutions are often perceived as alienated and dysfunctional.

The significance of this comparative reading lies in its ability to transcend historical and cultural differences between the Islamic Middle Ages and Modern Europe. Ibn Khaldun and Weber together offer a dialectical understanding of institutions – they are both necessary for the social order and dangerous to social dynam-

31 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem 318

32 Veber, Maks. (1976). *Privreda i društvo*. Beograd: Prosveta, 223.

33 Veber, Maks. (1968). *Protestantska etika i duh kapitalizma*. Sarajevo: "Veselin Masleša."

34 Veber, Maks. (1976). *Privreda i društvo*. Beograd: Prosveta, 235.

ics. This understanding is especially important in the modern world, which faces crises ranging from climate change to pandemics, where efficient institutions are essential, but where institutional rigidity can also be deadly. The dialogue between Ibn Khaldun and Weber reminds us that temporal or cultural frames do not bound social theory. Their insights, borne from entirely different contexts, show the timeless importance of questions about the relationship between freedom and organization, between creativity and structure, between human agency and institutional determination. This dialogue reveals the value of sociological thought – the ability to recognize universal patterns in historical specificity.

4. Instead of a Conclusion: The Last Relevance of Ibn Khaldun's Thought

Using the dialogue between Ibn Khaldun and classical sociological theory, this paper shows that the *Muqaddimah* is much more than a historical document. Rather, it is a living theoretical heritage that yields productive insight into social reality even today. Even though Ibn Khaldun's ideas were formulated in the 14th century, they still influence modern sociological and political theory. Ibn Khaldun spoke about how science has its own special subject – human civilization and social organization.³⁵ This paper has also demonstrated that Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* is not just the historical predecessor of modern sociology, but also its modern interlocutor, as we can put it in dialogue with the classical sociological tradition. Comparative analysis of Ibn Khaldun's concepts with the theories of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber has shown not just interesting parallels, but deep structural similarities in the way that these thinkers approach the phenomena of power, cohesion, and social change. As Syed Farid Alatas noted in his study of the application of Ibn Khaldun's ideas, his theory of civilizational cycles provides a framework for understanding social processes that are equally relevant to the medieval Maghreb and the modern globalizing world.³⁶ One of the key findings of this paper is that understanding social cohesion cannot be reduced to a single mechanism or factor. Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyyah*, Durkheim's solidarity, Marx's class consciousness, and Weber's rationalization offer different but mutually interconnected dimensions of social connection, reminding us that the strength of collective spirit is not just sentimental but a strategic force that enables political action.³⁷ This multidimensional understanding of cohesion is especially important in the modern context, where traditional forms of solidarity transform under the influence of globalization and digital technology. Modern societies face chal-

35 Soyer, M.; Gilbert, P. (2012). *Debating the Origins of Sociology: Ibn Khaldun as a Founding Father of Sociology*. International Journal of Sociological Research, no. 1-2, p. 15.

36 Alatas, S. F. (2014). *Applying Ibn Khaldun: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology*. London: Routledge, 215.

37 Ibn Khaldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 156.

lenges that echo in Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the collapse of civilizations. As he described, over-taxation and corruption erode a society's very fabric.³⁸ So today, we see how economic inequalities and the loss of trust in institutions endanger social capital. Durkheim's warning about *anomie* takes on new dimensions in societies experiencing accelerated changes in norms and values. At the same time, Weber's 'iron cage of bureaucracy' becomes more evident in globalized systems of governance. Marx's analysis of class antagonism, on the other hand, provides a framework for understanding increasing social tensions in the era of neoliberal capitalism. An especially fertile ground for future research lies in the possible integration of Ibn Khaldun's cyclical model with modern theories of social change. Instead of a linear understanding of progress, Ibn Khaldun's vision of history as a cycle of rises and falls offers a more realistic framework for understanding seemingly irrational social processes. As noted by Ernest Gellner, Ibn Khaldun's model allows us to understand why social development does not necessarily occur linearly, but through fractal patterns of iteration and transformation.³⁹ This is especially important in the era of global crises when it appears that historical forms of inequality, corruption, and institutional rigidity repeat in new contexts. The significance of Ibn Khaldun for modern sociology lies not only in his historical importance as the predecessor of the discipline but also in his ability to inspire new theoretical syntheses. He is the greatest thinker of all time, and his work stands as the greatest work of its kind, made no matter when.⁴⁰ His work reminds us that questions that troubled socially minded thinkers in the 14th century – questions of justice, power, solidarity, and social collapse – remain central to sociological reflection. Maybe the most important message Ibn Khaldun provides for modern society is precisely his understanding that no civilization lasts forever, but that every fall contains the seed of renewal. At a time when global challenges are too great to solve, Ibn Khaldun's optimism about humankind's ability to reconstruct the social order is not just a historical curiosity – it is an essential source of inspiration for those who believe that social change is not only possible but also inevitable.

