

Final Degree Project

A Foucauldian Archaeological Analysis of the Liberal International Order as a Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to see how the concept of the Liberal International Order (LIO) has been instrumentalized by liberal and realist scholars as a “regime of truth” to give a particular and ideological account of history. The paper explores the theory of Michel Foucault, specifically his concepts of discourse, “regime of truth”, and his understanding of history; together with the methodological technique offered in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) called archaeological discourse analysis.

Using this technique, the research examines the LIO as a discourse and studies its discursive nature to expose its core components and show its inconsistencies. First, it investigates the Foucauldian discursive elements needed to form a discourse, that is, objects, enunciative models, concepts, and strategies, and identifies them in the LIO. Secondly, it exposes the incongruity of the LIO’s truth by debunking its three seminal pillars: security, economic liberalism, and law. This is done through historical examples of international relations, mainly: the 2003 US invasion of Iraq; the effects of the Washington Consensus policies in Latin America; and the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

The study finds that the LIO constitutes a “regime of truth” within the liberal and realist IR paradigms due to its discursive legitimization of the Order and its statements which have been made to function as true.

Key words: Liberal International Order, Michel Foucault, “regime of truth”, archaeological discourse analysis, historical narratives

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« Pangloss endeavored to comfort them under this affliction by affirming that things could not be otherwise that they were.

“For,” said he, “all this is for the very best end, for if there is a volcano at Lisbon it could be in no other spot; and it is impossible, but things should be as they are, for everything is for the best.” »

Candide, Voltaire (1759)

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the literature around the so-called “crisis of the liberal international order (hereafter, LIO or the Order)” or “crisis of multilateralism” (Kundnani, 2017; Ikenberry 2018; 2020; Mearsheimer, 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2020; Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021; LSE 2021; IIEA 2022) began to proliferate due to factors such as the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States (US), the result of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom (UK), and the growth of illiberal democracies¹ around the world (Hungary, Poland, the Philippines, among others). When a concept is said to be “in crisis” there is an assumption about its previous well-functioning. Likewise, the concrete exposure of such a crisis by Western liberal and realist scholars framed the events in a normative way: the crisis of the LIO was a risk and a threat for liberal Western powers.

This research project aims to analyze the LIO discursively and debunk the assumptions underlying the development of this concept² by neoliberal and neorealist theoretical paradigms. Both debates around the nature and definition of the LIO and its present crisis reflect aspects of the prevailing hegemonic framework of International Relations (IR) theory, as well as core assumptions within the international community’s historical discourse on the events since 1945. The choice to address this topic is thus driven by its transdisciplinary capacity to tackle multiple subject matters of IR. It will offer a different perspective from which to reconsider both the LIO and the way in which narratives are constructed within IR.

The objective of this research project is to theorize the LIO as a concept that serves to create a particular historical discourse that redefines past events to the benefit of certain actors within the Order. Therefore, the research question (RQ) at the heart of this inquiry asks: ***Can the concept of the Liberal International Order (LIO) be understood as a "regime of truth" - in Foucault's terms - within the Realist and Liberal paradigms of IR?***

This RQ focuses on the possibility of relating Michel Foucault’s notion of a “regime of truth” to the LIO as a concept belonging to the liberal and realist IR discipline. In general terms, a “regime of truth” is defined as a system of discourses created by

¹ This is exemplified by historian Timothy Snyder in his bestselling book *The Road to Unfreedom* (2018)

² While the concept of the LIO was developed in the late 90s and throughout the 21st century, its own chronology begins after the Second World War.

structures of power which produce, regulate, and distribute certain knowledge as truthful and natural, and which have direct material consequences in sociopolitical, economic, and cultural terms. The general objective of this dissertation is to expose the LIO as a “regime of truth” which established a particular account of history; hence serving as a theoretical, historical, and institutional apparatus³. Moreover, it will be shown how the LIO as a discourse has benefited the economic and socio-political interests of the West, particularly the US.

Regarding the decision behind the theoretical framework, it is important to stress that the objective of this research project is not to critique the predominant socioeconomic model of the LIO – capitalism, neoliberalism, neoimperialism– nor its material conditions. There is an existing and developed critique of the material conditions of the LIO by Marxist, constructivist, and postmodern theorists, but they will not be discussed. While Marxist theory and analysis are based on materialism and socioeconomic dimensions –sometimes even economic determinism –, as well as causal explanations of discourse (Howarth, 2002, p. 119); Foucauldian theory is grounded in the analysis of power relationships in society as expressed through language. For Foucault, the discursive dimension of society is pivotal.

Therefore, Foucault’s perspective has been chosen over other seminal and legitimate theories due to the importance he gives to the linguistic and discursive condition. Foucault’s discourse analysis appears to be the most relevant since it is argued that it has probably been through language and discourse that the LIO has achieved its hegemonic status in IR to explain international relations. Furthermore, the thesis offers a historiographical critical framework, which goes beyond the more common materialist critiques of the LIO.

On another note, the fact that the abovementioned paradigms are still framed within the umbrella of “alternative” or “critical” theories of International Relations paradoxically affirms the existence of a dominant epistemology and ontology in the discipline. Scholars abiding by critical theory or reflectivism within IR and Political Science academia tend to be a minority, thus holding significantly less power – in a material sense – within the creation, development, and circulation of alternate

³ Regarding the concept of “apparatus”, Foucault wrote: “What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements” (Foucault, 1980, p. 194-228).

theories/narratives. Hence, it is through Foucauldian theory that this thesis will put forward an alternative narrative and approach.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of answering the RQ posed by this FDP – *Can the concept of the Liberal International Order (LIO) be understood as a "regime of truth" - in Foucault's terms - within the Realist and Liberal paradigms of IR?* – and to achieve the objectives of this research, the methodology used is a qualitative and interpretative one. I have relied specifically on the technique called archeological discourse analysis developed by Foucault in his book *the Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Specifically, I have analyzed the works of interpretative secondary sources such as publications and papers of several central scholars from both the IR field (G.J. Ikenberry, J. Ruggie, R. Keohane, D. Held, J. Mearsheimer) and Foucauldian theory (D.A. Hernández Castellanos, D. Lorenzini, J.F. Keely, M. Dean).

As conceptual research, this Final Degree Project is primarily theoretical; thus, the interpretative framework and the theories have been its main methodological tools to answer to the research question. In other words, a wide and deep understanding of the Foucauldian concepts has served as methods to create an analytical ground from which the LIO has been analyzed.

