

The Arabs: From Military Domination to Technological Domination and the Crisis of Meaning

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ABSTRACT

This research paper seeks to shed light on the transformation of colonial domination from military hegemony to technological hegemony and to trace its manifestations through technological advancement. It also examines the various forms of colonial control that go beyond subjugating bodies and exploiting human and natural resources, extending instead to the moral and symbolic space of the human being. This produces a crisis of meaning and threatens human values under the guise of efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, the paper contributes to exposing the limits of dominant technological discourse and placing it within a necessary critical and civilizational context.

Keywords: Hegemony – Colonialism – Technology – Power – Progress – Knowledge – Crisis of Meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Since the twentieth century, the world has witnessed a radical transformation in the forms of domination exercised by major powers. Whereas control was once imposed through military occupation and hard power, the world is now experiencing a subtle shift toward digital technological hegemony, through which individuals and societies are reshaped and their behaviors directed by indirect means. Borders are no longer breached by armies but by data and algorithms. Control no longer requires military bases, but rather smart applications and mobile devices that allow access to human consciousness itself.

Artificial intelligence has replaced the cannon, networks have taken the place of armies, and occupation is now achieved through monopolizing technical knowledge and controlling the flow of

data. This has led to the emergence of a new form of colonialism: behavioral digital colonialism, which redefines power, culture, and sovereignty.

However, this transformation is not merely a shift in tools of control; it is accompanied by a profound crisis of meaning, as the human being begins to lose their sense of reference under the dominance of the machine. Classical concepts such as identity, freedom, and value are increasingly replaced by algorithms that determine preference, decision, and direction. In a world where machines generate choices, free will contracts, and awareness of purpose and meaning weakens this opens the door to an existential void that technology, regardless of its advancement, cannot fill.

Hence arises the importance of our research: to deconstruct this transformation from military hegemony to technological hegemony, and to explore the core question:

- **To what extent is this technological hegemony linked to the crisis of meaning and the loss of the human being's active role in this deteriorating reality?**

Equipped with all the tools of research and drawing on the methods of other sciences such as psychology, sociology, history, and economics we aim to uncover the driving forces behind this shift. It is, after all, a civilizational and existential challenge that touches on the very meaning and essence of the human being, and thus requires a thorough questioning of the foundations on which it was built.

FROM MILITARY POWER TO THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE:

If we reflect on the civilizational shock experienced by Arab peoples since the beginning of Western colonial movements starting with France's occupation of Egypt in 1798, followed by the British occupation in 1882, and then the successive occupations of other Arab countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq in both the eastern and greater western Arab world this brings us to a concept expressed by Malek Bennabi in his duality of colonizability/colonialism. According to Bennabi, colonialism does not merely appear in this duality as a mythical force halting the progress of the Islamic world or a delusion that paralyzes it from overcoming its psychological and social challenges. It also manifests in a tangible form through destructive acts aimed at erasing the individual's values and potential for development. This aspect is more visible when colonialism is despotic, as it was in Indonesia and Tripoli, and as it is now in North Africa. ¹

Colonialism, in this sense, is a fundamental element in the chaos of the Islamic world; it obstructs a people's self-reform by establishing a system of corruption, humiliation, and destruction whether on a military or cognitive level that erases the very existential presence of the human being. The historical record of the West's fascination with the Islamic Renaissance and its intellectual output is

clear evidence of an attempt at intellectual colonization, with Napoleon's campaigns providing ample proof of this.

Indeed, the deep investigations conducted by Edward Said into numerous Western texts whether literary, philosophical, or political enabled him to define Orientalism as “not an alternative experience about the marvels of the East, nor merely vague fantasies about the essence of the East (though it may contain elements of that), but a way of exerting control over real peoples. It is tied to actual domination of the East beginning with Napoleon.”²

That is why he adopted a scientific method devoid of emotion, examining the details of the Arab mind and everything that shapes its spirit. He observed its most important intellectual, cultural, and psychological components, studying both the internal references of its thought, awareness, and memory (such as religion, heritage, and art), as well as external influences (natural and social) that may affect its disposition.³

Colonialism is no longer limited to military occupation; it has transformed into an intellectual and cultural system that exercises domination over peoples through distorted representations of them representations that are then presented as scientific knowledge.

