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# Historical sociology, international relations and connected histories

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## Abstract

This paper addresses three recent developments in historical sociology: (i) neo-Weberian historical sociology within International Relations; (ii) the ‘civilizational analysis’ approach utilized by scholars of ‘multiple modernities’, and (iii) the ‘third wave’ cultural turn in US historical sociology. While these developments are responses to problems identified within earlier forms of historical sociology, it is suggested each fails to resolve them precisely because each remains contained within the methodological framework of historical sociology as initially conceived. It is argued that their common problem lies in the utilization of ‘ideal types’ as the basis for socio-historical analysis. This necessarily has the effect of abstracting a set of particular relations from their wider connections and has the further effect of suggesting *sui generis* endogenous processes as integral to these relations. In this way, each of the three developments continues the Eurocentrism typical of earlier approaches. The paper concludes with a call for ‘connected histories’ to provide a more adequate methodological and substantive basis for an historical sociology appropriate to calls for a properly global historical sociology.

## Introduction

Historical sociology is primarily a subfield of sociology, although the claims made about it are frequently much grander. Most contributors have been sociologists who invoke historiographical arguments, although in recent years, it has been within the field of International Relations (IR) — at least in the United Kingdom (UK) — that historical sociology has perhaps had most resonance. In this section devoted to sociology and IR, I want to address some key developments within sociology that have had less attention within the field of IR and call into question some of its assumptions. I begin with one recent approach in IR that draws directly on historical sociology, before addressing two recent developments within historical sociology that have special resonance for debates within IR. These are: (i) the argument for a ‘new’ neo-Weberian historical sociology within IR in the UK (Hobden and Hobson 2002; Lawson 2007); (ii) the largely European engagement with historical sociology that seeks to combine it with ‘civilizational analysis’ in order to identify ‘multiple modernities’ (Arnason 2000; Eisenstadt 2000b; 2001); and (iii) the ‘third wave’ cultural turn in US historical sociology (for example, Bonnell and Hunt 1999b; Adams et al 2005a). Each is a response to problems of earlier forms of historical sociology. The problem of locating agency is the focus of the first development; the deficiencies of a linear convergent model of development are the focus of the second; and the problem of structural determination is the focus for the third. I shall suggest, however, that each response fails to resolve these problems precisely because each remains contained within the methodological

framework of historical sociology, as conceived within the position being subjected to critique.

A typical feature of historical sociology is that its methodological specificity rests in the utilization of 'ideal types' as the basis for socio-historical analysis. This necessarily has the effect of abstracting a set of particular connections from wider connections and has the further effect of suggesting *sui generis* endogenous processes as integral to the connections that are so abstracted. The other connections most frequently omitted are those 'connecting' Europe and the West to much of the rest of the world. These connections are thereby rendered exogenous to the processes abstracted from them at the same time as these processes are represented as having a significant degree of internal coherence, independent of these wider connections. In this way, a dominant Eurocentric focus to the analysis is established, while relegating non-European contributions to specific cultural inflections of pre-existing structures that are held to be a product of European modernity (Bhambra 2007a).

While postcolonial criticism has sought to illuminate these omissions (see Guha 1982; 1983; Chaturvedi 2000), it has itself frequently focused on the specificity of what is omitted in the standard accounts, rather than their interconnected and related nature. In other words, it also fails to see the connections as integral to the processes previously represented as independent of them. Of course, there are other approaches which purport to avoid some of these difficulties identified by postcolonial theorists. For example, Marxist approaches with their emphasis on 'totality', whether 'expressively' given or 'conjuncturally' determined (to use Louis Althusser's (1969) formulation), would seem necessarily to be about connections (see for example, Rosenberg 2006; Matin 2007).

The issue of Marxist approaches is further complicated by the division between self-consciously 'internalist' approaches (for example, Brenner 1976; 1977 and Wood 2002) and those which emphasize inter-societal inter-connection (for example, Wallerstein 1974; 1980; Teschke 2005; Rosenberg 2006; 2007). It should be clear, however, that a defining feature of any Marxist approach (precisely what distinguishes it from historical *sociology*) is the emphasis on modes of production and their determinate processes. The 'internalism' of some Marxist approaches may be moderated by an emphasis upon 'uneven and combined development', but the meaning of the latter is given in the central role attributed to the modes of production which render other processes (those of colonialism, for example) secondary to them, however *empirically* significant they are allowed to be. While historical materialist approaches acknowledge the operation of capitalism as a 'world system', then, they usually also identify its central dynamic with processes having a *European* origin.