The main aim has been to analyze in what ways the LIO may be considered a “regime of truth” by having explored the discursive dimensions of the order through a Foucauldian archeological methodology. The LIO has been taken as a discourse and explored through this scope. Thus, the question has been addressed by shifting the liberal and realist theoretical framework – which has traditionally developed the LIO – into a post structural one; challenging, therefore, the ontological positivist assumptions at the bases of these IR theories. Moreover, this research aims to depict the inconsistencies of the LIO and to show how it has been beneficial for certain subjectivities and actors (the West/Global North/US) while helping to neglect and conceal ongoing atrocious events through the consolidation of the Order.

This research project is structured in the following way: first, it aims to elaborate a background to the LIO: what it is, when it started, how and when was it consolidated, and what its main features and pillars are. In this section, three main categories of the LIO will be recognized, that is: security (national sovereignty and non-interference); economic liberalism (trade openness and interdependence and neoliberal dictums); and law (human rights and rule of law) - all embedded in the principle of multilateralism. Secondly, a theoretical framework has been developed through Foucauldian theory and its

relationship to IR theory. More specifically, the essential Foucauldian concepts used by this project such as “regime of truth”, discourse, and archaeology will be introduced and linked to the LIO. After having disclosed its main theoretical scheme, the paper will provide a section devoted to the findings that emerge from the analysis of the LIO according to the methodology described above. This will also be conducted through a series of concrete examples for each of the pillars of the LIO, specifically the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the impact of the Washington Consensus in Latin America, and the 1994 Rwandan genocide. These will be exposed to prove the discrepancy between the mainstream LIO literature and its hegemonic historical claims on the one hand, and what happened in the real world on the other. Finally, I will provide a discussion on the interconnection between the findings and the theoretical framework. This will conclude the disclosure of the LIO as a “regime of truth”.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the late 1990s, the notion of a “liberal international order” has been pivotal for IR studies and the historical chronology of the 20th century events after the Second World War. In this section, the LIO will be presented and disclosed, from its origins to its features. Thereafter, Michel Foucault’s theory will be introduced to link it to the LIO through the concepts of “regime of truth” and “archeological” historiographical and discursive methodology.

The term “LIO” remains a contested concept in the IR literature and is often referred to as the “global liberal order”, “liberal world order”, “liberal hegemonic order”, “American-led liberal world order”, “American-led liberal hegemony”, “the American system, the West, the Atlantic world, Pax Democratica, Pax Americana, and the Philadelphia system” (Acharya, 2020: p. 1). Nonetheless, D. Deudney and G.J. Ikenberry – structural liberal IR theorists - coined the term in 1999 to refer to “a political, economic, and strategic order that was explicitly conceived as a solution to the problems that led to the depression and world war” after 1945 (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999: p. 180). It was an order developed and dominated by the United States (US) and its allies at the time of the Cold War. According to them, it comprises five main components: security co-binding; penetrated hegemony; semi-sovereignty and partial great powers; economic openness; and civic identity and community. Elements which interact and are mutually reinforceable (Ibid, p. 195), and which define a project correlated to liberal internationalism⁴ (Ikenberry, 2020).

The core components of the LIO

To break down the nature of the LIO, it is important to define the meaning of its core components: order, liberalism, and internationalism. First, an order implies “patterned or structured relationships among units” (Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021: p. 228), but also “an organized group of international institutions that help govern the interactions among member states” (Centre for Independent Studies, 2019). Within this comprehensive definition, an order can be considered to establish a system, that is, units and actors that relate to each other following certain processes established according to certain rules or values. In this sense, the orderly character of the LIO is normative

⁴ Liberal internationalism (or liberal institutionalism) refers to a sub theory and foreign policy doctrine within the liberal paradigm of IR theory that maintains that progress and harmonious cooperation are possible among the international community. Hence, it is concerned with matters such as the need for multilateralism among international organizations and nation states.

(Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999; Ikenberry, 2011; Ikenberry, 2018; Fioretos, 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2020) and can be interpreted as the establishment of an international community as disclosed by David C. Ellis (2009). In his own words, “a unified society of states adhering to generally the same norms, rules, identities, and views of moral conduct” (Ellis, 2009: p. 4).

Secondly, the international aspect of the order refers to two factors; on the one hand, it opposes the concept of a bounded order⁵ – which was precisely the nature of the pre-Cold War system – by including the world’s greatest superpowers and becoming truly international (Centre for Independent Studies, 2019; 4:30-7:23). Even though this does not determine its unipolar or multipolar constitution, it did entail the globalization principle of the contemporary world system (Fioretos, 2019). On the other hand, the LIO constitutes a historical continuation of the modern state system or Westphalian order after 1648 (Lake, Martin, and Risse, 2021; Kundnani, 2017), characterized by its primary focus on the recognition of the sovereignty of nation-states. Indeed, the LIO is a fusion of two order-building projects: firstly, the said modern Westphalian system; and in the second place, the liberal order led by the 19th century hegemony of Britain and the US backed by the Enlightenment tradition, which was characterized by liberal democracy, nationalism, and the industrial revolution (Kundnani, 2017; Ikenberry, 2018).

Therefore, the third – and perhaps most important – designating element of the LIO is its liberal doctrine. Although its exact meaning remains undefined, it is commonly understood to refer to political liberalism, economic liberalism, and the liberal paradigm within IR theoretical tradition (Kundnani, 2017). Moreover, its standardizing liberal nature also refers to “a belief in the universal equality of individuals and posits freedom as well as individual and collective self-determination as the highest human aspirations” (Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021: p. 229). In this sense, fundamental features are attributed to the LIO such as “solidarity, cohesion, and cooperation” (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999: p. 196). Likewise, elements such as human rights, the rule of law, individual freedom, and representative democracy are also included within the LIO’s scope (Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021).

Consequently, the literature around the LIO tends to classify its constitutional principles into three general categories: security (national sovereignty), economic

⁵ John Mearsheimer defines bounded orders as those which “consist of a set of institutions that have limited membership, do not include all of the great powers, and are usually regional in scope” and can be dominated by either a single great power or by two or more great powers, provided that at least one great power remains outside of the order. See Mearsheimer, 2019a, p. 11-12.

liberalism (trade openness and interdependence), and law (human rights and the rule of law) (Deudney and Ikenberry 1999; Kundnani 2017; Ikenberry, 2018; Lake, Martin and Risse 2021). Again, it is relevant to notice that to “sustain these substantive principles, governments have endorsed a procedural principle of multilateralism” (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2020, p. 1079), that is, “an institutional form that coordinates relations among a group of states ‘on the basis of generalized principles of conduct’” (Ruggie, 1992, p. 11). Therefore, multilateralism became the essential unifying principle of the LIO’s normative nature.