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38 Ibn Haldun. (2007). *Al-Muqaddima*. Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 289.

39 Gellner, E. (1981). *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 134.

40 Shahidipak, M. (2020). *Ibn Khaldun as a paradigm for the past and future of sociology and humanity*. Sociology International Journal, no. 5, 154.

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BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA STUDIES SARAJEVO 2

ŠAĆIR FILANDRA

Semir Halilović's book *The Experience of the State (Iskustvo države, 2024)* introduces significant novelties in the interpretation of Bosnian and Herzegovinian statehood^{**}

UDC

Book Review

pages 70-75

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** Halilović, S. (2024). *Iskustvo države: Bosna i Hercegovina između državnosti i podjele*.

Amid a contemporary non-reading culture, scholarly inertia, and inherited hermeneutical patterns shaping interpretations of Bosnian statehood, Semir Halilović's book on Bosnia's historical experience as a land and society endowed with its own statehood has passed almost unnoticed. This is unjust. Halilović approaches Bosnia's experience of its own statehood in an exceptionally innovative, courageous, critical, and distinctive manner, introducing a breath of fresh air into the rather ossified and polarising discourses surrounding this subject. The author does not proceed from dogmatic positions, mythologize or essentialize Bosnia, or engage in debates on the continuity or discontinuity of its millennial statehood—issues around which contemporary ethnonational narratives clash most fiercely. Instead, he focuses on the experience of Bosnia's polymorphic legal-political distinctiveness, shaped by a wide spectrum of internal and external determinants that have defined, and continue to define, Bosnia as a particular and unique political entity.

From the theoretical-political standpoint of a Bosnian Herzegovinian civic nation—which constitutes his theoretical, political, and constitutional position—Halilović transcends the logic of the hitherto dominant ethnonational evaluation of Bosnian political history, elevating his analysis to the level of a new, possible, and forthcoming political horizon, which he presents as the key to the prosperity of all people of Bosnia. From this philosophical-political perspective, he analyzes and evaluates the historical forms and contents of Bosnian statehood, offering political-science insights into a rich body of historical material across various stages of Bosnian state formation and development.

The Banate (ca.1154-1377) and later Kingdom of Bosnia (1377-1463), the distinctiveness of their ruling class and religious composition, their territorial integrity, and state/royal sovereignty define the medieval Bosnian state. A thousand years later, these features testify that the ZAVNOBiH¹ restoration of Bosnian statehood did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but from the continuities of Bosnia's historical and political rootedness. The arrival of the Ottomans in Bosnia—or, more precisely, the Ottoman Empire's occupation of Bosnia, as Halilović characterizes it—marks a first-order historical event that intensified contemporary Christian states' politico-military interest in the land. European dogma, grounded in ancient Greek thought, Roman organization, and Christianity, gave the conquest of Bosnia a pronounced religious dimension. Moreover, the author supports interpretations according to which Europe, regardless of the Enlightenment and modernity, has generally understood itself—and continues to understand itself—as

1 Translation note: ZAVNOBiH (bos. Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine) – State/National Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH) was first convened on November 25, 1943, and served as the highest representative-legislative body of the territories controlled by the Yugoslav Partisans in Bosnia and Herzegovina until April 1945. It further affirmed the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its equal status within a proposed federated Yugoslavia.

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Christian, and that every intrusion of the “Other” into its imagined space has been met with suspicion.