Any model that posits a world historical centre from which developments diffuse outwards is problematic. What is needed is a 'connected histories' approach within a de-centred conception of 'totality'; de-centred not just spatially, but also conceptually, (that is, my ultimate concern would also be to de-centre the idea of 'modes of production' in these debates).<sup>1</sup> While I do regard Marxist historiographies to be similarly flawed to those of Weberian historical sociology, then, for the purposes of this paper I am using the self-conscious distinction between 'historical materialism' and 'historical sociology' to delimit the

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<sup>1</sup> I shall be addressing the specific issues of Marxist historiography and its relation to historical sociology in a forthcoming paper, 'Modernity in Global Context: Historical Sociology and the Marxist Problematique'.

object of my scrutiny. It will be evident by the end of this paper that I locate my own concerns within a reconstructed historical sociology, rather than historical materialism.

Before I begin my examination of the three recent developments identified above, I shall set out their context in 'second wave' historical sociology. After I have outlined the problems inherent to each of these three critical responses to second wave historical sociology, I shall conclude with a call for 'connected histories' to provide a more adequate methodological and substantive basis for an historical sociology appropriate for our times and for IR.

## **Second wave historical sociology: a recent history**

Historical sociology came to be delineated in the post-war period and, in particular, in the aftermath of the tumultuous decade of the sixties. Even if one can see antecedents for it in the writings of the 'classics' of the discipline, such as Karl Marx and Max Weber, its explicit statement is strongly associated with the general upheavals and critiques of disciplinary formations that the 1960s themselves came to represent (see Skocpol 1984a). The different academic groupings that began to coalesce around the idea of historical sociology in this period did so for the most part around 'oblique attacks on orthodoxies in their disciplines' (Abbott 1991, 202). In sociology, the orthodoxy was Parsonsian functionalism, embodied in the tropes of grand theory, where societal types were derived from a theoretical scheme rather than in a direct address of the historical record. The critical response challenged the abstract Parsonsian focus on consensus and integration and instead saw social change as characterized by conflict and struggle (see Moore 1966; Tilly 1985a; 1988; Skocpol 1984a; 1987; Abbott 1991; Holmwood 1996). Correspondingly, in history there was a widening of the remit of historical investigation which increasingly operated under the rubric of social history or 'histories from below' (see Hobsbawm 1971; Sarkar 1985; Zunz 1985).<sup>2</sup> In turn, this reinforced the concern within historical sociology for mechanisms of change that emphasized popular struggles and social movements, rather than the unfolding of a functionalist logic of 'structural differentiation' (Stedman-Jones 1976; Skocpol 1987; Tilly 1985b; 1988).

The association of historical sociology with social and political movements was also to become a distinctive aspect of second wave historical sociology. While Andrew Abbott (1991) points to Marxism and feminism as particular *analytical* approaches within historical sociology, I suggest that ultimately their contribution lies in pointing to the *structures of value relevance* in the constitution of disciplines. This is disguised to some extent by the circumstance that the points at which history and sociology moved closer to each other and began to coalesce around the idea of historical sociology were precisely those in which historians and sociologists had shared political commitments. Over time, these commitments have fragmented and the mood for grand theory within sociology has declined, opening up the field to a more 'disruptive' politics of knowledge construction.

The distance of the second wave historical sociologists from the Parsonsian approach lay in their accounts of the mechanisms producing European (and north American) dominance and whether there was some social formation beyond the 'new lead

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<sup>2</sup> It was not until the emergence of the Subaltern Studies collective in the 1980s, however, that the priority given to the labour movements of advanced capitalist countries was significantly challenged. See for example, Guha (1982; 1983) and Arnold (1984).

society' (Parsons 1971) of American capitalism, that is, they were not generally critical of the idea of an endogenous process of modernization within Europe. As Theda Skocpol suggests when outlining 'emerging agendas' in historical sociology, it is the issue of 'evidence and methods of analysis' that distinguish current historical sociologists from earlier ones, not necessarily the 'traditional questions about the roots and consequences of the *European Industrial Revolution*' (Skocpol 1984b, 357, emphasis added). Where historical sociology has broken with 'the Western Eurocentric purview', it has apparently done so by pursuing 'in-depth historical comparisons among non-Western countries or people examined *in their own right*' (Skocpol 1984b, 358, emphasis added), thereby suggesting that European modernization is appropriately studied in 'its own right'.

Where the mediation of history by theory has made it necessary to ask the question posed by Victoria Bonnell—'how do historical sociologists select, organize, and interpret historical evidence?' (Bonnell 1980, 162) — the answer has, for the most part, been comparative study. For, as Bonnell continues, comparative study is the primary way of establishing that 'a theoretical proposition applicable to one case sustains its explanatory power when applied to additional cases' (1980, 160; see also Skocpol and Somers 1980). However, the issue is not merely that of the selection of cases to be compared, but also the primary point of view from which comparison is made. That is, what kinds of historical circumstances are held to merit inclusion within the generalized statements and which are to be aligned with mere particularity? Here we can see quite explicitly that the dominant case for historical sociologists remains that of the emergence of an endogenous European (Western) modernity and then, its subsequent world-historical significance. While the experiences of others may now be examined *in their own right*, usually in terms of providing *different* routes to modernity, they are not deemed as significant in the answering of the 'traditional' questions of modernity, nor calling into question the validity of those questions.