Development

Even though the chronology of the LIO begins in 1945, in opposition to liberal authors like Deudney and Ikenberry, realists such as John Mearsheimer consider that its complete consolidation and enforcement happened only after the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the bipolar world order in the 1990s (Mearsheimer, 2018; 2019; Centre for Independent Studies, 2019). Still, both paradigms agree on its development throughout the second half of the 20th century as it “has structured relations among capitalist, democratic, and industrialized nations since the late 1940s” (Lake, Martin, and Risse, 2021, p. 225). After the Second World War, the US had to carry out a sociopolitical and economic strategy to consolidate itself as the major superpower amid the Cold War against the USSR. Thus, it depended on the establishment (and domination) of international institutions as the major pillars of the post-war order, which began with the setting up of the economic Bretton Woods Institutions: The World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Furthermore, other institutions included: the United Nations (UN); the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and subsequent World Trade Organization (WTO); and the Washington Consensus, that is, the creation of a free trade international economy. This was all coordinated with the spread of liberal democracy throughout the globe (Mearsheimer, 2019).

The LIO was structured by the US with “broadly multilateral lines, at the global level” (Ruggie, 1992, p. 590). In other words, it was an order precisely because it was based on coordinated general principles of conduct throughout international institutions, trade relations and shared values (The Stockdalecenter, 2021; Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021; Centre for Independent Studies, 2019). Particularly, the liberal convictions were “openness, cooperation among institutions, democracy, and rising interdependence”

(Ibid, 2021), which were especially embodied and expanded by the so-called UN system⁶, focused on the “promotion of international peace and security and importantly, [to] foster a common ground for development” (Amadi, 2020, p. 2). Hence, the LIO “is distinct from other international orders in retaining a core set of principles and practices” (Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021, p. 227). As Baudrillard puts it, the practice of politics and economics had become the same discourse (as cited in Carty, 2007: p. 199), but this same one was now enclosed by a moral high ground discourse through inseparable norms structured by the mentioned generalized principles of conduct. As Robert Cox explained, “international organizations function as the process through which the institutions of hegemony and its ideology are developed” (as cited in Puchala, 2005: p. 578).

J. Ruggie argues that it was precisely the “*American* hegemony” rather than “*American hegemony*” what “accounts for the explosion of multilateral arrangements” (Ruggie, 1992: p. 568). Thus, after 1989, the international order led by the US was shaped by a political and economic stability that offered substantial benefits to the other actors. This happened through their membership in the key international organizations, as well as by “strategic restraint and observing the rules and norms of existing institutions” (Fioretos, 2019: p. 21) rather than from confronting the order. This has been considered a process of “the rationalization of liberalism as a dominant set of political ideology in the Western industrial nations” (Amadi, 2020: p. 2) which contributed to the new US global hegemony. Furthermore, according to L. Amadi, the rise of globalization paved the way for an advanced justification of the LIO (2020: p. 2), demonstrated in fundamental writings such as *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Hartz, 1991), “Democracy a universal value” (Sen, 1999), *America's Global Advantage: US Hegemony and International Cooperation* (Norrlof, 2010), “Hegemony and After” (Keohane, 2012), and *The World America Made* (Kagan, 2012).

On another note, the establishment and support of the LIO is often related to the “end of history” thesis by Francis Fukuyama (1992), which claimed the dissolution of tensions between the opposing poles (capitalism and communism) that determined international relations. Hence, without conflict or differentiation the world became a single whole, and Fukuyama claimed liberal democracy to be the final step in the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural progress of humankind. However, scholars like

⁶ The UN system refers to the UN six principal organs (the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and the UN Secretariat), together with its Specialized Agencies, related organizations, and different funds and programs.

Ikenberry rather affirm that "the era of U.S. leadership did not usher in the end of history, but it did set the stage for world-historical advances" (Ikenberry, 2018: p. 2). Namely, the LIO did not constitute an endpoint in the history of humanity, but a starting point of a complex system of international relations as never before seen in history.

Nowadays, liberal and realist theorists such as G.J. Ikenberry, J.G. Ruggie, J. Mearsheimer, R. Keohane and David Held have been some of the main scholars dedicated to expanding, debating, and contesting the notion of the LIO and its importance. Furthermore, these are authors frequently assigned as mandatory readings in courses such as International Politics, International Relations Theory, International Political Structure, Global Governance, Foreign Policy, and other IR courses. However, over the last decades – and especially in 2016 at the time of Trump’s election, illiberal democracies, populism, and Brexit – there emerged a mainstream discourse about the crisis of the LIO and multilateralism, reaffirming as well as reassessing the fragile nature of both the Order and the unipolar US hegemony (Kundnani, 2017; Ikenberry 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2020; Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021).

Despite the material hegemony of the LIO, critical theories of constructivism, Marxism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism, among others, have critiqued its concept. Scholars such as Pankaj Mishra (2014; 2017), Amitav Acharya (2014; 2020), and Sanjeev Kumar H.M. (2020) have depicted the neglect of non-Western states, societies, and actors in the LIO, which are arguably framed within an imperialist and European epistemology “heavily grounded in the chronology of the post-Westphalia international order” (Kumar H. M., 2020, p. 1). Similarly, Chomsky, (2002), Jacques (2006) and Mitrani (2017) argue that Western powers and neoliberal institutions have monopolized not only historical narratives but the global governance discourse in their favor. Nevertheless, although existent and proliferous, alternative theoretical frameworks of the LIO will not be further developed in this thesis since the object of study here is the development of the LIO’s historical narrative as a liberal concept by the neoliberal and neorealist paradigm of IR, and the subsequent formation of a particular discourse.

Michel Foucault’s the *Archaeology of Knowledge* and the “regime of truth”

To address the Foucauldian analysis of the LIO it is crucial to define and explicate the terms that are essential to this research project: discourse, “regime of truth”, and archaeology. The work of post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault was focused on exposing the endogenous rules of discourses in a particular historical period. Foucault

understood history as a system of rules shaped by epistemes⁷ which produce not only certain knowledge but a reality, subjectivities, institutions... Moreover, discourse is defined not only as an ideological superstructure or the linguistic manifestation of institutional and economic practices, but as “a regulated and specific practice within the context of other practices, which straddles the line between the ideological and the transcendental” (Castro, 2020, 57:55-58:05). As such, Foucault’s studies are directed towards the analysis of how different discourses are articulated through a series of rules throughout history itself.

