

ISESCO and The International Knowledge Order: Pro-action, Reaction or In-action

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Abstract

This article is representative of the “culturalist” school of thought in political science. Using a paradigm coined by Foucault, numerous faces of power in the international knowledge order are explored. Starting from the assumption that the burden of “cultural gate-keeping” rests heavily upon UNESCO’s shoulder, it is analyzed whether ISESCO can count as a counter-power. Once the flaws of the comparative framework that posits ISESCO as a “second UNESCO” are shown, an Islamic methodology is used in order to see whether this Islamic cultural institution represents Islam or simulates it. Such an inquiry requires a discursive analysis of two institutions that share a common cultural goal using either the framework of internationalism or that of the *Ummah*.

Introduction

Since this paper is written at a critical period for the discipline of international relations, it will share the burden of its deficiencies. What are the crises of IR? How to transcend them? Bertrand Badie (a Master in the making of IR) answered these questions clearly in several of his works, and his analysis will justify both the choice of ISESCO as a topic and the comparison of the latter with UNESCO.

The first crisis of IR is that of universalism, the caricature of which is Dahl’s claim that the GNP growth determines that of democracy. Universalism is a problem because it assumes the existence of a specific

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logic behind every system. When we compare the United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), we assume a potential 'UNESCO-isation' of ISESCO. This assumption brings us to the first crisis of IR and shows us how this paper reflects the problematic aspects of the discipline.

The second crisis, which is that of explanation, relates to the space variable because it deals with the extension of the boundaries of IR beyond those of the west. The choice of ISESCO reflects this crisis in the sense that it informs us about the exclusion (or inclusion) of an Islamic political science. This crisis is also reflected in our comparison of UNESCO and ISESCO since it sheds light on some fashionable dichotomies in IR like self/other, inside/outside and universality/particularity.

The third crisis concerns the time variable in the sense that it looks at history as a general model applied to all events. This crisis is also reflected in the comparison of UNESCO and ISESCO, since one can hardly understand the historical development of the latter without understanding that of the former.

If this comparative framework helps us to highlight the problems of IR, its use will be crucial if it provides us with some solutions to these problems. According to Badie, two solutions are sensible and effective: the use of historical sociology and the introduction of culture into IR. The former consists of using sociological concepts in explaining historical narratives. The benefits of this approach are that it does not use the hypothetico-deductive method; hence, it does not state any *a priori* conclusions. Following this methodology, the identity of ISESCO is

"... only fully perceptible when opposed to another political order, constructed in another context, and facing other challenges."¹

The introduction of culture in IR will allow us to construct a different conception of power and will enable us to see whether Islamic modernities

"... defy all known models, by taking new forms which in no way repeat the history of the western state-building."²

Furthermore, considering culture as a primary variable rather than a residual category will justify our comparison of UNESCO with ISESCO by putting the practice of "imported state" under the microscope. Three factors explain why the western state ideology is imported by non-western states. The first factor lies in the dependency on the West for the

appropriation of state sovereignty and legitimacy. In this context, the comparison between UNESCO and ISESCO becomes understandable. The second factor is the universalist pretension of the western management model. The need for ISESCO'S comparison with UNESCO reflects this pretension that is served by the generalization of western international law. The third factor is the non-western elite's adoption of the "imported state" strategy as a protection against domestic threats and foreign ones. In this context, the recourse to the comparison between ISESCO and UNESCO is necessary for seeing whether the creation of ISESCO was a mere state import strategy. The fact that all ISESCO members – except Brunei – are also members of UNESCO renders the comparison of the two organizations a logical method for testing the consistency of states that are part of both. An ISESCO official set UNESCO as a reference for his organization by stating that:

"The diversity in activities, programs and projects undertaken by ISESCO, proves indeed that it is the UNESCO of the Islamic world."³

Indeed, this statement makes it more legitimate to compare the two institutions. The choice of an Islamic cultural organization cannot be considered 'out of fashion' when one keeps in mind the future of Islam. Hence, according to the demographic projection that Jean Bourgeois-Pichat made in *Les Scientifiques parlent*, the world Muslim population will represent 43% of the global population by the year 2125. Moreover, Samuel Huntington talks about a forthcoming 'clash of civilizations' that will oppose the West to a 'Confucian-Islamic military connection'. The importance of studying ISESCO appears clearly in the following statement:

"Non-western civilizations no longer remain objects of history as targets of western colonialism but join the West as movers and shapers of history."⁴

Since UNESCO is taken as a model by ISESCO, it is essential to analyze functional structure of the former as well as its relation with knowledge, prior to analyzing ISESCO in order to see its "UNESCO-ization". Finally, the necessity of understanding ISESCO within its reference requires us to mention the ontology of its field as a means for testing its representativeness.

Part 1: UNESCO and Knowledge :

Chapter 1- A Functional Analysis

UNESCO was founded on November 4, 1946 to foster peace and security through international co-operation in education, science and culture. It is based in Paris but it is still linked to the values of the New York-based United Nations. Its program has two aspects: a traditional one in the domain of international co-operation (exchange of information, preparation of conventions, etc.) and a modern one concerning the development of specific projects (educational programs, scientific research, preservation of cultural heritage, etc.). UNESCO consists of three organs: the General Conference, composed of representatives of member states meeting once in two years; the Executive Council, which is a body of thirty-four members elected by the General Conference; and the Secretariat, which is headed by a General Director. It is a global organization in terms of its membership, since it is a forum gathering as many cultures as there are nations, especially since decolonization. This multiculturalism has not always been proportionally mirrored in positions, since initially the Director General was generally from the host country or was the one with much influence (Rene Maheu was the first director general to be reelected). UNESCO follows a voting strategy of "one state, one vote", even if informally the voting results are influenced by budgeting and caucuses. UNESCO's structure tells us that it is a service organization rather than a forum, one given the high level of bureaucracy pervading it. This is reflected in the ambiguity of its constitutional documents, as is clearly stated by Imber:

"UNESCO has a mandate that is so broad that almost any matter of dispute could be said to have educational, scientific or cultural dimensions." ⁶

This opens our eyes to the real problem linked with the discourse governing UNESCO. Indeed the core of it lies in the diversity of meanings that the reader attaches to the constitutional texts of UNESCO. Hence, one's understanding of the purpose of UNESCO, which is "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations", depends on one's conceptions of peace and security. For example, a functionalist will not emphasize the role of nation-states, while a populist will develop a greater sensibility towards emerging majorities than a Marxist, who will be more interested in the ideological conflict between East and West.