Abbott (1991, 228) is sceptical about the potential of comparative study to deliver on its promise to provide adequate explanations of social change, arguing that the focus on generating causal explanations diverts attention away from the basic social scientific insight that 'the meaning of an event is determined by the story in which it appears and by the ensemble of contemporaneous events'. In this he agrees with Philip Abrams who writes that in sociology, the narrative of becoming 'is both the reality to be explained and the structuring in terms of which explanation can be achieved' (1980, 11). Stories need to be validated not by recourse to facts alone, suggests Abrams, 'but by a reasoned elaboration of the grounds of principle in terms of which their facts are selected, constructed and judged significant' (1980, 12). The focus on generalization by way of narrative, for both Abbott and Abrams, follows in the Weberian tradition of placing complex particulars — that is, descriptions — at the centre of analyses from which ideal-typical narratives can then be constructed (see Kalberg 1994). The construction of these ideal-typical narratives becomes the primary focus of historical sociology where the emphasis is on 'agency', rather than 'structures', or only those structures that can be 'uncovered' in actors' meanings. The issue of 'comparison', then, for Abrams and Abbott, cannot be limited within a self-contained theoretical framework as the 'possession' of the individual sociologist or historian, but is also dependent upon the wider social and cultural context within which knowledge is produced (see Nelson 1993). For a long time that context — the nature of the academy, prevailing cultural meanings, and so forth — supported Eurocentric narratives. However, as soon as narrative becomes the explicit focus, space is created for the possibility of different narratives and thus, the potential for displacing the dominant Eurocentric narrative.

### **Third wave historical sociology in the UK, Europe and the US**

The second wave project of historical sociology, as it came to be delineated in the 1960s, entailed little direct consideration of the politics of knowledge production, or in Weber's terms, value relevance. Yet, as I have suggested, subsequent developments in sociology have challenged grand theory more fundamentally as a modernist project that could no longer be sustained in the light of various kinds of postmodern and poststructuralist critiques. In their different ways, these criticisms all focus on the issue of agency. Frequently, this has been conducted in terms of some kind of standpoint position arising from feminist and postcolonial criticisms, or, more generally, in the context of a self-proclaimed cultural turn itself influenced by those criticisms. In many respects, the recent developments in historical sociology which I shall address in the rest of this article represent an attempt to reengage with the established tropes of historical sociology in light of these critiques rather than transforming them. In part, the problem of these critiques is seen as one of relativism where the issue is how to accommodate difference to the 'general' categories of the dominant scheme since it is only general categories that could establish that different variants, say of modernity, are indeed variants of the 'same' thing.

#### *Historical sociology and UK International Relations*

The recent engagement of IR theorists with historical sociology has been regarded as a novel undertaking by much of mainstream IR, which, it is argued, remains 'curiously unhistorical' in its approach (Lawson 2007, 346). The relatively recent — and perhaps fleeting — dominance of systems theories and rational choice approaches such as neo-realism, however, is prefaced by a longer-standing engagement with the disciplines of history and sociology. A key argument made by Stephen Hobden is that the recent engagement is not a new phenomenon, but that rather it is part of 'a long and distinguished tradition' (Hobden 2002, 42; see also Hobden 1998). Indeed, some of the key authors within the field have crossed these disciplinary boundaries at some point in their career (for example, Michael Mann and Martin Shaw). What is perhaps distinctive is the explicit engagement with 'historical sociology', as opposed to simply with 'history' and 'sociology'. As Hobden (2002) and John M Hobson (2002) argue, the 1980s were marked by the convergence of the concerns of (some) second wave historical sociologists and (some) IR theorists on questions of state formation, interstate relations and the emergence and development of global processes generally. To the extent that historical sociologists expanded the remit of sociology to include an active engagement with understanding global and international processes 'their work provided challenges to both sociology and International Relations' (Hobden 2002, 57).

While IR theorists have looked to historical sociology to remedy particular deficiencies within their own discipline, Hobson suggests that the turn to an avowedly Weberian historical sociology has potentially replicated those deficiencies. He argues this is because both mainstream forms of IR, as well as historical sociologists, reify international structures and deny agency to state-society complexes (Hobson 2002, 66; see also Rosenberg 2007). In contrast, Hobson calls for a reformulation of historical sociology — to be termed

‘second wave Weberian historical sociology’<sup>3</sup> or ‘neo-Weberian historical sociology’ — organized in line with ‘a structurationist theory of the state and International Relations in which states and state-society complexes shape, and are simultaneously shaped by, the international system’ (Hobson 2002, 66). Quite apart from this being very similar to what neo-Weberian sociologists, such as Skocpol have argued, it also replicates other aspects of debates internal to historical sociology along the same lines.