Halilović identifies the causes of the fall of the Bosnian Kingdom in what he describes as a conflict between the people and the state, manifested in the indifference of the persecuted Bosnian Christians toward their own state, whose king, by embracing Catholicism, bound the fate of the land to the assistance of European Catholic powers. At the very beginning of the book, Halilović reveals a key feature of his intellectual style, which he demonstrates repeatedly throughout the book’s analysis: he extrapolates a socio-structural model from one historical period to another through comparative methodology, applying it to different actors and circumstances while preserving the same structural framework. In this instance, he compares the medieval situation with the contemporary one. In both periods—the Bosnian Kingdom and the present—he identifies a conflict between the people and the state. In the modern Bosnian state, the author highlights the striking fact that nearly half the population rejects its own state identity, instead binding its existence to neighboring political and national frameworks. In contemporary terms, the author detects a conflict between ethnic and political imagination within the Bosnian people, revealing certain forms analogous to those characteristics of the early phase of Bosnian statehood. Throughout the book, Halilović persistently raises the question of the absence, non-existence, or dysfunctionality of a Bosnian civic identity. In a highly analytical, well-argued, and vivid manner, he demonstrates Bosnia’s internal antinomies between the general/state identity and the particular/ethno-religious identity.

This Bosnian antinomic condition has long been a generally recognized scholarly fact. Halilović, however, radicalizes and persuasively presents it to the point that it becomes the fundamental political determinant of Bosnian political existence. In doing so, the author devotes insufficient attention to analyzing the causes of this phenomenon, or—especially—to how to overcome it, beyond advocating the concept of civic identity, since his analysis emphasizes the forms and consequences of this division.

The consequences of the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia have been enduring, and they still resonate today. After the Ottomans, Bosnia was never the same. Halilović argues that Bosnia’s national and state development was interrupted and halted; it became, and remains to this day, a society shaped by Islam, which, from the perspective of Christian Europe, positions it as a European ‘heretic.’ Bosnia’s enemies, both in the past and today, have exploited this fact by forming alliances along the lines of real or imagined anti-Islamism, observing Bosnia and its political belonging within Europe with suspicion. According to the author, the Ottoman failure to conquer Europe following the Great Turkish War (1683-1699) resulted in the emergence of two processes that, in certain respects, continue to this day: the shrinking of Bosnia’s territorial borders and the continuous displace-

ment of Bosnian Muslims. Most subsequent peace treaties concluded after Ottoman defeats by the Western powers also established Bosnia's new northern and western borders. When Bosnian Muslims adopted the position that the Bosnians could no longer bear the brunt of Ottoman defeats, a movement for Bosnian autonomy emerged. With the abolition of the Bosnian military nobility and captaincies and the suppression of the autonomy movement, Bosnia faded from the historical stage at precisely the moment of the collapse of imperial orders and the emergence of Balkan nation-states—a process in which it did not participate.

The Ottomans “concluded their historical role in Bosnia deprived of honor” (p. 95), as the author argues, because Austro-Hungary occupied Bosnia (1878-1908) with their consent. Contemporary friendly relations between modern Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot obscure the fact that, in Halilović's view, Bosnia was never more than a valuable military resource and, subsequently, a bargaining dowry to the Ottomans. Particularly noteworthy is the author's observation that Bosnian Croats, who at the time of the occupation were the most disappointed with the new authorities, historically had the greatest reason for satisfaction, as they remained under the control of identical religious-political forces within which the Croatian nation enjoyed far greater political power than its demographic potential would suggest. One might say—and here the author once again extrapolates this power model to contemporary circumstances—that they occupy a similar position today, with the support of a comparable bloc of Western European states.

With the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918-1929), an era of regional hegemonism began—a century of Serbo-Croatian domination over the political space of South Slavic unification. Their proto-national ideas formed the basis of the Yugoslav unification process and, later, two devastating, disintegrative wars. The governance of the Kingdom of SHS in Bosnia and Herzegovina rested upon three continuous processes: “the inversion of ownership over Bosnian land, the national suppression of the Bosnian population, and the abolition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political, and later geographical, concept” (Halilović, 2024, p. 130).² The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) was the only politically distinctively positive force during this period of Bosnian statehood. The communists advocated, and subsequently achieved, the restoration of Bosnian statehood, yet their state solution left the national question unresolved, remaining within the framework of Serbo-Croatian pan-national needs.

Three key political ideologies co-determined the fate of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Second World War: Nazism, monarchism, and communism. All three had external origins as well as internal allies and supporters. While Nazism and monarchism, through the Ustaša and Chetnik movements, fundamentally sought

² Halilović, S. (2024). *Iskustvo države: Bosna i Hercegovina između državnosti i podjele*.