When we read and examine Edward Said's study of Orientalism, it becomes clear that Orientalism is an intellectual tool of hegemony. This is evident in the implicit structures he uncovered within the discourse, where Orientalists were not always neutral researchers. Rather, their studies often carried colonial dimensions. They portrayed the “East” as strange, mythical, emotional, and irrational, in order to justify the West's need to intervene. They described the Arab mind as functioning solely from emotional and sentimental impulses, which in their view rendered it unfit for modernity or progress without external intervention to reshape it.

However, when we closely examine the background of the West's scientific advancement and the astounding discoveries it has made since awakening from its slumber, we find that the West greatly benefited from the sciences of Arabs and Muslims. These were preserved and developed, serving as the intellectual foundation from which the Industrial Revolution was launched. The West would not have reached its current level of technological and scientific progress had it not translated and absorbed the scientific achievements of the Arabs in medicine, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, optics, and other fields.

These sciences became the very stick the West later used to strike the Eastern world imposing its superiority through intellectual and technological tools rooted in a civilizational heritage that it later denied and marginalized.

The Industrial Revolution as a Direct Driver of Expansion:

The Industrial Revolution was not merely a movement of enlightenment that lifted Europe out of its darkness and beyond the age of the Church and indulgences into an era of knowledge and the discovery of nature's vast resources, enabling humanity to transition from a primitive life to a technological one.

As Eric Hobsbawm clarified in his book *The Age of Revolution (1789–1848)*, the Industrial Revolution was not simply an economic transformation it was the spark that ignited a race for control over markets and raw materials. He pointed out that European industrial powers sought to secure sources of raw materials and markets for distributing their manufactured goods, which led to colonial expansion in the East.

Eastern countries thus came under military pressure, signaled by the presence of warships and Western military campaigns, and found themselves on a path toward economic dependency on the West. Even into the 1930s when the Soviet Union developed means to overcome the gap between underdeveloped and advanced countries this divide remained fixed, resistant, and increasingly wide between the minority of the world's population and the rest. This very reality, Hobsbawm argued, was the most decisive factor in shaping the course of history in the twentieth century.⁴

This historical trajectory altered by the Industrial Revolution did not only affect the Western individual and their relationship with the East; it also reshaped human relations in general, emphasizing individualism at the expense of communal values, all in pursuit of economic profit.

Eric Hobsbawm pointed out that the Industrial Revolution was not merely an economic shift it restructured the class system through the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie that came to dominate the means of production. This transformation led to an increased need for specialized bureaucracies to manage production, transportation, and education, as well as a push to open foreign markets and seize sources of raw materials thus accelerating the idea of colonial expansion.

In his book, Hobsbawm notes figures such as Sir Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Sir Richard Cobden as prominent examples of this industrial bourgeois dominance. These figures had direct influence on government policy and extended their control into other sectors by imposing specialized educational and technical systems that served industrial and transport needs.

According to Hobsbawm, this bourgeois elite marginalized the traditional intellectual class, turning technological utility into a tool for social and political legitimacy. He argues that technological hegemony reengineered the structures of power and legitimacy, particularly in British society and, more broadly, throughout European society as a whole.⁵

What can be observed from the above is that the Industrial Revolution, grounded in technological hegemony, posed a significant challenge to European societies. It pushed them toward organizing science, industry, and transportation, and it restructured the relationship between rulers and the ruled. This hegemony, as noted, is reflected in how societies responded to these challenges. The Industrial Revolution provided Europe with overwhelmingly powerful tools of response industry, technology, and economic strength which enabled imperial expansion into the East and facilitated the subjugation of Eastern societies that had not yet entered the industrial age.

This expansion and domination were not solely the result of economic needs, but rather of a civilizational perspective that viewed the "Other" as incapable of response and thus deserving of control. Beneath this hegemony lies the reality that 19th-century Europe, despite its apparent strength fueled by the Industrial Revolution and imperial expansion, was suffering from deep internal divisions: class conflict characterized by tension between the wealthy bourgeoisie and the impoverished working class; domestic uprisings expressing resistance to tyranny and social injustice; and the rise of skepticism and atheism, which created a spiritual void and a loss of moral and philosophical certainty, raising profound questions about the very meaning of progress.