Indeed, what Hobson describes is not so much neo-Weberian as neo-functionalist. For example, he draws on Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory as a resolution of the structure-agency dilemma, but this involves a codification of structural categories in terms of four structural principles that provide the ‘grid’ through which institutions can be classified. Thus, Giddens writes of structuration analysis providing two forms of articulation, where:

one is how far a society contains distinct spheres of ‘specialism’ in respect of institutional orders: differentiated forms of symbolic order ... a differentiated ‘polity’, ‘economy’ and legal/ repressive apparatus. The second is how modes of institutional articulation are organized in terms of overall properties of societal reproduction: that is to say, ‘structural principles’ (1981, 47–48)

These reproduce the form of Talcott Parsons’ account of structural differentiation, which historical sociologists had otherwise castigated (for a fuller discussion, see Holmwood 1996). This is in contrast to the development of a more distinctive neo-Weberian form of historical sociology, as discussed above, which would emphasize narrative over ‘causal structures’.

Despite the call for a specifically neo-Weberian historical sociology within IR, this has not necessarily been picked up by other scholars, even those sympathetic to establishing a historical sociological method within IR. As Shaw argues, ‘the sociological imagination is intrinsically historical’ and that this is ‘a common inheritance of sociology’ not to be monopolized by any one school, be it Marxist, Weberian or other (2002, 84). Andrew Linklater (2002) similarly argues for a broadening out of the sociological field with which IR, and specifically historically oriented IR theorists engage; and Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2001; 2002) argue for methodological pluralism. Christian Reus-Smit, in turn, argues more strongly against the ‘subterranean rationalism and materialism’ of the neo-Weberian approach in favour of a ‘constructivist turn’ that draws on poststructuralist theory, seeing actors and action ‘as the products of institutionally grounded identities and normatively sanctioned repertoires of conduct’ (Reus-Smit 2002, 121,129; see also Smith 2002). Despite these apparent differences, however, the authors mentioned are all convinced of the importance and perhaps even necessity of a historical sociological approach to IR that goes beyond the presentism of much IR literature.

The importance of historical sociology across the different positions in IR rests, in part, on resolving a supposed structure-agency problem and in acknowledging the importance of the cultural domain in the address of current silences. Remedying the previous omission of the rest of the world from global analyses is to be undertaken by ‘adding’ particularities in the development of a ‘thick’ conception of the social. For example, Hobden and Hobson, in their articulation of a ‘world historical sociology’, suggest that the omission of postcolonial issues is to be rectified via a focus on the analysis of identity

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<sup>3</sup> While historical sociologists within sociology generally term the work of Skocpol, Charles Tilly, and Mann and others as constituting ‘second wave historical sociology’, the convention within IR is to term it, ‘first wave Weberian historical sociology’. This is as a consequence of it being regarded as the first wave of historical sociology within IR, the ostensible focus of their engagement and critique.

formation (Hobden and Hobson 2002, 284; see also Hobson 2007a). There is no acknowledgement of the necessity of reconsidering the structures of historical sociology that have previously excluded these ‘others’. I would argue that it is the extent to which questions of difference and identity are taken simply to inflect the structural form of the system, as opposed to being understood as constitutive of that system, which poses fundamental limitations for properly historical sociological projects (see Holmwood 1996; 2001). These issues are also to be found within the ‘multiple modernities’ approach to historical sociology.

*Multiple modernities, civilizational analysis and European historical sociology*

The second recent development within historical sociology is the conjunction between a Weberian comparative sociology of cultures with Jaspers’ (1965) work on the emergence of Axial Age civilizations.<sup>4</sup> This approach has been taken up, most prominently, by historical sociologists working on multiple modernities to examine the trajectory of modernity into divergent forms.<sup>5</sup> Fundamental to this initiative is a concern with identifying the form of modernity associated with the West and then examining the cultural dynamics of other religions and/or civilizations in comparison to it. The civilizational approach provides a unit of analysis larger than that of the nation state while at the same time not subsuming the diversity of the world under a single rubric as was believed to be the case for earlier, functionalist modernization theory. Whereas modernization studies were tied, to a large extent, to the political and economic developments of the modern state, the new paradigm of multiple modernities brings in an important cultural focus in its attempt to move beyond the deficiencies of the earlier paradigm. It allows scholars to theorize differences between peoples and acknowledges the existence of a plurality of civilizations that goes beyond earlier binaries of ‘civilized’ and ‘non-civilized’, modernity and tradition. Key proponents of this historical sociological shift are, largely, European sociologists such as Johann Arnason (2000), Bjorn Wittrock (1998) and Goran Therborn (2003), who build on the work of Shmuel Eisenstadt (1965; 2000a; 2000b) and rework it in conjunction with him to examine processes of modernization in relation to civilizational complexes that bring culture ‘back in’ to historical-sociological theorizing.