After analyzing the structure of UNESCO, which does not explain by itself its behavior, we need to clarify the knowledge structures that shape it and the historical ruptures it went through. In the last decade, bureaucratization, politicization and privatization were the three major components of these knowledge structures. The features of bureaucracy described by Max Weber are recognizable in the structure of UNESCO: hierarchical bureaucratization, the importance of written documents in intra-bureaucratic communication, impersonal relations, full time engagement and "technicised" knowledge. F. Crozier adds two other variables: centralized decision-making and the shift from the organization as a function to the organization as an end in itself. These features find their origin in larger behavioral patterns that manifested themselves in the United Nations, the mother institution. Some of these patterns are the following:

- An obsession with "co-ordination" and a slow implementation of its conclusions, turning the instrument into an end in itself.
- A shift of emphasis from 'maintenance of peace' to development, which makes international co-operation become a charitable enterprise instead of a commonly accepted obligation.
- Luxurious spending, as is clearly expressed by Shirley Hazzard in *Defeat of An Ideal*:

"The merry-go-round of high salaries and allowances, abused immunities, incessant parties and earth-girdling trips are important in their implications, and their repercussions in the organization's performance."⁷

The trend of politicization is more complicated because it is not perceived by the West in the same way it is perceived by the rest of the world. This is clearly shown in Clare Well's statement: "If from the western perspective 'politicization' appears to lie in challenging and changing the existing order, it is the prevailing order itself and failure to change it which appear political from the vantage point of the new majority."⁸ Examples of such "politicization" are found in the resolutions concerning the North Korean aggression on August 28, 1950 (the Board unanimously condemned it) and in those related to Israel in 1974 condemning the Israeli occupation and the archaeological excavations in East Jerusalem.

This condemnation led to the rejection of the Israeli application to join the club named 'Europe'. The ambiguous uses of politicization

involve the exercise of “extraneous” politics – the origin of which is the functionalist distinction between “high politics” and “low politics” – which is a challenge to existing institutional structures and patterns of resource allocation. This “extraneous” politics involves the use of double standards with respect to national sovereignty (liberalism vs. interventionism), as well as the convenient recourse to selective morality (the “third world” countries focus on racism, zionism and imperialism and neglect domestic corruption and gender issues). This bias towards third world countries – especially in the era of Makhtar M'bow – led the UK to withdraw from the organization in 1985. As a consequence, all the member states which were unhappy with this politicization “ran full-page anti-UNESCO advertisements in leading western newspapers”⁹, generating from the “practitioners” of politicization vehement denials or concessions that took form in the recent shift towards privatization, the beginning of which can be seen as a result of the demand for a new world information order between 1974 and 1978. Nevertheless, both politicization and privatization cannot be fully comprehended as institutional or political phenomena alone but need to be explained in the context of hegemonic organizations. In fact, politicization was only a reaction against privatization that was inaugurated by Frederico Mayor, who brought new management techniques such as “Management by objectives” and “SWOT analysis” and led UNESCO in a sub-contracting philosophy typical of the economies in transition. What is problematic in this innovation is the binary opposition “politicization/privatization” presenting the latter as apolitical, economic and value-free while presenting the former as political and partial. Privatization is indeed a political phenomenon because of the political entities behind it and also because it reflects the ideological victory of the West over the East, since it is defined as a dominant technical rational ideology. It is important in this context to destroy the myth of the opposition between theory and practice, to feel the necessity of explaining the influence of knowledge structures on the institutional development of UNESCO. Also the role UNESCO plays in shaping the knowledge order at the level of norms, elite formation and decision making. This institution is able to engage in a hegemonic game by “facilitating the transformation of initially subjective and particularistic interests into the objective conditions and normative criteria for what counts as appropriate or inappropriate behavior and policy formulation, for all actors in the system.”¹⁰ In order to test whether UNESCO is part of those “all actors”, it is necessary to define some western positions on knowledge such as modernism, post-modernism and globalization.¹¹

Chapter 2: Knowledge/UNESCO: A Mutual Relationship

The methodology that I will use in analyzing those trends is borrowed from *Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which Foucault considers interruptions and discontinuities in history rather than long historical processes. In this context, it will be interesting to consider some important twentieth-century trends in light of Foucault's approach.

Globalization, defined by A. Akbar as "the rapid developments in communications technology, transport and information which bring the remotest parts of the world within easy reach"¹², is one of these trends. Akbar points to the effects of globalization on the global political economy by stressing the principles of rationalization (WEBER) and commodification (everything is judged according to its exchange value). Globalization has long been equated with "Mc Donaldization", which involves principles such as efficiency (less time between a need and its satisfaction), calculability (cost analysis), standardization and surveillance. Anthony Giddens sees modernity as responsible for the globalization patterns through capitalism and industrialism. Modernized societies have high specialization in their units, are not self-sufficient, and their value-orientations are universalistic. Empiricism and the dominance of consumer cultures are the strongest icons of modernity.