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the destruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a historical and political fact, the only political movement that revived the idea of restoring its state unity was found among the Yugoslav communists. Although totalitarian, communism—beyond the prior conflictual relationship between religion and ethnicity—was the only movement to offer a new political perspective and existential salvation. This novelty was recognized and accepted particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Halilović, Bosniaks embraced this idea for two reasons: caught between the hammer and anvil within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, they saw an escape in the policy of *brotherhood and unity* (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina's distinctiveness and statehood were the second motivating factor behind Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak alignment with the communist project.

Halilović also adopts a critical stance toward the restoration of Bosnian statehood during the Second World War. He accepts previous research findings that the communists resolved the Bosnian *state* question through the ZAVNOBiH (1943-1945) decisions, but not the *national* question. He therefore takes the analysis a step further, reproaching the communists for lacking the courage to resolve the question of a Bosnian civic nation, given that they defined Bosnia as the property of three peoples. In his view, this constituted a “far-reaching historical omission” (p. 176), which left the door open for Bosnia to become the epicenter of great-national projects emanating from its east and west during Yugoslav crises. More explicitly, he argues that by establishing a state without a civic nation, the communists “did a favor to Serbo-Montenegrin and Croatian pretensions to Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Halilović, 2024, p. 176).³ Consequently, he radically questions the formula of Bosnia as neither Serbian, nor Croatian, nor Muslim, but simultaneously Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim—a formula in which we today largely take pride.

The author does not deny that the communist “constitutional trichotomy” produced significant social results through the socialist system. Ultimately, political culture developed through the constitutional amendments of July 1990, which replaced the sovereignty of peoples with the primacy of citizens' sovereignty, forming the legal and political basis for the referendum on the country's independence.

Considering the period of the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, Halilović makes a starkly apodictic claim: “Throughout the entire twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina were sovereign for only one day” (Halilović, 2024, p. 211).⁴ Only on that day—the day of the referendum on Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence [February 29-March 1, 1992]—did sovereignty, in modern political terms, emanate from the citizens rather than from the party or the peoples. Had Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged from Yugoslavia

3 Halilović, S. (2024). *Iskustvo države: Bosna i Hercegovina između državnosti i podjele*.

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within the ZAVNOBiH framework as “Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim,” three ethnic states would have appeared on the political map instead of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, civic sovereignty lasted only one day; the next morning, Bosnia and Herzegovina awoke as a militarily blockaded state. With a surprising indifference on the part of the international community toward the violation of universal norms of international law, an arms embargo was imposed on the sovereign country, leaving it at the mercy of internal rebel forces and their sponsors.

Throughout the negotiation processes that followed during the war against Bosnia and Herzegovina, what was sought was not a peace solution, but rather the “legalization of the use of force” (Halilović, 2024, p. 223).⁵ The author finds it unclear—and this remains a question for further research—why representatives of the independent Bosnian state, under conditions of external aggression and internal armed rebellion, negotiated with representatives of established para-state formations, given that such negotiations legitimized them and their demands. With the international community’s assistance, aggression was transformed into an internal political issue. The establishment of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the acceptance of the entity name “Republika Srpska,” analyzed in detail in the book, form part of a process by which the peace process was subordinated to domestic electoral interests in the United States, ultimately resulting in an incomplete peace settlement. In this regard, Halilović reaches the following conclusion:

The war against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not end in its defeat, but it did end to its detriment. By abolishing state unitarism and rewarding incomplete ethnic secessionism, the Dayton Peace Agreement created a new constitutional order that framed wartime policies within peacetime political maneuvering. Trapped in a consociational constitutional system, within a model of (quasi-) functioning oscillating between conflict and enforced cooperation, the signatories of the Dayton Peace Agreement are compelled to suppress or continue their unfinished wartime conflicts at the constitutional, legal, and symbolic level. (Halilović, 2024, p. 277)⁶

Halilović’s book is intriguing and intellectually stimulating. It represents a new reading of old material and abounds in lucid observations, commentary, and comparative insights. This does not mean that I agree with all the author’s positions—such agreement is neither necessary nor possible in scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, the book unquestionably deserves significant intellectual attention and critical dialogue, as it introduces important novelties in interpreting and understanding Bosnian Herzegovinian statehood and offers a measure of optimism about its future.

⁵ Halilović, S. (2024). *Iskustvo države: Bosna i Hercegovina između državnosti i podjele*.

⁶ Halilović, S. (2024). *Iskustvo države: Bosna i Hercegovina između državnosti i podjele*.

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