Theorists of multiple modernities situate themselves critically in relation to earlier debates on modernization theory as well as taking issue with the general charge of Eurocentrism made within postcolonial studies. In developing the multiple modernities paradigm, and in guarding against the self-identified fallacies of Eurocentrism and linear convergence, they claim to take into account the cultural diversity of the expression of modern institutions globally. Their move from a conceptual language of modernization to that of multiple modernities reflects unease with the idea of a singular, uniform trajectory applied to the current diversity of contemporary societies within the world. As Eisenstadt and Wolfgang Schluchter suggest, the global expansion of modernity ought not to be viewed ‘as a process of repetition but as the crystallization of new civilizations’, albeit new civilizations that take as their reference point ‘the original Western crystallization of modernity’ (1998, 2, 3). However, to the extent that these multiple modernities continue to

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, the issue of *International Sociology* on ‘Rethinking Civilizational Analysis’ (2001). There has also been a turn in IR to an international historical sociological approach (Hobson and Lawson 2008), which engages with recent developments in ‘world history’ (see for example, Buzan and Little 2001; Hall and Jackson 2007).

<sup>5</sup> See for example, the two volumes of *Daedalus* on ‘Early Modernities’ (1998) and ‘Multiple Modernities’ (2000).



be understood as derived from the creative appropriation, by those that followed, of the institutional frameworks of modernity that are seen to originate in Europe, the problem of Eurocentrism remains integral to this new paradigm.

Modernity is theorized simultaneously in terms of its institutional constellations, that is, its tendency 'towards universal structural, institutional, and cultural frameworks' (Eisenstadt and Schluchter 1998, 3), as well as a cultural programme 'beset by internal antinomies and contradictions, giving rise to continual critical discourse and political contestations' (Eisenstadt 2000a, 7). Multiple modernities are thus seen to emerge from the encounters 'between Western modernity and the cultural traditions and historical experiences' of other societies (Eisenstadt 2000a, 23). This explains the apparent paradox that Eisenstadt and Schluchter can dissociate themselves from Eurocentrism at the same time as apparently embracing its core assumptions, namely, 'the Enlightenment assumptions of the centrality of a Eurocentred type of modernity' (1998, 5). Insofar as the civilization of modernity is seen to entail the modernity of civilizations and however differently other civilizations may then express 'their' modernity, there is a clear understanding of Western modernity as the original form. Further, it is a form that is seen to have achieved expression without relation to others in order to produce modernity's common framework of institutions such as the market economy, the modern nation-state and bureaucratic rationality. These institutions, having originated in Europe, are then subsequently exported to the rest of the world where they are inflected within different cultural meanings. Colonialism is neither seen as integral to the construction of modern institutions nor, even within the diffusionist account given, seen as a mechanism of diffusion.

As I have argued in greater detail elsewhere, acknowledging the multiplicity of cultural forms of modernity does nothing to address the fundamental problems with the conceptualization of modernity itself (Bhambra 2007a). All that the idea of 'multiple modernities' does, as Dirlik argues, is 'contain challenges to modernity by conceding the possibility of culturally different ways of being modern' (Dirlik 2003, 285). There is no examination of what could be learnt from 'our' engagements with 'them' and how we might reconstruct our categories of understanding as a result of the new knowledge gained. Thus, while purporting to offer new ways of understanding the concept of modernity, theories of multiple modernities continue to rest on assumptions of an original modernity of the West which others adapt, domesticate, or tropicalize; the 'originality' of the West as having been constituted in colonial relations is not addressed. These issues will be picked up and developed further in the concluding section of the article. Before presenting the idea of 'connected histories' as a solution to these problems, I shall address the third recent development in historical sociology, which I suggest gives rise to 'disaggregated', 'decentred' histories.

#### *The cultural turn in US historical sociology*

The cultural turn in sociology, as in other disciplines, is predicated on the presumed necessary demise of grand narratives as well as a corresponding assertion of the importance and significance of the particular. The importance of discourse and representation is posited over that of adequate explanation, with explanation itself seen as part of the matrix of domination wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated by the social sciences. As Victoria E Bonnell and Lynn Hunt argue, for example, the cultural turn has led to the diminishing importance of causal explanation in favour of 'the demystification and deconstruction of power' (Bonnell and Hunt 1999a, 11), including the power intrinsic to knowledge claims. This turn,

then, owes much to the general crisis of the humanities, as embodied in the critique and politicization of knowledge as articulated in poststructuralist and postmodernist theories. It has also begun to permeate the area of historical sociology, at least in its north American variant, if not more generally.