A mere glance at the decisional process in UNESCO is likely to reveal its submission to the constraints and demands of Globalization, one of the conditions of modernity. For a long time UNESCO was an example of turbulent nongrowth since it never had a cohesive dominant coalition or a commitment to a specific problem. A shift in this trend was the insistence on the creation of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which brought to the fore the idea of sovereignty and cultural autonomy through the legitimization of controls on the outflow of news. The NWICO called on the West to share modern communications technologies and to finance the installation of Third World communication facilities in order to keep western control over global telecommunications. The NWICO was very divisive and was not implemented in its entirety because of the lack of consensual knowledge and similar goals. It was generated by an imbalance in the communication sector between North and South.¹³ Hence it sought to establish "a free and balanced flow of information organized in respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter Concerning the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states."¹⁴ What is ironic about Masmoudi's so called "radical"

declaration is its use of a language of nation-states and its faith in the UN philosophy. If we were to go by Masmoudi's statement in our analysis of the Salman Rushdie affair, we would have to apply Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reads,

"Everyone has the right to freedom to hold opinions....and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Here, we can see that the "radicalism" of Masmoudi is other than Islamic. We can discern two parties in NWICO debate: North and South (East and West before the collapse of the Soviet Union). What I intend to show is that whatever difference separates the orthodox camp and the radical one, their original values are similar, since they are both Judeo-Christian in their nature. This fact, (deemed by some as being ideological), is borne out by the discourse of Masmoudi, a third world representative¹⁵, and that of Elie Abel, the American spokesman. The aim of NWICO, according to Masmoudi, was to "consolidate and develop the established structures, particularly among the non-aligned countries"¹⁶ and also to 'decolonize' information by "eschewing all incitement to hatred or radical, religious, political or any other kinds of discrimination."¹⁷ Two elements point to the orthodox nature of such a discourse:

- The notion of non-alignment, which is a reaction against the Cold War, is UN-Islamic to the extent that in Islam there is no room for neutrality (if you are not in heaven you must be in hell).
- Mr. Masmoudi's separation between religious and political discrimination is typical of the modernist secularization process, the origin of which was the Protestant tradition. In fact the latter was instrumental in solving the conflict between church and state either by subordinating the church to the state (England) or by secularizing the state (USA, France). This secularization process deeply affected religious practices by separating them from non-religious ones in time and space (in Church and on Sunday) and also by orienting them to abstract philosophical principles.

As for Abel, the American representative of the orthodox view, he mentions the philosophical-political issues such as the right of access, the licensing of journalists and the right of rectification that – he thinks – cannot generate any consensus. About the right of rectification, he declares that:

"In many countries, including the United States, it is unthinkable that the media should be compelled by the government to publish a retraction or correction of an earlier report."¹⁸

Instead, as Abel points out, "the government relies on the professionalism of the media to publish corrections or retractions voluntarily when they are justified."¹⁹ This would be the case only in ideal situations in which there would be absolute freedom of the press and an absolute distinction between media and governments. Those who are acquainted with the process of American decision-making know that the Congress and the White House have formal and informal links with all the sectors of society including the "fourth power", that is, the media.

Also, in this respect, The Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg and the Trilateral Commission are examples of parallel institutions that participate in consensus building. The Bilderberg group, named for the Hotel de Bilderberg of Oosterbeek (Holland), where a few leaders first met in 1945, comprised members who reached senior positions in Kennedy's state department (secretary of state Dean Rusk). The Trilateral Commission includes heads of states (Carter, Bush and Clinton), officials of five of the world's six largest banks (Sumitomo, Fuji, Sakura, Sanwa and Mitsubishi), and heads of media organizations (Japan Times, Le Point, Times Mirror, The Washington Post, CNN and Time Warner). When we compare the contents of a confidential memo from the Economic and Financial Group of the Council on Foreign Relations in 1941 with the "radical" suggestions of Masmoudi, we find that they both speak a realist language. The memo reads:

If war aims are stated which seem to be concerned solely with Anglo-American imperialism they will offer little to people in the rest of the world, and will be vulnerable to Nazi counter promises (...). The interests of other peoples should be stressed, not only those of Europe, but also those of Asia, and Latin America. *This would have a better propaganda effect* (my emphasis).²⁰

Likewise, Masmoudi's advice to developed countries to "pay particular attention to the information supplied by the national news collection centers or new pools of the developing countries, on the problems which concern their respective regions or countries"²¹ reproduces the status quo. Thus, if the orthodox view and the radical one generally appear to be antagonistic, their value system is similar. The other major shift in history is the rise of post-modernism which destroys the certainties of modernism and thus "accelerates the search for a single, often mythologised truth that can reference all social mores and practices."²² UNESCO

has not entered yet the age of post-modernism, the features of which are, according to Giddens, a post-scarcity economy, multilevel political participation, humanization of technology, time-space compression and demilitarization of society. These are not imperative for UNESCO.

Since the relationship between UNESCO and Knowledge is reciprocal, one must also see how UNESCO shapes the Knowledge order. UNESCO as an organization addresses two constituencies: its members (States, NGOS, etc.) and professional experts. It is useful here to view UNESCO as a disciplining mechanism, the aim of which is the surveillance of the discourse on Knowledge. As Foucault said, there are different ways of orienting a discourse:

- Mastering the power of a discourse: we find in this strategy exclusion procedures such as the use of the forbidden and of dichotomies that privilege one side over the other. We also find in this strategy internal procedures such as the recourse to the authority of the author and the discipline, which limit the randomness of a discourse.
- Limiting access to a discourse through rituals and through doctrines, thus influencing its author via conventions and pre-established regulations (heresy/orthodoxy), and by the same token influencing the discourse through its author (status, class, interest, etc.).
- Appropriation of the social discourse via education.

The three strategies mentioned above are part and parcel of the functioning of UNESCO:

- First, UNESCO masters the power of Knowledge as a discourse by the use of the forbidden, which is the “political”. Our analysis of the NWICO debate revealed that what was “political” was not to be mentioned and had to be excluded. Moreover, in the divide, “privatization/politicization”, the former was privileged over the latter. Politicization was in fact perceived as hindering the progress of UNESCO and thus had to be fought. UNESCO also draws the limits and outlines of education, culture and science through its symbolic decisions and rule-creating activities. This view is shared by James Sewell, who writes that:

"UNESCO offers an unending series of issues whose theme is the collective legitimization of the world's doers of good or the de-legitimization of its doers of evil."²³

This control is easily seen in the secularism of UNESCO, which dismisses what is religious as being ideological or separates it from the cultural. In fact, during the outcry that followed the publication of

Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and Khomeini's *fatwa* against him, UNESCO did not engage in any religious analysis but worked for the protection of Rushdie under the chapter of "protection of freedom of opinions".