As a consequence of these internal pressures, Europe turned to imperial expansion in Asia, Africa, and the Arab East not merely for economic gain, but as a way to compensate for internal disintegration. The Arab world, therefore, was not just an economic target, but also a mirror reflecting Europe's need to manufacture external victories to conceal its internal defeats. This is precisely what Arnold Toynbee illustrated when he stated: "When a society responds to external pressure through imperial expansion, it often conceals a state of stagnation." ⁶

On the other hand, from the perspective offered by social theory in its analytical study of modern capitalism, one of the key drivers of technological hegemony is the reshaping of Eastern societies to serve the interests of the colonizer. Max Weber pointed out that industrialization was not merely a technical development, but rather the product of modern Western rationality, which placed order, bureaucracy, and planning at the heart of everything from the economy to the state.

This same rationality that advanced industry and administration also led to the construction of efficient colonial systems that organized colonized peoples and transformed them into tools of production. ⁷ This is what Weber referred to as "rational domination" a method of subjugating ⁸ peoples systematically through state institutions.

Technological Hegemony as an Extension of Epistemic Hegemony:

Following the failure of traditional colonialism and the withdrawal of colonial powers from most developing countries, new forms of control emerged. Alongside economic domination, power shifted

from the sword to the machine. While military hegemony was the primary force shaping the global order until the twentieth century, the high cost of wars led states to seek more sustainable sources of power namely, technology and economics.⁹ As a result, colonialism began to adopt a softer approach and shape a different rationale for itself.

The system Michel Foucault discussed in *Discipline and Punish* mirrors the logic of the colonial state. Colonialism became rationalized, governed by bureaucratic and technical precision, such that "knowledge and power directly imply one another: there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge."¹⁰ Thus, "control was rationalized and made both acceptable and productive."¹¹

Through tools of knowledge such as statistics, cartography, medicine, the educational system, and demography, colonial powers managed to reproduce colonized societies according to their own logic. They subjected the Eastern individual to precise disciplinary systems aimed not only at physical control, but also at reshaping their identity, behavior, and self-perception. Military hegemony thus evolved into soft power, exercised through rationalized institutions and structures making colonialism a complete model of the alliance between power and knowledge.

The shift from hard power (military) to soft power began at the end of the Cold War, when technological innovations like the internet and artificial intelligence became tools of global domination.¹² As Kai-Fu Lee explains in his book *AI Superpowers*, data has moved beyond being a mere tool for analysis to becoming a source of hegemony, enabling control over markets and behaviors. Whoever controls the data holds the tools of digital colonialism.

Artificial intelligence has also become a form of psychological domination through behavioral control used in both individual and collective decisions (e.g., social media recommendation algorithms or e-commerce suggestions) thereby creating a kind of psychological and cognitive colonization.¹³

Economic and Technological Exploitation

The harnessing of developing countries by advanced nations to provide cheap manufacturing and to reinforce technological dependency appears to be a form of neo-colonialism, where domination is exercised through economic and cultural tools instead of direct occupation. According to modern studies, these dynamics keep developing countries in a state of permanent dependency, where they are exploited as low-cost production bases, while the added value remains monopolized by developed countries.

This structurally designed model ensures that developing nations remain unable to achieve independent development. Technology transfer has not granted them technological sovereignty;

rather, it has deepened their dependency, turning them into digital colonies that function as production and application sites for technologies they do not own. Under the banner of "globalization," a consumption pattern has been imposed on these countries, keeping them in constant need of the external world.

Technology transfer has become conditional. Many industries in developing countries are established using imported technology from advanced countries. Although these countries appear to manufacture and produce, in reality, they consume technology controlled by the developed world. They remain dependent on maintenance, upgrades, training, and spare parts from abroad. Even when machines and factories are transferred, the precise knowledge is not. Engineers are often denied access to control software or the ability to modify designs ensuring that technological control remains external.

Thus, the colonizer has become present in every detail of the individual and societal life of developing countries. Naturally, this condition has its reflections in philosophical thought, which is "the spiritual essence of its era, and as a philosophy of the contemporary world, it represents a specific system of knowledge about the place of man in the world and his relationship to the surrounding world."¹⁴

When we return to our dismal reality, shaped by turbulent technological and economic transformations, we are compelled to reassess the present differently where superficial things appear more dazzling and monopolize public attention. It has become necessary for philosophy to engage with the question of technology, and to think from within it, as it is a given of technological advancement.