Additionally, Foucault devoted a great part of his seminal writings, courses, and interviews to the relations between power and knowledge. He assumed truth and knowledge to be instruments of power. For Foucault, both are synonymous as they share an equal willing of domination through their own justification and legitimization. For this reason, he coined the concept of a “regime of truth”. Although plurally defined in various works, it is in an interview by Alexandra Fontana and Pasquale Pasquine in 1977 that Foucault gives one of the referential definitions of the concept. A "regime of truth" alludes to “the types of discourse society harbors and causes to function as true” (Foucault, 1977a: p. 13). Specifically, it means that truth is a “system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements” and linked “by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces, and which redirect it” (Foucault 1977a, p. 14). Later, he elaborates:

In societies like ours the 'political economy' of truth is characterized by five historically important traits: 'truth' is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to a constant economic and political incitation (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of an immense diffusion and consumption (it circulates in apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively wide within the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media...); lastly, it is the stake of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles). (Foucault, 1977a, p. 13)

Following this, Daniele Lorenzini adds that truth is “produced, sustained, valorized and regulated by a series of mechanisms, techniques and procedures that are ‘political’”, that

⁷ An episteme refers to the set of epistemological assumptions about truth, reality, the world, the subject, the object, and knowledge of a given historical period which underlies its cultural framework and determines what can and cannot be thinkable. For Foucault, an episteme is the combination of transcendental determinations, the unconscious, and the economic infrastructure. As it determines core assumptions on knowledge, it regulates social considerations on what is acceptable or natural. Hence, it is not only a source of knowledge, but of power.

is, embedded in “the complex and constitutive field of power relations within which we ordinarily live” (Lorenzini, 2015: p. 2). Moreover, a “regime of truth” can be described as a specific ideological configuration with a totalizing ambition. Hence, when relating it to the LIO, it could be considered not only a potentiality or a system partially endorsed, but a project with an absolute totalizing nature.

In Foucault, truth becomes political through its link to the inherently and explicitly political notion of the regime, exposing once again the deep ties between power and knowledge (Lorenzini, 2015). According to Fluck (2017), political domination is based on the capability of power relations or authorities to establish specific “regimes of truth”, which in turn give “specific definition and order to a public space or realm of action”, politicizing them (Daddow, 2013) and endorsing “certain languages, symbols, modes of reasoning and conclusions” (Keely, 1990).

In addition to the totalizing ambition of a “regime of truth”, Foucault also considers the totalizing nature of historical discourses. Throughout his work, he challenged what he termed “the project of total history”, that is, a project that “seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle of a society, the significance common to all the phenomena of a period, the law that accounts for their cohesion” (Foucault, 2002: p.10) and presumes a “network of casualty” among units (such as economic structures or social institutions and customs) which “contain within themselves their own principle of cohesion” (Ibid: p.11) and are therefore tautological. Opposed to this generalization and compression of the events of a period, Foucault pursued to develop the project of a “general history”. General history refers to the idea of analyzing and capturing the differences, discontinuities, ruptures, shifts, specificities, and irregularities of history, confronting its granted coherence that had framed the former as “exceptions” within history’s progress.

Moreover, following W. Benjamin’s⁸ (2019) refusal of the modern notion of teleological progress embedded in historiographical practices, Foucault devoted part of his work to challenge ideas of positivist continuity and unity in history. He exposed discursive formations to be defined by discontinuity, contingency, and cultural and historical specificity (Fournier, 2015). Specifically, in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (henceforth, *AK*), Foucault (2002) defends how power structures evaded the

⁸ Specially consider his Thesis VIII in *On the Concept of History*, also known as *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1942).

unpredictability of discourses, controlling them, selecting them, and redistributing them. Foucault argues that the coherence of an account/discourse/narrative arises from having eliminated its contradictions and having presented a solution as the result of an investigation.

Against this practice, Foucault suggests the return of the contradiction described by itself. This is also related to his notion of a “general history” as it aims to find deviance and dissent precisely in contradictions. Contrary to the linear succession of events – often interpreted as historical human “progress” – the Foucauldian archaeological method seeks faults, sudden redistributions, discontinuities, and cuts that contradict the work of historians and their usual previous sketches, extracts, anticipations, and agglutinative continuity, where, once again, such discontinuities have been framed as exceptions. Therefore, the LIO would serve nowadays as a surrogate of the Foucauldian “universal” and “centralized” total history since it is through this history that “all the differences of a society might be reduced to a single form, to the organization of a world-view, to the establishment of a system of values, to a coherent type of civilization” (Foucault 2002, p. 14).

Later on, Foucault focused his theory on the seminal concept of genealogy or genealogical analysis/research. According to him, genealogy does not pretend to create a new epistemology or truth. It aims to find in historiographical narratives – understood by him as sources of knowledge– breaches and disruptions. These discontinuities will expose that the origin of knowledge which we understand as rational, logical, and truthful is based on domination and power balance. In addition, it is ultimately entrenched in said power. Archaeology, on the other hand, questions the will to truth⁹ that operates within discourses. While archaeology was mainly concerned with “a spatial diachronic analysis of the episteme” (Castro, 2020: 59:29-59:52), genealogy will focus on the temporal and diachronic study of how discourses evolve from one another. The aim is to show how history is nothing but the sum of contingencies. Consequently, this FDP will not conduct a genealogical analysis of the LIO, but only a Foucauldian archaeological discourse analysis of it.

To conclude, this paper is interested in taking Foucault’s contributions and using

⁹ In *The Order of Discourse* (1970), Foucault defines the “will to truth” as the main system of exclusion which creates and governs discourse, and which is driven by power and desire. In his own words: “‘True’ discourse, freed from desire and power by the necessity of its form, cannot recognize the will to truth which pervades it; and the will to truth, having imposed itself on us for a very long time, is such that the truth it wants cannot fail to mask it” (Foucault, 1970, p. 56).

it in the micro-context of IR. It is interested in offering a new approach on the way liberal and realist theories produced a particular meaning and historical truth through the concept of the LIO. In turn, this made the Order act exactly as the agent governing an “homogenous system of relations” (Foucault, 2002, p. 10) and their legitimacy, thus enhancing its totalizing nature.