– Second, UNESCO controls access of the discourse of Knowledge in the science policy programs. The shift inside UNESCO towards governmentalism is very revealing in this respect. In the fifties UNESCO saw the rise of science policy bureaucracies, which are "organs of the state that have as their primary mission the tasks of coordinating, organizing and planning scientific and technological activities at a national level."²⁴ Such bureaucracies did not have the same roots in developed countries as they did in developing ones. For developed countries, their domestic conditions shaped their reaction in UNESCO (the authors determine the discipline). Indeed, a high correlation was found between the strength of domestic science communities, the modernization of domestic economies and their militarization on the one hand, and the establishment of science policy bureaucracies on the other. As for developing countries, the adoption of such bureaucracies is a mere imitation of UNESCO's program, which stated that there are two features for a good science bureaucracy: the science policy makers could not be research organizations and they would have to have access to the highest governmental positions. An example of this discourse control via the discipline is the assistance provided by UNESCO to the Lebanese government in the creation of a National Council for Scientific Research giving science a strict empiricist nature.

– Third, the education of the high functionaries of UNESCO was a popular practice and this socialization process occurred through material incentives and "sophisticated" cultural gatherings. Incidentally, it is interesting to see how states that are members of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) behave within UNESCO in issues related to "boundary decisions". An eloquent example is the Gulf War (1991), where neither UNESCO nor ISESCO took any measures against the countries that destroyed the Baghdad museum, and this despite their signature on the international convention for the protection of cultural property in armed conflicts (the Hague, 1954). The Muslim countries that are members of both organizations showed the same inaction but their motives were different. If the ISESCO countries did not act because of the financial hegemony of Saudi Arabia (part of the conflict), the UNESCO countries on the other hand were following the instructions of the security council, the "other United States department."²⁵ Another

example is the NWICO debate even though it took place prior to the birth of ISESCO. The debate had a marginal influence on the restructuring of international communications relations, as the Mac Bride report testified. The creation of the Pan-African News agency (PANA) tells us at first sight that UNESCO "helped" the South to create a private media agency. Nevertheless, a "second sight" at the ethics of PANA (quick profits, exploitation of non-resistant markets and the de-unionization of labor) reveals its association with materialistic values. These values, being those of transnational capitalism, bring us back to the dangers of homogenization for culture as it is expressed by Rowe and Schelling:

Part of the violence produced by global homogenization is the illusion that there is only one history, an illusion which suppresses the differences between the different histories lived by different groups of human beings. There is a further point: historical memory is a vital culture action in the making, and preservation of those differences and the destruction of memory a prime means of domination. Nor is it appropriate to speak of a single popular memory: there are a variety of differentiated memories.²⁶

Thus, it is essential to analyze the structure of ISESCO to show its specificity as well as its similarity with UNESCO and to see whether it takes any counter-hegemonic action.

Part 2: ISESCO and the Knowledge Order

Chapter 1: A Functional Analysis

The first Article of ISESCO'S 1982 charter defines it as an "international body working within the framework of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, specializing in the fields of education, science, culture and communication." ISESCO is based in Rabat, Morocco, and it operates in three languages: Arabic, English and French. Among its objectives are to "contribute to the achievement of world peace and security" and to "protect the independence of Islamic thought against cultural invasion and distortion factors and safeguard the features and distinct characteristics of the Islamic civilization." Two important goals should be noticed here: ISESCO's attachment to the promotion of peace and its desire to face cultural homogenization. The dependence of ISESCO on the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) based in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), and the important role played by states, are reflected in the sixth and seventh articles of the charter: "A state which is not a member of the Organization of the

Islamic Conference cannot become a member of the Islamic Organization (ISESCO), and: "*Only the Member States of the Islamic Organization (ISESCO) shall have the right to vote at the General Conference (my emphasis).*"

ISESCO, like UNESCO, is made of three organs: the General Conference, the Executive Council and the General Directorate. The General Conference and the Executive Council are composed of representatives appointed by member states. The Director General is elected for a three-year renewable term and has "direct authority over the entire staff of the General Directorate." ISESCO uses the "one state one vote" strategy, which makes Africa the most represented continent and Europe the least represented one. Since OIC's philosophy shapes ISESCO's policies, it is worth mentioning Al Ahsan's definition of OIC. Culture, as seen by the OIC charter, "refers to all aspects of life except politics and economics."²⁷ According to this definition, OIC separates culture from politics and economics. Since this separation is alien to Islam, one wonders where it stems from. In the West, cultural manifestations were always regarded as structural epiphenomena, and as a result culture was either defined as a luxury item consumed by different elite or as the opposite of a good with an exchange value. Culture in fact is both material (it produces exchangeable goods) and immaterial (its objects are performed by humans). This confusion comes from the fashionable view considering economics the domain of numbers, therefore of objectivity, and culture the realm of arts, which is synonymous with subjectivity. This is why the relationship between culture and economics could not be seen outside three interdependent lenses:

- Who finances culture?
- Is there any private financing of culture? (public/private)
- Does private financing go to the arts?

Thus, when we cease to view the "economic problem" as a problem of means (or lack of means), we can start setting the alphabet of a culture of economics since the latter views first and foremost finalities which are impossible to define without ethics. Culture and politics will be joined together when the identity of the Islamic *Ummah* will be the main drive of OIC, because, as al Ahsan puts it, "The strongest force inhibiting the success of the OIC is the secular concept of national sovereignty."²⁸

ISESCO, whose goal is to face hegemony, has achievements in different domains.

- Cultural production: The financing of symposia discussing vital issues in the Muslim world and the translation of foreign research accompanied by commentaries (a technique to control discourses).
- Education: The revision of school curricula to make them follow an Islamic model and the founding of Islamic universities in such countries as Bangladesh, Mali or Malaysia.
- Cultural heritage: ISESCO tries to resist cultural aggressions and preserve cultural monuments. Hence, it faced the Salman Rushdie affair in an intellectual way by holding a symposium on *The Satanic Verses* and publishing in 1992 its proceedings under the title "Correction Of Erroneous Information Published On Islam And Muslims" as regards the Book *The Satanic Verses*. However, no action was taken towards condemning Rushdie by a *fatwa* or condemning Khomeini's un-Islamic *fatwa*. Hence, Education is the primary field of action for ISESCO, UNESCO and ALECSO (the Arab league Educational, Cultural and Scientific organization) all together. Moreover, many centers have been created such as the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation or the International Islamic Women's Organization.