Martin Heidegger laid the foundation for understanding the relationship between technology and the human being. He argued that technology is not merely a collection of tools, but rather a loss of human freedom, wherein man becomes enslaved to technology instead of mastering it. The loss of freedom is one of the hallmarks of advanced industrial civilization, in which, Heidegger believed, "man lives under the domination of technological developments that have emptied him of his essence and spirit. Instead of safeguarding human culture, they have stripped human life of values, spirituality, transcendence even meaning itself. The very products man thought would bring happiness have instead caused him misery, anxiety, alienation, and a detachment from his own being and essence."¹⁵

This reflects the logic humanity has followed to achieve happiness at the expense of the Other a form of utilitarian opportunism, which, according to Heidegger, is a non-contemplative form of thought. As such, it does not seek the meaning of things, but rather treats them merely as objects for instrumental calculation.¹⁶

Heidegger made it clear in his famous lecture "The Question Concerning Technology" that modern technology is not a neutral tool, but rather a mode of "revealing" (Entbergung) a way of disclosing

the world that transforms everything, including the human being, into a “standing-reserve” (Bestand), where every resource becomes consumable and exploitable from a colonial standpoint.

This revealing, as Heidegger sees it, takes the form of a “challenging-forth” a provocation or incitement. It occurs, he explains, when the hidden energy of nature is liberated, and “what is transformed gets stored, what is stored gets distributed, and what is distributed gets preserved and consumed again.”¹⁷

From this Heideggerian perspective, modern technology is a way the world discloses itself a means of reshaping reality and nature in a particular manner. Humanity engages with nature in a coercive and extractive fashion, demanding that it unveil its energies. This leads to treating nature as nothing more than a resource at our disposal, ultimately disrupting the natural balance.

As a result, “modern technology places nature in a state of constant demand for endless supply... even the human being is reduced to standing-reserve.”¹⁸ Through this lens, “man becomes soulless, living in a world of objects rather than meanings.”¹⁹

A number of philosophers including Nick Bostrom have called for balancing technological progress with human wisdom, warning that such advancement will only deepen the crisis of meaning if it is not accompanied by parallel spiritual development. Societies that focus solely on technological advancement without a solid foundation in values are likely to face profound identity crises.²⁰

Bostrom outlined a catastrophic scenario concerning the misuse of artificial intelligence, suggesting that if AI were to spiral out of control, the outcome could resemble the “paperclip maximizer” scenario.²¹ His recommendation was to embed human values into AI systems, proposing that ethics must be part of the structure of AI, not merely an afterthought.²²

In any case, societies that neglect the moral and spiritual dimension will inevitably collapse even if they achieve technological progress.

CONCLUSION:

The transformation of hegemony from military to technological did not eliminate the colonial essence it merely changed its tools. Expansionist tendencies persist, whether through traditional wars or digital domination, and both reflect the same consumerist mindset that marginalizes the human being as a value in favor of material interests. This mindset reduces the human to a functional entity, confined to his material dimension and threatened with the loss of the meaning of his existence.

What we have found with certainty through our review of the human condition, supported by historical, social, and economic studies, is that colonialism even when cloaked in the guise of development and technology continues to rely on the exploitation of both humanity and the earth.

The real alternative is not to abandon technology, but to liberate it from expansionist drives so that it becomes a servant of human existence rather than an instrument of existential dispossession.

Our descriptive study revealed that while this technology has produced technically advanced societies, they continue to suffer from a spiritual void, replacing life's fundamental questions with standards of productivity and efficiency. Many philosophers have warned against unchecked technological development that comes at the expense of human spiritual values, as it will only intensify crises of alienation and meaninglessness.

They argue that the solution does not lie in rejecting technology but in restoring a balance that makes it a tool serving humanity not a master reshaping it according to the logic of the machine. This dilemma is not only philosophical but existential: either we succeed in building a civilization that harmonizes technological advancement with spiritual depth, or we bequeath to future generations a world that is technologically advanced but empty on the inside.

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FOOTNOTES

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