ANALYSIS

To address the RQ of this FDP, that is, *can the concept of the Liberal International Order (LIO) be understood as a "regime of truth" - in Foucault's terms - within the Realist and Liberal paradigms of IR?* this analytical section will be concerned with further developing Foucault's archaeological discourse analysis method and presenting findings and examples to expose the LIO as a "regime of truth". Therefore, it will first cover the basic principles of the Foucauldian technique – the concept of discourse and the rules within archaeological discourse analysis – as to implement them later in analyzing the LIO. Secondly, once the LIO is illustrated as a discourse, I will link its discursive nature to the concept of a "regime of truth", providing a set of examples to prove this point.

The Archaeology of Knowledge: discourse and the archaeological discourse analysis method

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Michel Foucault dedicated the core part of his theoretical and analytical contribution to the study of the relations between power and knowledge; he understood that knowledge and power relations were discursive because narratives do not emerge in isolation, or in a social vacuum, but are created by language as a mediator, which allows us to make sense of the world (Lemus-Delgado, 2020). In the early stage of his work (so-called archaeological), Foucault focused specifically on the conditions of knowledge throughout history through an analysis of discourse to grasp the inner commonalities between discourse and power.

It is in the *AK* that Foucault (2002) deploys a method to find the historical conditions of the possibility of discourse, its respective discursive formations, and its boundaries in various given periods. These show how each knowledge is rapidly modified and transforms the episteme (i.e., the knowledge systems which dominated each epistemological era) of a given period, reordering it, or replacing it with another episteme and constructing its corresponding "regime of truth". Indeed, each society holds its "regime of truth", and thus its mechanisms and instances, techniques and procedures through which truth is addressed, constructed, valued, and delimited, as well as the subjects who own it. Yet, the intention of the *AK* was not to establish a methodological instrument that could be systematically repeated, but rather to "rationalize and systematize his prior works" (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003: p. 8).

Discourse

To comprehend Foucauldian archaeological analysis, it is crucial to clarify the concept of “discourse” in Foucault’s work. Notably, discourse is a basic practice that explores specific objects and topics. Discourses are tied to specific disciplines, but as disciplines are tied to other ones (as well as to the social structure) this means discourse is both multidisciplinary and transversal. To sum up, the term “discourse” answers or reacts to the various layers of a discipline’s statements, their connections and correspondences, and their reference to specific objects, styles, concepts, and topics.

In the *AK*, Foucault remarks that discourse is “material in effect” (Adams, 2017b) as it produces “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 2002, p. 54). Hence, according to him, “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 194). Thus, following what has been explained in the theoretical framework about truth and knowledge as instruments of power, discourse is related to power in the way the latter constitutes and produces discourse within a social order, prescribing a priori particular and positivist rules and categories which define the legitimate criteria for knowledge and truth (Adams, 2017a). As a result, discourse presents itself as “a-historical, universal, scientific, objective, and stable” (Adams, 2017b) by concealing its productive capability and making statements in society that favor the political rationality behind the making of certain meanings or knowledge.

At the beginning of the *AK*, Foucault establishes a primary distinction between the elements that comprise discourses. First, there is the “statement”, that is, the smallest unit of discourse that makes objects, subject positions, concepts, and strategies visible through enunciation¹⁰; second, he considers “discourse”, the body of formulated statements; and, finally, “discursive formation”, the regularity in the dispersion of statements, or, in other words, the rules that produce certain knowledge. These will be explained on the following section.

However, discourse is not a coherent set of statements, but a set of practices that keep statements in circulation through processes of exclusion and inclusion as well as rationality (Khan and MacEachen, 2021); in effect, it is a way of organizing knowledge. Differently, archaeology is the method that describes the systems of thought which

¹⁰When dealing with statements, an analyst should always refer to the HOW, that is, how these statements came into place in each context, and never what are the statements or why they appeared. (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003).

organize the epistemological hegemonies of a period. The *AK* aims to describe the systems of discursivity (that is, of discourses) in the dispersion of their statements; the enunciative events that make it possible to identify the unity of discourse (what we may also name “disciplines”, such as psychiatry, or political economy). It tries to individuate the discursive formations which make up the epistemological field of a period’s knowledge and define its unity. Namely, discourse analysis is concerned with the specificity of a statement, what Foucault called its “conditions of existence”: its limits, relations with other statements, and its exclusions (Ibid: pp. 30-31). Thus, it is the regularity¹¹ between objects, enunciative modalities, concepts, and strategies what defines such discursive formation. In the words of scholar N. Åkerstrøm Andersen, “the archeological eye divides the world into dispersed statements and the regularity of the dispersion” (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003, p. 16).

For Foucault, hegemony and power are relational and productive, like for Gramsci (Keely, 1990; Daddow, 2013), and function within discourse through the four rules of formation – which will be discussed in the next section – not as a commodity or a resource but by regulating the effects of discourses through institutions and procedures that introduce such power relations (Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Keely, 1990; Hernández Castellanos, 2010; Daddow, 2013; Khan and MacEachen, 2021). Furthermore, in the *AK*, knowledge is presented as a necessary object of appropriation “for the maintenance and transformation of political power and position”, ergo making statements political objects and weapons of power (Kennedy, 1979, p. 286). It must then be concluded that there is a specific (political) social order that regulates the problematics and paradoxes of discourse in the context of an event. This is called by Foucault “the order of discourse” (Foucault, 1981).

Archaeological discourse analysis: Rules of discursive formation of statements

To understand such conditions and explore the limits of discourse, Foucault deployed the four “rules¹² of discursive formation” of statements (Foucault, 2002; Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003; McMahon and Harwood, 2007; Nicholls, 2009; Hernández Castellanos, 2010); he also established the “rule of discursive correlation” – which refers to the interrelation and interaction between discourses – and the “rule of discursive

¹¹That is the “order, correlations, positions and functioning, transformations” (Ibid, p. 41) and the construction created through discourse analysis.

¹²According to N. Åkerstrøm Andersen, in this context rules mean “rules of acceptability, that is, rules about when a statement is accepted as a reasonable statement” (2003, p. 14)

transformation” – focused on how discourses shift and change. Nonetheless, for this FDP these will not be addressed as they are not relevant for this analysis.