The organization of ISESCO'S general conference meeting at the headquarters of UNESCO on its fiftieth anniversary on November 16, 1995 and the presentation of its project to the international charter of cultural development are sufficient reasons for comparing UNESCO with ISESCO.

(a) What are the similarities between UNESCO and ISESCO?

We can divide our variables into descriptive and analytical ones:

- Setting: Both organizations have the same representation mechanism, which is equality of voting. Moreover, the secretariat is not autonomous but rather partially penetrated.
- Power: We find a similar revenue base (annual assessment), administration style (a direct one), and the same absence of sanctions monitoring compliance such as embargos or military operations.
- Behavior: The program budgeting procedures and the small role assigned to NGOS are a common denominator, as well as the recruitment of personnel on the basis of nationality rather than competence.
- Analytical variables: Three features are common to both organizations. The "issue linkage" is tactical: when bargaining involves more than one issue, new items are introduced into the agenda to obtain concessions. The authority of UNESCO and ISESCO is unchanging and does not approach

the realm of foreign policies. Furthermore, both organizations were created to overcome educational deficiencies, and both of their programs cannot be evaluated in a technically rational manner in the sense that reference should always be made to earlier performances.

Other common features can be detected: the unequal distribution of power and the presence of western modes of problem-solving. The latter "results not only from the founding role western governments played in designing most international organizations but also from the tendency of non-western delegates, experts, and civil servants to be educated in western ways and sympathetic, in principle, to western modes of defining policy issues."²⁹ The former is caused by imbalances in financial contributions and in the frequency of consultancy. In connection with hegemony, one may express astonishment at the similarity of charges leveled at both UNESCO and ISESCO during the propaganda campaigns of which they have been victims. The first campaign was directed against Director M'bow during the NWICO debate, and accused him of being a "dictator" who did nothing to counteract the mounting bias in favor of third world states. The second one was directed against ISESCO'S second director general Al Tuwaijri (Saudi Arabia) during the autumn of 1994, and the charge was the marginalization of Moroccan civil servants. In this respect it is interesting to mention briefly ISESCO's two major successes in 1993 prior to that campaign. It moved to a new building that it acquired as a property, thus becoming the first Islamic and Arabic organization in the field of culture to own its building. It also held a conference on the preservation of the cultural patrimony of Al Quds. Denying any bias against the Moroccan officials of ISESCO, Al Idrissi (a Moroccan official himself) implicitly alluded to who might be behind this campaign of denigration. Mentioning how ISESCO reintroduced the Arabic alphabet in sixteen African languages, he wrote, "there are people working to erase the Arabic presence in Africa."³⁰ In his presentation of the way in which ISESCO reflects a tolerant and moderate Islam, he declares that it "constitutes a source of disturbance and annoyance for parties seeking to show a frightening image of Islam"³¹ (my translation). What al Idrissi said implicitly may just as well be said explicitly: Francophone mercenaries and fundamentalists are behind the campaign. ISESCO plays a difficult balancing act by claiming on the one hand that it is against *Francophone hegemony* and on the other by signing a cooperation treaty with the ACCT (*Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique*) in order to help the fifteen Francophone African countries that

are members of ISESCO. Mahdi Elmandjra, a reliable authority in the field of international relations, is among those who perceive Francophonie as an instrument of cultural domination, since it is based on a divisive principle French/ Francophone, which privileges the former over the latter.

If there are some similarities between ISESCO and UNESCO, there are also differences between them.

(b) how different is UNESCO from ISESCO?

– Descriptive variables:

+ Setting: UNESCO follows an Ideology of "Ecoholism", the purpose of which is to "create global rules and programs designed to reflect the perception that all is interdependent with everything"³²; whereas ISESCO follows a "pragmatic antidependency" ideology that creates global rules "to protect maximum national autonomy in order to restrain developed countries but within limits of recognized and unavoidable international interdependence."³³ Moreover, UNESCO's experts represent epistemic communities while those hired by ISESCO are groomed by governments.

Behavior : Concerning voting procedures, UNESCO focuses on consensus (associated with the NWICO debate), while ISESCO uses the rule of simple majority in most of its decisions. With respect to leadership, the present one in UNESCO is influenced by some hegemonic coalitions, and it is perhaps why the UK has expressed its desire to re-join UNESCO. As for ISESCO, the current "leader" is a man who uses networking in the practice of his role.

Analytical variables:

The political goals of the two organizations do not have the same structure in the sense that UNESCO has a specific goal (construct peace in the minds of people), while ISESCO follows interconnected goals (independence and participation in global trends). This difference results in antagonistic decision-making styles: UNESCO follows an eclectic pattern based on western universal values while ISESCO tries to adapt to the environment by following a pragmatic strategy. Membership is also another point of difference. Even though both organizations have a diversified membership economically and socially, UNESCO encompasses a unified Europe as a homogeneous force, and this appeared clearly in the battle of audiovisuals against the United States. Inside ISESCO African countries are far from unity (failure of the Organization of African Unity), and even the Maghrebi countries cannot find a common ground, especially with the absence of Algeria from the organization.

Let us examine why unity is absent.

Economic obstacles

The first variable is the weakness of economic exchanges between countries in the Maghreb: in 1988 inter-Maghreb exchanges represented 3.9% of the Tunisian foreign exchange; 4.4% that of Morocco and 0.8% that of Mauritania (Libya was omitted because of the embargo that alters the significance of such variables).³⁴ Monetary problems (different currencies, parity exchange rates) and diversity of legislation are other obstacles that outweigh the benefits of the complementarity of the economies of the Maghreb.