Julia Adams, Elisabeth S Clemens and Ann Shola Orloff (2005a) draw together a variety of scholars who all engage, to a lesser or greater degree, with the project of critiquing and reconstructing 'the modernist categories that have informed historical sociology to date' from the perspective of a self-consciously defined 'third wave' of historical sociology (Adams et al 2005b, 3; see also Bonnell and Hunt 1999b). The editors argue that if the first wave of historical sociologists 'were obsessed with how their world (usually Europe) had become modern, many of their [second wave] successors froze the distinction between tradition and modernity and concentrated their efforts almost exclusively on "modern society"' (Adams et al 2005b, 4). The 'third wave' is defined, at least in part, by the idea that modernity needs to be historicized as an idea 'capturing people's changing ideas of what is or is not modern, and assessing the valences of emotion and moral judgment that these mappings assume in varieties of discourse and institutions' (Adams et al 2005b, 15). In this way, the contributors seek to maintain a focus on large-scale transformations while simultaneously examining the diverse, complex histories that are regarded as embodying and constituting those transformations.

Briefly, the move away from earlier questions concerning structural determinism and causal explanation to the general 'genealogical' project 'associated with the formation of historically evolving cultural categories and practices' in Adams et al (2005a) is reinforced by related developments that foreground agency. The foci of third wave historical sociology are identified by the editors as the following: '(1) institutionalism, (2) rational choice, (3) the cultural turn, (4) feminist challenges, and (5) the scholarship on colonialism and the racial formations of empire' (Adams et al 2005b, 32).<sup>6</sup> To the extent that these relate to questions of identity, identity is seen in the Foucauldian terms of the emergence and construction of the self-authorized individual subject. As such, they suggest that the silences of first and second wave historical sociology are to be probed in the context of understanding the emergence and historical conditions of particular identities in relation to the evolution of cultural categories and practices.

The structuralist sensibilities of second wave historical sociology and its associated problems are thus deemed to have been superseded by the focus on agency and cultural constructivism that now distinguishes third wave historical sociology. However, it is worth noting in passing that the categories remain unchanged and it is simply the emphasis that has shifted. While the turn to the particular is now located in the cultural realm, a decade earlier Abbott (1991) located similar particularistic tendencies within historical sociology, albeit in the social sphere. Abbott pointed specifically to links between history and sociology within 'substantive areas like demography, studies of the family, labour history, criminology, and so on' (1991, 222). While history and sociology might each have been enriched by movements across the boundaries at these particular sites, each discipline remained internally diverse and immune to any fundamental reorientation as a consequence of the engagement. What was created was less an overarching historical sociology, as a number of historical sociologies, with the implication that these might be mutually exclusive. In a similar vein, I would argue

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<sup>6</sup> In this way, 'the cultural turn' is argued to be one of a number of related, but sometimes opposed, developments which have each displaced the dominant (structuralist) approach to historical sociology. In what follows, I concentrate on those aspects specifically associated with the cultural turn.

third wave historical sociology is less a culturally inflected historical sociology than a form of historical cultural studies, which evades the difficult questions raised in its problematization of grand narratives through a descent into relativistic multiplicity. The failure to resolve the core questions associated with the grand narrative of (European) modernity has tended to devolve into a particularistic emphasis more attuned to the conventional modes of working in history. In this way, we are offered a diversity of disaggregated histories in which Eurocentric history is de-centred. However, this leaves the standard Eurocentric (macro) narrative intact in its own 'particular' domain and fails to make the interconnections among those histories a specific focus of attention.