Thus, the four relevant rules of discursive formation of statements are described below. These will be applied to the LIO as a discourse in an incoming section:

- 1. The formation of objects¹³:** the aim is to indicate the enunciative locations where the objects of knowledge can emerge (“surfaces of emergence”) within statements, the “authorities of delimitation” which assign and analyze them, and the systems by which they are separated, opposed, classified, or interdependent (“the grids of specification”). To put it another way, “when and where” an object emerges in statements, which authorities legitimate such knowledge, and what is its specificity (McMahon and Harwood, 2007).
- 2. The formation of enunciative models** (or subject positions): its focus is to place the origin of the discourses within the subjects, institutions, authorities, and discursive practices. That is, to also describe the institutional domains of influence of discourse. In this sense, this rule sets the limits of the enunciative position that subjects within a discourse can hold. Hence, the subject is a “location” made possible by discursivity as “the statement articulates the space and possibility of subjects” (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003, p. 11). In other words, whether subjects are considered legitimate and what they can or cannot say.
- 3. The formation of concepts** (or conceptual network): its objective is to describe the organization of a statement's field in which concepts appear, circulate, and multiply. This is concerned with the relationship between concepts in a field, discipline, or discursive formation, as well as its ontological and epistemological evolution and actualization over time and in between different fields of study.
- 4. The formation of strategies:** as Åkerstrøm Andersen explains, the statement needs to be “integrated into operations or strategies in which the identity of the statement is maintained or effaced” (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003, p. 12; see also Foucault, 2002, p. 118). This involves the question “what is it that this discourse does” (McMahon and Harwood, 2007), i.e., its particular possibilities, effects, allowances... together with the completion of actualization of the rules of

¹³ Objects are literally the objects (units) created, classified, and identified by the statement itself (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2003, p. 11).

acceptability.

Discursive formations are complex, and the appearance of statements depends on the complicated network of successive rules of object formation, enunciative modalities, the formation of concepts, and the formation of strategies through which knowledge is introduced into practices (Hernández Castellanos, 2010, p. 53-54). However, Foucault himself stressed in the *AK* that not all of them need to be addressed and analyzed equally, as the importance of each of them depends on the particularities of each archaeological methodology and its subject of study (Foucault, 2002, p. 72).

FINDINGS

Part I: Archaeological analysis of the LIO

To analyze the LIO archaeologically, the terms used by Foucault need to be applied to the framework of the Order. First, the **objects** of discourse of the LIO refer to its tripartite dimension aforementioned: security, economic liberalism, and law. Regarding security: the self-preservation of national sovereignty and principles of non-interference along with multilateral cooperation; in the case of economic liberalism: international openness and trade, private property, and global market capitalism as foundations of development; regarding law: insistence on liberal principles, representative democracy, and the international rule of law.

Furthermore, the regularity which puts together the formation of such objects, namely, that attributed coherence to them, goes back to the “rationalization of liberalism” (Amadi, 2020) discussed in the theoretical framework. This is demonstrated by Ikenberry at the beginning of *A World Safe for Democracy*¹⁴ (2020), where he expresses that “for two hundred years, the grand project of liberal internationalism has been to build a world order that is open, loosely rules-based, and oriented toward progressive ideas.” (Ikenberry, 2020: p. 1). Hence, the “surfaces for emergence” of the objects of the LIO resulted not only from this historical standpoint but the normative ground derived from it – Ruggie’s coordinated general principles of conduct. In this sense, the objects were ordered through necessary rules of cooperation and multilateralism, global capitalism, and liberal values of moral conduct proposed by international organizations. This establishes both an expansive and integrative relationship between the discursive objects, as well as an exclusive one to those objects and concepts incoherent with these ontological rules of the LIO. For example, Dean explains that liberalism is not only an economically self-limited art of government but also a “form of action-oriented to the appropriation of the powers of the state and international organizations to implement a detailed conduct of life” (Dean, 2017, p. 110). In other words, said “rationalization” is one of the key instruments within the development of the LIO as a discourse, with its set of rules of conduct functioning as a pillar of its “regime of truth”.

Moreover, such normative ground was determined by the “authorities of

¹⁴ *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (2020) is G.J. Ikenberry’s last book, which does not only give an account for liberal internationalism throughout history but is meant to act as an avid defense of the liberal internationalist project, its feasibility, and its need amidst the current crises of the LIO, all against the realists and detractors of so-called American imperialism and capitalism.

delimitation” of the objects. On the one hand, in the LIO’s case they refer to international organizations and institutions (UN system and Bretton Woods system) and international law settled in the Statue of the International Court of Justice of the UN Charter, from which the Foucauldian “grids of specification” of objects, that is, the rules, were established. These are expressed not only legally, but through conditioning demands. An example of it are the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) provided by the IMF and the WB, a set of (neoliberal) economic reforms¹⁵ a country must comply with to secure a loan amidst an economic crisis, and which have been only distributed to Global South countries. In this regard, Dean observes that these international agencies

“seek to regulate the economic governance of nations, the attempted management of populations across borders and in international spaces, the growth of international law and human rights principles, and the view of military intervention as a form of international policing” (Dean, 2017: p. 107).

On the other hand, the American hegemony of the order at the end of the 20th century made the domestic interests of the US another “authority of delimitation”. This was done by taking advantage of its position and using the UN “for collective legitimization” (examples of this are the Gulf War and Qaddafi’s regime removal in 2012) and “to create rules and institutions compatible with its interests” through its economic contribution, its ability to set the agenda, and its maintenance of decisive veto power on the UNSC (Mingst, Karns & Lyon, 2022: p. 65; see also Dawda, 2016). Moreover, the sole existence of the Security Council framed an explicit hierarchy of the international community, granting material and overriding power to certain (mainly Western) states.