Political obstacles

The heterogeneity of political regimes is another factor of disunity, since they can range from one extreme (revolutionary regimes such as Libya) to another (anti-revolutionary Morocco). The presence of territorial conflicts is yet another factor, and the best example is the one opposing Tunisia to Libya over the delimitation of the Gulf of Gabes (solved in 1988). Finally, we can mention the desire of each country to establish its leadership over the region, stopping any initiatives and movements that might undermine its interests. Finally, fundamentalism is perceived as a threat to this unity. The argument goes as follows: the rise of Islamic forces generates a certain fear from neighboring countries and pushes foreign powers to intervene in the domestic affairs of countries suffering from such problems (Tunisia cut its diplomatic ties with Iran in 1987). Basics of IR tell us, on the contrary, that this fear will be felt whenever the interests of the elite are threatened, and the intervention in domestic affairs is not linked only to Islamic groups but is rather a global phenomenon.

After such comparison and following a model established by Haas, we can deduce the nature of both UNESCO and ISESCO. The former has six features of "Incremental Growth", seven of "Turbulent Nongrowth" and four of "Managed Interdependence", while the latter has four elements of "Incremental Growth", seven of "Turbulent Nongrowth" and five of "Managed Interdependence". Thus, both organizations follow the "Turbulent Nongrowth" model, and ISESCO is even more Weberian than UNESCO since it has more features of "Managed Interdependence", the latter being the only ideal type against the two real ones. We have accepted so far the widely accepted statement that "it is politically right to compare ISESCO to UNESCO." In the following chapter we will closely examine this statement.

Chapter 2:

What is wrong with comparing UNESCO to ISESCO?

All features common to both UNESCO and ISESCO that we have discussed so far do indeed invite a comparison. However, some of the assumptions underlying the comparison are problematic.

First, one problematic assumption is that by understanding the culture of the other institution, one will be more accepting of it, which is not always the case. One may fully understand a culture but still hate it. It is in this sense that Charles Taylor mentions intersubjective meanings where "the dispute is at fever pitch just because both sides can fully understand the other."³⁵

Second, the divide UNESCO/ISESCO may also involve differences and oppositions which are interpreted differently according to the reader's episteme. Some would situate the opposition between the two institutions in a center/periphery framework, others would see it in an inside/outside context, while many will put it in a similarity/dissimilarity scheme. The problem with these classifications is that they are not scientific. Logic is a prerequisite for scientific thought, and these classifications are by these standards not logical and therefore not scientific. When one does a comparison, one usually comes to it with the assumption that the two elements of the comparison are *a priori* either similar or dissimilar and therefore sets out to establish the presupposed similarity or dissimilarity.

Third, the comparison assumes that both UNESCO and ISESCO are real representatives (rather than simulators) of their belief systems. In Islam, the belief system is a divinely established reality and is therefore separate from the entities representing it.

Fourth, the comparison assumes that since history is a universally unified process, ISESCO's career will in its development go through the same historical processes as UNESCO. This view, widely held in international relations, resulted "in the complicity of international relations scholarship with particular constructions of the South and of the 'reality' of the South's place in international relations."³⁶ As a reaction against the possible dangers of assimilation implied in this view of history, some leaders have thrown the baby out with the bath water, as it were. They have indeed rejected even the positive aspects of the other for the sake of cultural autonomy. Other leaders use the assimilative historical process, if one may say so, to justify their own failures, not putting their own specificity in the balance ("How can you blame us for our

underdevelopment when you know that, unlike Europe, we did not go through an industrial revolution?). An example of this assimilation process is Occidentalism, as defined in Carrier's question: "Whose experiences and perceptions of western society are elevated to the level of public acceptance? And whose are denied-why and how?"³⁷ Occidentalism is defined as a bias coming from the way the Orient perceives the Occident but also – and especially – from the way the Occident creates the image of itself that it wants exported to the Orient. In Occidentalism, we find the discourse of cultural imperialism that is 'invented' by 'white phallogocentric academicians', to use the language of post-modernism, which delimits the borderline of radicalism (I am not saying that they are doing it intentionally nor am I asserting the opposite). Tomlinson understood this representation in 1991 when he described cultural imperialism as " a critical discourse which operates by representing the cultures whose autonomy it defends in its own western cultural terms."³⁸

Four variables are to be named to weigh cultural imperialism: Media, Nationality, Capitalism and Modernity. The first one assumes a central role of the media in culture as well as its imposition on the consumers. Moreover, it assumes that the audiences read the text in the same manner. The nationality discourse is found within UNESCO and it is problematic since " it may take as its reference cultural elements – the flag and its rituals, the national anthem, state ceremonials"³⁹, and also because it privileges space over time. When Capitalism is seen as a tool of imperialism or its cause, cultural diversity becomes a threat, and homogenization becomes a bad thing in itself (I'm an imperialist because I wear American-made Jeans and drink Coke). The hatred of what is American finds its origins in the Cold War, and the rejection of consumerism comes from the Christian puritanical principle, "Man does not live by bread alone." Being a Muslim and living in a post-Cold War era, I do not share the view of Capitalism as being inherently an evil. As for Modernity, some UNESCO officials tend to see it as an imposition while romanticizing tradition. This is why UNESCO accepts "otherness" as long as it remains "exotic" and "indigenous". In other words, it tends to use a discourse about minorities but not for minorities. In order not to make the same mistake, one should judge ISESCO by its own standards, that is, its own belief system. Examining the Islamic vision of science, education and culture will enable us to see whether ISESCO is a representative of Islam or its simulator. Derrida's advice brings academic legitimacy to our task:

"One could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the difference of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same."⁴⁰