### **From disaggregated to connected histories**

Two key related issues emerge from this consideration of developments within IR and within historical sociology more generally. The first is that 'culture' is posited as something that can accommodate (agent-produced) 'difference', while at the same time allowing for the necessity of 'material realities'. This construction allows the presentation of the position that there are common structural institutions, which emerged in Europe and then were culturally inflected as they were diffused around the globe. As I have shown, these arguments are associated with another issue — that of the structure-agency debate where certain structural processes are said to allow mediation by cultural differences and particularity. Neo-Weberian IR historical sociology, for example, points to the lack of recognition of state (and other) agency within classical IR theory and the replication of this failure to address agency in second wave historical sociology's turn to IR. US historical sociology, in turn, seeks to relocate 'agency' within its narratives of modernity by foregrounding the role of emotions and subjectivity. In a slightly different version of the debate, European civilizational historical sociology addresses the problem of structural determinism by acknowledging the plural cultural inflections of particular structural institutions. Here, resolving the tension between structure and agency is seen to be a solution to the problems presented by modernity rather than, as I propose, the expression and embodiment of those problems. All three contemporary forms of historical sociology, in some way posit culture (and the turn to culture) to address what are recognized as earlier deficiencies. In this way, an area of apparent convergence with postcolonial studies is also opened up, since the latter is frequently acknowledged as pointing to the necessity of recognizing cultural differences in other (non-European) parts of the world. The introduction of 'culture' into these debates, however, is not unproblematic. Even if one were to accept the diffusionist position associated with the multiple modernities position, for example, there is no address of the processes by way of which these institutions had been diffused, that is, processes of colonialism, imperialism and slavery. Indeed, most explanations of dissemination or diffusion of what are regarded as 'European' institutions elide the questions of colonialism and imperialism to a neutral process whereby European developments are said, as Peter Wagner puts it (2008, 43), not to have remained 'confined to the territory of Europe'; to have been simply spread around the world with little discussion of the processes by which such dissemination occurred. Further, the differences that are now beginning to be acknowledged in the recognition of culture (and cultural particularities) do not then call into question the pre-existing notions of 'material realities', nor do they provide the basis from which to reconstruct our understandings of those 'realities'.

One of the key omissions highlighted across all three variants of contemporary historical sociology concerns the exclusion of ‘the rest of the world’ from standard accounts of modernity and global processes. We can get some purchase on this by considering the historian Margaret C Jacob’s argument in the context of science studies (but with a more general applicability) that there is a need to think globally and comparatively in our research as ‘there is now a global conversation under way in almost every area of inquiry’ (Jacob 1999, 112). The necessity of including ‘others’ in our research today for Jacob is that while modern science was ‘[d]istinctively Western at its inception’, it no longer is in its pursuit or execution (Jacob 1999, 95). While acknowledging the contemporary interconnectedness of global processes as they relate to the development of science, she is still reluctant to think that interconnectedness back through history despite the extensive literature in this field that presents interconnectedness as the *prior* condition of those processes argued to be indicative of emergent modernity (for an overview, see Barkawi 2004; Hobson 2004; Bhambra 2007a). Similarly, Michael Mann claims that ‘it was in England that major scientific and technological breakthroughs were made in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ resulting in the only ‘spontaneous’, that is, freestanding breakthrough to industrial society. This is why, he suggests, ‘the term “European Miracle” remains appropriate’ (Mann 2006, 549). The reasons for the take-off in Europe are all attributed to developments within its geographical boundaries and there is little discussion within his account of the vital contribution of the slave trade, slavery, or colonial relations to these developments and processes.<sup>7</sup> Despite the existence of an extensive historical and sociological literature addressing these very connections, Mann continues to argue for the self-contained emergence and development of the industrial revolution with little acknowledgement of the wider global conditions from which this largely endogenous account is built (for an overview, see Washbrook 1997; Bhambra 2007a). As such, industrialization continues to be regarded as a European phenomenon subsequently diffused to the rest of the world rather than one which was global in its instantiation and which had differential impacts across the globe.

The trail laid by Weber in seeking to determine the causes of the ‘Rise of West’ and ‘the European miracle’ has been followed by subsequent theorists attempting to account for the miracle in Europe, that is, the initial emergence of (the institutions of) modernity there (see *Daedalus* 1998; 2000). Reflecting on whether this understanding makes his work ‘Eurocentric’, Mann argues that while he is ‘exploring what is uniquely European’ (2006, 550), he does not accept the claim regarding the general superiority of Europe as made by authors such as David Landes (1999).<sup>8</sup> While the explicit interpretive bias linking the emergence of the miracle of modernity in Europe to an innate sense of superiority may be rejected by contemporary scholars such as Jacob and Mann, the exceptionalism of the West

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<sup>7</sup> Despite the differences of emphasis and interpretation allowed to the various aspects of the ‘transition’ to capitalism, for example, the overarching singularity of the process described—the expansion globally from an initial core that is European—is agreed upon in both standard accounts of industrialization as well the different Marxist ones (see, for example, Wallerstein 1979; Wood 2002). Any logic of industrialism or capitalism that can be isolated has been demonstrated to have existed in other places and at other times and so can never be regarded as unique nor causal in itself. The question is not one of the efficiency of, for example, Indian manufacture, but the colonial squeeze applied to it in order to privilege British interests. The one aspect that is missing from hegemonic explanations, then, is that of the relationship between any industrializing impulse and the ability to use ‘force’ both in terms of establishing forms of ‘unfree’ labour as well as expanding the reach of the market for one’s goods. Colonialism was integral to both (for further details, see Bhambra 2007a; on the issue of ‘force’, see Barkawi 2004, 158).