Secondly, the **enunciative modalities** could be understood as the specific social subjects which are brought into being by the articulation of the LIO, also considering their opposition to the ones who are not permitted subjects. Therefore, these subjectivities are given the authority and ability to enunciate or create knowledge since they are either a direct part of the LIO or they adhere to its truth and interest. This was at stake in the advent of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debate in UNESCO over biased Western media representation of the Global South (Puchala, 2005, p. 574). In this example, it is the LIO as a discourse that constitutes their identities in the order. Subsequently, the Order is focused on the elaboration of a “liberal”, “democratic”, “developed” subjectivity (of a nation, but also civil society) in contrast to the otherness

¹⁵ These are policies focused on increasing privatization, liberalizing trade and foreign investment, and balancing government deficit to allegedly alleviate poverty. The ten policies were:

which emerges as its antithesis (illiberal democracies, authoritarian regimes, so-called underdeveloped countries, non-Western states) and in which notions of moral duty and responsibility are embedded. A perfect example is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)¹⁶, which also served as the legal justification for the UN authorized military intervention in Libya in 2011 and directly contradicts the LIO's principle of noninterference. Furthermore, international institutions and IOs serve as the main space for subjectivities to emerge in the LIO's discursivity, as they are the fundamental workshop of the LIO's set of principles through the instrument of international law, membership, and the threat of sanctions/exclusion (e.g., Libya's 1992 arms embargo by the UN)¹⁷. Thus, each legitimate subject must presumably relate to qualities of liberalism, democracy, and capitalism (or neoliberalism). Nonetheless, unequal, and hierarchical relations of power within the current UN system and IOs makes a given subject's – either state or nonstate actor's – ability to enunciate dependent on its material power within the international community.

Finally, concepts and strategies must be introduced. However, it must be noted that this is only an introduction to both elements as they will be further elaborated in the next section. To begin with, the **concepts** are established through two dimensions. First, the LIO's three components or domains of power – security, economic liberalism, and law – along with key aspects such as multilateralism, interdependence, cooperation, progress, and institutional rules; and secondly, through the concrete signifying structures which derive from the re-signification of the chosen historical events as examples, and which constitute that which has been discarded.

Lastly, the **strategies** of discourse would refer to the congregation of different political and ideological practices, institutional plans of action, theoretical and academic approaches to legitimize not only such an account of history, but naturalize and universalize (in this sense, continue with its totalizing aim) the values and ideals of the Order. Accordingly, in the LIO, the strategies are designed and carried out by institutional rules, codes of conduct, values, and moral high ground that regulate who can exercise power and how they can exercise it. A great historical example is the aftermath of the 2015 Greek referendum on the bailout designed and proposed by the European

¹⁶A global commitment to prevent crimes against humanity endorsed in the 2005 UN World Summit.

¹⁷Moreover, it has taken almost 30 years for the international community to collectively and consistently back a UN resolution against the longstanding US embargo to Cuba, since its first attempt in 1992, where 79 countries abstained (among them the countries of the former European Community).

Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the IMF amidst the country's government debt-crisis. After being rejected by a majority of over 61% to 39%, the bailout conditions were approved against popular will a week later. The new agreement with the EU authorities ended up having more severe austerity requirements than the ones previously voted. Ultimately, Greece's governmental decision was subjugated to its commitment as a MS of the EU's Eurozone as its monetary policy is managed and regulated by the ECB and the Eurosystem.

In other respects, another pertinent point from which to consider the strategies of the LIO – and, ultimately, make it a “regime of truth” – is by connecting these terms to realist scholar Stephen D. Krasner's concept of “international regimes”. As specified by him, international regimes are

“implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations (...). Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice” (quoted in Keely, 1990: p. 83).

According to the definition, the LIO would be the contemporary international regime of the international community as previously defined by Ellis (2009). Yet, from a (neo)liberal perspective, this idea of community through such convergence takes for granted regimes as benevolent, voluntary, cooperative, and legitimate. Once again, the framework of legitimacy for the LIO is based not only on institutional or political procedures, but on morality. As Keely (1990) explains, a “regime of truth goes beyond agenda setting” and endorses a mode of reasoning. In the LIO's case, this does not only justify certain action within international relations but structures its own narrative through the lens of a desirable, order, considered a world-historical advance (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999; Ikenberry 2018; 2020). This is expressed by Ikenberry when he states that “if the long arc of history bends towards justice, it does so thanks to the activism and moral commitment of liberals and their allies” (Ikenberry, 2020: p. 25).

Part II: The LIO as a discursive “regime of truth” through examples

Likewise, the explicit hypocrisy and will to truth that underlies the LIO, its nature as a “regime of truth”, could be exemplified by different seminal events within the historical period of the order. These events are deliberately marginalized – or framed as rather

exceptional¹⁸ – statements of the discourse. Each of them refers to one of the core elements of the LIO, namely, security: the 2003 invasion of Iraq; economic liberalism: the Washington Consensus in Latin America throughout the 90s; and law: the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Security. In the LIO, the security aspect involves mainly three ideas: cooperative security (Ikenberry, 2018), national sovereignty, and non-interference. Accordingly, the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq amidst the US “War on Terror” accounts for one of the historical examples of so-called Western interventionism. It is a known and repeatedly proven fact that Saddam Hussein’s regime did not possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the war has been considered illegal by several experts such as former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (MacAskill & Borger, 2004), the Dutch Committee of Inquiry on the War on Iraq headed by Willibrord Davis (Schrijver, 2018), or the British public Chilcot Inquiry (The Guardian, 2016). This is because the invasion was never legally endorsed by the UN Charter nor were any UNSC¹⁹ resolutions passed to launch the war. Yet, most of the architects of the illegal invasion have not been held accountable neither legally nor reputation-wise (Smith, 2018). In 2008 G.W. Bush’s Vice President Dick Cheney even declared the invasion a “successful endeavor” (Zakaria, 2008). As an irregularity, this event shows how the basis within the LIO’s security and legal system were neglected because, indeed, they *could* be neglected as the actors had the legitimacy to do so. Moreover, the record of the invasion in the historical narrative of the LIO has been used as an “exception” or “mistake” (Ikenberry, 2020: p. 257), stressing its nature as a discursive discontinuity in Foucault’s terms.

Economic liberalism. Throughout the 90s, global trade and IMF lending grew rapidly due to the proscribed market-oriented policies, economic reforms, and borrowing procedures codified in John Williamson’s Washington Consensus (WC) and designed by the US and international financial institutions²⁰. It was a 10-item list arranged by a panel of economic policy experts in Washington to discuss the desirable set of economic reforms for the 1970s-1980s Latin American debt crisis (although it was also especially implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa). It embodied the economic liberal principles of the

¹⁸Understood as *negatively* unusual.

¹⁹ Even though UNSC resolution 1441 authorized an inspection of Iraq’s programs to develop chemical, biological, nuclear, and weapons of other nature, it never authorized the use of force by nation-states, nor the war.

²⁰According to John Williamson, it included the “political Washington of Congress and senior members of the administration and the technocratic Washington of the international financial institutions, the economic agencies of the US government, the Federal Reserve Board, and the think tanks” (Williamson, 1990).