Part 3: Alternative Knowledge and Organization

The term "University" is derived from "Universe" and that points to the standardizing effects of western Education (MBA formations) while the term *Jamiah* is derived from *Jamaa*, which means both a mosque and a unifying entity referring to the sacredness of Education and to its non-specialization. The system of old *madrasah* functioned as a family providing material and spiritual support for its members (students). It is significant that a typical working day of a *madrasah* would start with *salat al fajr* (the early morning prayer). After several years at this *madrasah*, the student would receive from his *shaykh* (teacher) the *immah* (the origin of the cap and gown in modern graduation ceremonies) as the symbol of confidence that the student might now speak with his teacher's authority. The anthropomorphic modern thought made man the criterion of reality as it is testified by the Cartesian statement, "I think, therefore I am", which is, by the way, different from Al Hallaj's⁴¹, "I am the truth" to the extent that the latter referred to the spiritual experience of unity with God. Indeed in Islam, "Whatever was known possessed a profoundly religious character, not only because the object of every type of knowledge is created by God, but most of all because the intelligence by which man knows is itself a Divine gift."⁴² Hence, there is no separation between knowledge and its holder, as is beautifully expressed in the Persian Poet Sana'i's analogy: "If a thief comes with a lamp, he will be able to steal more precious goods."⁴³ Speaking of Persian poets, we recall a story told by Rumi (a 13th century Sufi poet): once upon a time, there were three blind men trying to identify an elephant by touching it. As each one of them felt only one part of the elephant, the one who felt the trunk said that it was a rope, the one that felt the leg thought it to be a tree, and the one that felt the ear said that it was a fan. According to Bourdieu, modernity elevates the teacher to the position of a "priest convincing the public of their culpability for failures" and the student to a recipient of academic qualifications. When this spirit is imported into Islamic schools, it alters our understanding of literacy that becomes measured solely by academic achievements. The 1979 report to

the Club of Rome points to the inadequacy of this standard:

There are, for example, many people still living within oral traditions, 'illiterates' who have memorized religious or ethical epics or texts and who can philosophize and act at high levels of morality. Any implication that this type of person can a priori be considered less able, less prepared, or less worthy than the one who can read and yet display intolerance or racism is an anachronism whose time for change has come.⁴⁴

In connection with Islam's view of the instruments of Knowledge, we will give two examples that reflect the difference in the epistemological foundations of both Islam and Modern Education. These two examples are grading and ringing bells. The former is a seventeenth century Cambridge invention that turns knowledge into a performance, fostering material rewards for mental efforts. The latter is a modern practice prohibited by the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in a *hadith* stating that "there is a devil in each ringing of a bell." The psychological effects of using a bell to indicate the end of sessions implies that nothing is worth finishing, and this is in contradiction with the Islamic principle stipulating excellence in every task performed. The Muslim "bell" is actually different in its spirit, since it is a call to prayer.

After this brief outline of the ontology of ISESCO's field, we will see whether this organization represents Islam or simulates it.

From the analysis conducted so far, it can be concluded that ISESCO counteracts some forms of cultural violence. When it comes to media issues, it tries to present a good image of Islam, as is the case in the speech presented in the Rio summit and in the Peking conference. Its inaction in the "political" field results from its governmentalism. Rather than acting freely to enhance Islamic culture, ISESCO is controlled by member states. ISESCO gives scholarships to those who study in the West, while in the meantime it finances traditional schools. This action is in fact a form of inaction, since it is not an efficient undertaking against the globalization process with its central dichotomy, homogenization/ heterogenization that widens the gap between a modern education and a traditional one in Islamic countries. Ismail al Farouqi draws the portrait of the western-educated Muslim university teacher in his 1988 IIIT participation:

He was trained in the West and graduated with a fair or less than fair average. Since he was not Islamically motivated beforehand – i.e., he

has not embarked on his expedition to seek knowledge for the sake of Allah (SWT), but for a materialist egotistical (at best nationalistic) goal – he did not obtain all the knowledge available to him in the West. Neither did he surpass his western teachers at their own game, nor did he, like his ancestors who learned and Islamized the sciences of ancient Greece, Persia and India, digest what he learned or seek to rehabilitate it within the Islamic vision of knowledge and truth.

The high illiteracy rates and the massive “brain drain” phenomena, among other issues, point to the serious preoccupations that ISESCO has to deal with and to its hectic agenda. The comparison of ISESCO with ALECSO or for that matter of ISESCO at the time of Abdelhadi Boutaleb (the first director general) and ISESCO under the direction of Al Tuwaijri (the current director general) make us optimistic about the future of the organization, especially if it leaves the arena of states and adopts the spirit of communitarianism. Privatization (giving projects to private Muslim companies) seems a very good alternative as long as we do not adopt the radical imported ideology that equates privatization with Americanization. The argument of gradual change should be put to rest when it comes to vital issues, since it is also alien to our culture. A brief comparison of two myths (OEDIPUS and ALADDIN) will tell us more about this issue: on his way back to his original home, OEDIPUS encounters the Sphinx, easily solves the enigma, goes on to unknowingly kill his father and to commit finally incest, after which the plague breaks out in the kingdom. Claude Levi-Strauss, whose interpretation of this myth is an original one, understood that the rapid resolution of problems generally leads to negative results. Likewise, Aladdin was a very poor man with a great deal of problems until the day he found the magic lamp that enabled him to become rapidly rich. However, the rapidity with which his problems were solved did not bring about any disaster. We understand from this analogy that it is not necessarily true that we have to be content with our level of literacy (liter-assy) just because it took Europe centuries to almost entirely get rid of illiteracy. Culture is linked to economy not only in terms of culture financing but also in terms of setting the finalities of economic plans in accordance with the Islamic culture rather than importing models made in the World Bank with a different view of economics. This discourse of refusing western models was invented in the West as an alternative to the orthodox view and was presented as being radical and challenging. However, Islamic history tells us that the Prophet (PBUH) used Persian