<sup>8</sup> See Hobson (2007b) for a discussion of the ways in which even critical IR theory is implicated in particular Eurocentric constructions.

as a ‘factual’ matter — that is, as something that needs explanation *in its own terms* — remains firmly in place. Despite the extensive literature calling into question the sociological and historical boundaries of the ‘material realities’ which are argued to pre-exist the subsequent inflection by cultural processes located in other parts of the world, historical sociology has, for the most part, failed to address its core questions in light of the reconstruction of these ‘material realities’.

The comparative approach, which is advanced by all three responses to second wave historical sociology (as well as by second wave historical sociology itself), is established through a methodology of ‘ideal types’ where different civilizational trajectories are examined in relation with each other or, more usually, with Europe, or the West. The ideal type of Western modernity, derived from an endogenous examination of Western history, continues to serve as the ‘universal’ denominator against which to analyze and compare the developments and processes of, and in, other parts of the world. While ‘ideal types’ are said to refer to the ‘real’, they are posited as conceptual ‘truths’ abstracted from any particular history and/or cultural location. This abstraction is designed to render certain connections ‘visible’ and capable of being submitted to systematic examination. What is neglected is the extent to which that systematic examination reinforces the ‘invisibility’ of other connections that might have been the object of investigation. The cultural turn simply ‘discovers’ new particularities which are additive to the standard accounts. What is generally rendered invisible in most considerations of modernity are the colonial relationships which have comprised a significant aspect of modernity from its inception and have been no less systematic than the interconnections that have otherwise been represented within those accounts (see Bhambra 2007a; 2007b).

Colonialism, to the extent that it is addressed in the work of third wave historical sociologists, is seen as a phenomenon subsequent to modernity rather than constitutive of it. The various discourses of modernity, for example, from modernization theory to multiple modernities to entangled and alternative modernities, are variations on a theme where the theme is always the necessary priority of Europe, or the West, in any understanding of the world. ‘Others’ enter into the narrative only *after* modernity is established in Europe. The ‘ideal type’ of Western modernity is then supplemented by ‘ideal types’ of other modernities drawing upon the disaggregated histories advocated by theorists of the cultural turn. While the cultural turn, and its explicit focus on narrative, might have encouraged sociologists to reconsider the general historical ‘narrative’ of modernity implicit in the core categories of the discipline, it appears as if it has, rather, encouraged the proliferation of many, potentially mutually exclusive, narratives. What is rarely recognized is the way in which the ‘macro-narrative’ within which these particular narratives rest, remains unchanged.

Where the conceptual categories of historical sociology are dependent on a particular historical narrative, but have been argued to be timeless, or universal, in character, I suggest that they embody a form of unacknowledged Eurocentrism carried in the very methodology of comparative analysis. The evidential basis for this historical narrative within sociological discourse is reinforced in terms of the connections studied and those which are ignored, but this failure to consider ‘others’ is not a failure of any individual theorist, rather it is a consequence of the methodological tools utilized: ideal types and comparative analysis. Where ideal types have been constructed in relation to particular narratives, we now need a new narrative and method for global historical sociology; this is a narrative of interconnection and a methodology of ‘connected histories’ or, as Tarak Barkawi (2004) argues, ‘international interconnectedness’. The narratives of interconnection — coming

primarily from the turn to global and postcolonial histories — should thus pose significant problems for the macro assumptions of sociology, as well as provoking a reconsideration of the very organization of historical sociology.

In the area of security studies, Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey argue that the differentiation of the general (usually understood in terms of the ‘great powers’) from local factors privileged by area studies is problematic for generating adequate explanations of complex phenomenon. They argue instead for the recognition of the ‘mutually constitutive character of world politics’ through the analysis of ‘events, developments and processes in core and periphery together’ (Barkawi and Laffey 2006, 348, 349). As Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997) has similarly argued, the perceived ‘gap’ between general historical frameworks and the particular experiences they ignore can be overcome by addressing difference in the context of ‘connected histories’. The dominant sociological abstraction whereby categories are presented as universal while at the same time regarded as emanating from particular, discrete entities disguises two ‘truths’ which require address. First, that ‘ideal types’ are constructed in relation to a particular history and particular cultural engagements; and second, that in their construction, ideal types are abstracted from wider connections, which are themselves significant. In making an argument for ‘connected histories’, Subrahmanyam provides an innovative and productive way out of the bind that sees much historical sociology caught between an evolutionary universal scheme on the one hand, where differences are placed within particular hierarchies depending on the model being used; or a culturally relative exoticism, on the other, which reifies and privileges difference. Connected histories and connected sociologies, together with a recognition of ‘international interconnectedness’, allows for the deconstruction of dominant narratives at the same time as being open to different perspectives and seeks to reconcile them systematically both in terms of the reconstruction of theoretical categories and in the incorporation of new data and evidence. This is the promise of historical sociology — truly global and for our times — that it has so far failed to fulfil.

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