LIO worldwide – property rights, liberalization of trade and finance (open international capital flows), allowing markets to set prices, macroeconomic stability (inflation), deregulation, and privatization – and a large-scale reorientation of developing-country policies (Chomsky, 1998; Rodrik, 2006; Babb and Kentikelenis, 2021).

Still, it has now been stated that the WC in Latin America was somehow a failure, as it did not boost the expected economic growth but reinforced the structural inequality in the region and its dependence on international institutions (Rodrik, 2006; French-Davis, 2007). Even though these reforms have been greatly evaluated and criticized after 30 years²¹ (Rodrik, 2006), the importance of this unprecedented and fundamental policy re-direction of the global economy orchestrated by the US remains one of the core historical milestones of the LIO (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999; Ikenberry, 2018). To carry it out, it did not only require Ruggie’s *American* hegemony, but a basis of legitimacy embedded in the general principles of conduct elucidated in the theoretical framework; the WC is a perfect example of an enunciative model, as it not only sets the limit of (the LIO’s) economic discourse but also controls the legitimacy of its subjects.

Law. The 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi perpetrated by Interahamwe armed militias during the Rwandan Civil War (1990-1994) was perhaps considered one of the most shameful events in the recently consolidated LIO. In *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*, Linda R. Melvern (2000) exposes the “complacency, ineptitude, negligence and downright malevolence which led to this preventable tragedy” (Melvern, 2000). The exhaustive and complex reasons behind the negligence of the international community who prioritized their own interests – especially Western powers such as the US, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and even more the UNSC– is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the preventable nature of the catastrophe was revealed in a 1999 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report by scholar Alison Des Forges²² and has been further disclosed in Melvern’s book. Likewise, former Force Commander of the UNAMIR²³ peacekeeping forces General Roméo Dallaire – who also repeatedly called for reinforcements to the UNSC and warned about the killings early on – went so far as to declare that the international community did not care about the situation because Rwanda was “of no strategic importance” (HRW, 1999; Melvern, 2000; Santon,

²¹See also *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform* by the World Bank (2005).

²²A. Des Forges. (1999). “*Leave None to Tell the Story*”. *Genocide in Rwanda*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/12/rwanda-leave-none-to-tell-the-story.pdf

²³United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (October 1993 - March 1996)

2004; 2009; Beloff, 2015). Moreover, one of the distinctive stances of the international community during the event was the refusal to call the massacre a “genocide” so as to avoid obliged involvement as a consequence of legal malpractice (Santon, 2007). Whilst the 1990s are considered the decade of the final establishment for the LIO after the fall of the Soviet Union, in which human rights and the rule of law are supposed to be essential instruments of the Order, the international community was actively justifying its inaction regarding Rwanda. Again, not only was this possible due to the different material power each actor held and played at the time, but the construction of a narrative of the LIO where this can be omitted reveals its administration and manipulation of truth.

Furthermore, these examples also challenge not only the international dimension of the order but put into question its intrinsically indispensable multilateralism, uncovering how the hegemony entrenched in the LIO has marginalized certain episodes in history, as well as certain subjectivities. As has been explained throughout the analysis, which statements are acknowledged, forgotten, diminished, or endorsed has to do with the logic and dynamics determining the episteme and “regime of truth” of a period’s discourse, producing specific meaning and knowledge. As discourse fixes meaning, it needs to exclude and invalidate other interpretations. In this sense, the LIO is proven to have eliminated the differential facts which could challenge or destabilize its meaning and power. Therefore, where G. J. Ikenberry talks about “human interest” and the “(advancements of) human condition” (Ikenberry, 2020), these examples show which subjects are deviant from this discourse. This is because who does not conform with the enunciated truth is thrown outside of the discourse as well as “outside of society, sociality or the ‘sociable’” (Adams, 2017b).

In conclusion, while Foucault focused on society as the subject which creates, maintains, and operates the types of discourses that constitute a “regime of truth”, this research has proven that his precept can be generalized to explain the strategy carried out by liberal and realist scholars. Thus, the LIO is a “regime of truth” due to its discursive nature to operate as a factual concept to account for a certain historical narrative and a description of the international system.

CONCLUSIONS

This section evaluates and concludes the analysis by summarizing the key findings in relation to the RQ and objectives, discussing the value and contribution of the project, and offering academic and theoretical initiatives for further research on the topic.

As a conceptual piece of research, this paper was specifically concerned with investigating Foucauldian archeological discourse analysis and the “regime of truth” concept to examine if these theoretical frameworks could be applied to the Liberal International Order as a concept within the liberal and realist paradigms of IR theory. To do so, the LIO has been understood as a discourse with its discursive components (objects, enunciative models, concepts, and strategies) that have been analyzed through archaeological discourse analysis.

The results of the research indicate that the discursive condition of the LIO bestows the order with the capacity to produce meaning and reality. This meaning is brought about by the existence of the LIO as a concept and its dissemination by (mainly) liberal and realist scholars is the knowledge that pretends to act as truthful. In this sense, Foucault’s contribution has been linked to the LIO’s domination of the epistemological understanding of the historical narrative of international relations after the Cold War as a “regime of truth”. Indeed, the LIO can be understood as a “regime of truth” within these IR disciplines. This is because its account of history has been shown to disregard certain events and subjectivities intentionally and ideologically.

Building from these, to frame the LIO within an historiographical discourse as understood by Foucault is something that has never been done before. Moreover, it means to expose it as an instrument of power. This power is exercised through its discursive capacity and by the hegemonic institutions that comprise it and abide by it. Realist and liberal scholars presuppose the LIO not only as a viable structure for world politics, but one founded on modern and liberal moral grounds. Contrarily, the archeological analysis carried out has contextualized its operativity and exposed its instrumentalization to produce a teleological, rationalized, and legitimized account of the world order, legitimizing its nature.

Even though Foucault is one of the main postmodern scholars to have entered the critical theory IR discipline, the contribution by poststructuralist and postmodern literature remains marginal in the field. It is for this reason that IR can benefit greatly

from discursive analysis or Foucauldian theory as they both remain under-explored theoretical fields that offer an alternative standpoint.

I believe that – although insufficient due to the format and available resources – this study offers an innovative comprehension of theoretical concepts in IR theory, as well as new criticism to the ontology of the realist and liberal’s paradigm. Archaeological discourse analysis presents the opportunity for other IR researchers to investigate totalizing historical narratives taken for granted in the field, and the knowledge they legitimize.

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