military techniques and adopted Roman strategies. Hence, unless they are un-Islamic, foreign practices are not inherently bad and their adoption is considered a transfer of technology. One of the problems that ISESCO suffers from is the absence of a vision, which is a problem common to all Muslim states. Since ISESCO'S charter presents this institution as a sum of states, and since the latter have secular constitutions (except Saudi Arabia), we can conclude that ISESCO is secular. However, there is hope that ISESCO, which is only fifteen years old, will reach its full maturity and will be a full-fledged and efficient organization. The marginal role it plays is typical of the age we live in, an age in which international organizations do not have effective power.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can say that ISESCO resembles UNESCO in that both institutions follow a Weberian mode of management. The fact that UNESCO shapes the knowledge order is another reason behind the "UNESCO-ization" of ISESCO. However, ISESCO, rather than fully imitating UNESCO, tries to preserve its cultural autonomy and to resist cultural invasions. Hence, it can be said that ISESCO follows UNESCO in its internal management without melting completely into the hegemonic culture of the West. The different projects that ISESCO has undertaken, such as building Islamic centers, reflect clearly its desire to stand up to acculturation. Nevertheless, ISESCO is inactive in certain domains such as politics in the realist sense. This inaction is explained by a desire to play the democratic game both with the West, whose influence in the international system is great, and with the governments it consists of, whose fear of Islamic radicalism is obvious. As a consequence, ISESCO does not really represent Islam, nor does it simulate it. It does not represent Islam because it is silent on certain occasions in which Islam requires speech; and it does not simulate it since it illuminates some theoretical aspects of IR. Thus, it shows the existence of a different concept of power in Islam by making a separation between power as Authority (religious) and power as *puissance*. It also stresses the unity of the temporal and the spiritual by posing the debate around modernity in terms of its compatibility with Islam. Furthermore, the religious nature of ISESCO points to the proliferation of international actors, and highlights the need for a pluralistic view of rationality. As a result, it poses a challenge for strategic thinking which considers only one view of rationality. Among the serious shortcomings of

ISESCO, we find state-centrism and inaction in political issues. The former is alluded to by Noor Ahmad Baba, who considers it improper to equate the Organization of the Islamic Conference with the concept of *Ummah*, since it operates within a state-centric framework. The latter is touched upon by Mohammad Javad Zarif, who writes that "the more 'cultural' the organization's activities, the more successful they have been."⁴⁵ Since this inaction in political affairs stems partly from the lack of a political Islamic thought, intellectual efforts to improve this discipline seem to be a necessary prerequisite for the advancement of ISESCO.

Notes

1. Badie, Bertrand. *Les Deux Etats. Pouvoir et Societe en Occident et en Terre d'Islam*. Paris:Fayard, 1987, p.13.
2. idem, p. 219.
3. Al Idrissi. *Al ISESCO Rihanoun hawlalmoustaqbal*. 1997, p. 87.
4. Huntington, S. 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1993, p. 23.
5. Early secretariats were composed of nationals of the Headquarters State.
6. Imber, M. *The SA, ILO, UNESCO and IAEA*. NY: MacMillan. 1989, p. 35.
7. Hazzard, S. *Defeat of An Ideal*. NY: MacMillan. 1973, p.116.
8. Wells, C. *The UN, UNESCO and The Politics Of Knowledge*. London: MacMillan Press. 1987, p. 20.
9. idem., p. 19.
10. Mac Lean & El Kahal. "The "Privatization" of UNESCO: A New Form of Politicization within The Global Economy?" Brighton: Sussex University, 1995. p. 8.
11. These trends are chosen because of their popularity. *An Ad Populum Fallacy?*
12. Akbar, A. & Hasting, D. *Islam, Globalization and Post-modernity*. NY: Routledge. 1994, p. 1.
13. 80% of the world news is from the West and only 30% is devoted to the third world.
14. Masmoudi, A. *UNESCO Documents*. 1978, p. 11.
15. I consider here Masmoudi's statement as representative of UNESCO.
16. Masmoudi, 1978, p.11.
17. idem., p.13.
18. Abel, E. *UNESCO Documents*. 1978, p. 22.
19. idem., p. 12.
20. Memorandum E-B 32, April 17, 1941.
21. Masmoudi, 1987, p. 12.
22. Waters, M. *Globalization*. NY: Routledge. 1995, p. 130.

23. Cox, R & Jacobson, H. *The Anatomy of Influence*. Connecticut: Yale University Press. 1974, p. 149.
24. Finnemore, M. "International Organizations as Teachers of Norms". IO. Autumn 1993, p. 568.
25. The action taken by ISESCO concerning the Gulf War was the publication in 1992 of a book by Dr. Khalid Hamid Sheikh, the science director in ISESCO, named : *Oil Wells Fires in Kuwait 1991. Their impact on environment and the people, especially children in Kuwait and the Gulf region*. This book is at best scientific (neutral) and at worst hinting at the responsibility of Saddam and the victimization of Kuwait, a generous ISESCO donor!
26. Rowe, W. & Schelling, V. *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*. NY: Verso. 1991, p. 228.
27. Al Ahsan, A. *OIC: The Organization of The Islamic Conference*. Virginia: IIIT. 1988, p. 103.
28. idem., p.121.
29. Haas, Ernst. *When Knowledge is power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations*. University of California Press: Berkley. 1990, p. 58.
30. Al Idrissi. 1997, p. 126.
31. idem., p. 127.
32. Haas, 1990, p. 66.
33. Al-idem., p. 66.
34. Centre Islamique pour le developpement du commerce. *Le commerce inter-maghrebin, etat actuel et potentiel d'expansion*, p. II.
35. Dallmayr, F. *Understanding and Social Inquiry*. London: University Of Notre Dame Press. 1977. P.120.
36. Doty, R. L. *Imperial Encounters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1996, p. 5.
- Carrier, J. *Occidentalism: Images of The West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1995, p. 9.
37. Tomlinson, J. *Cultural Imperialism*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 1991, p. 2.
38. idem., p. 79.
39. Doty, 1996, p. 7.
40. A muslim mystic judged and killed for heresy by orthodox scholars.
41. Nasr, S H. *Traditional Islam in The Modern World*. NY: Kegan Paul International. 1987, p. 123.
42. idem., p. 124.

43. Elmandjra, M; Botkin, J; Malitza, M. *No Limits To Learning*. NY: Pergamon Press. 1979, p. 77.
44. Zarif, J. M. "The Need for Reforms in the Organization of The Islamic Conference". *The Iranian Journal Of International Affairs*, Vol IX, no. 3, Fall 1997, p. 377.