



University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

This paper is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please scroll down to view the document itself. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our policy information available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this paper please visit the publisher's website. Access to the published version may require a subscription.

Author(s): Gurminder K. Bhambra

Article Title: Sociology and Postcolonialism: Another 'Missing' Revolution?

Year of publication: 2007

Link to published version:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038038507080442>

Publisher statement: None

## **Sociology and Postcolonialism: Another ‘Missing’ Revolution?**

Gurminder K. Bhambra

Sociology is usually represented as having emerged alongside European modernity. The latter is frequently understood as sociology’s special object with sociology itself a distinctively modern form of explanation. The period of sociology’s disciplinary formation was also the heyday of European colonialism, yet the colonial relationship did not figure in the development of sociological understandings. While the recent emergence of postcolonialism appears to have initiated a reconsideration of understandings of modernity, with the development of theories of multiple modernities, I suggest, however, that this engagement is more an attempt at recuperating the transformative aspect of postcolonialism than engaging with its critiques. In setting out the challenge of postcolonialism to dominant sociological accounts, I will also address ‘missing feminist/ queer revolutions’, suggesting that by engaging with postcolonialism there is the potential to transform sociological understandings by opening up a dialogue beyond the simple pluralism of identity claims.

*Keywords:* feminism, identity, modernity, multiple modernities, postcolonialism, sociological theory

-----

The ‘modern’ idea of the social, as a number of commentators have argued, was delineated in the emergence of sociology itself and in relation to the combined upheavals of the political and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century (Nisbet,

1966; Hawthorn, 1976; Giddens, 1987; Heilbron, 1995). The new social theory that emerged was seen to correspond to these new social relations and the problems they brought forth. Modernity was framed as ‘the one great transformation in history’ and sociology was seen as the attempt to understand how this transformation had begun and the means of intervening in terms of how it would be completed (Badham, 1984). Sociology, thus, became ineluctably tied to the categories of modernity in its self-understanding.

These developments, however, were usually considered from a narrow, Eurocentric point of view where colonial and postcolonial encounters were written out of hegemonic accounts (Bhabha, 1994).<sup>1</sup> As Seidman remarks in his discussion of Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, sociology’s emergence coincided with the high point of Western imperialism, and yet, ‘the dynamics of empire were not incorporated into the basic categories, models of explanation, and narratives of social development of the classical sociologists’ (1996: 314). Outside the canonical ‘twin revolutions’, then, the potential contribution of other events (and the experiences of non-Western ‘others’) to the sociological paradigm has rarely been considered (see Calhoun, 1996; Chakrabarty 2000; Bhabha, 2007).

The neglect of colonial relations is, perhaps, particularly surprising in the case of British sociology, given Britain’s past as an imperial power and the fact that the institutionalization of British sociology in the post-war period – indicated by the 40 year anniversary of this journal – occurred in the context of a legacy of decolonization and the dissolution of the British Empire. The limited engagement between sociology and postcolonialism is primarily concerned, on the side of sociology, with ‘saving’ the universality of sociology’s core concepts in the light of a postcolonial (and other) politics of knowledge production (see McLennan, 2006; Delanty, 2006).<sup>2</sup> There is little engagement with what could be learnt, whether from the initial failure to address colonial relationships as integral to modernity, or from the subsequent neglect of decolonization and postcolonialism.

Sociology is also frequently represented as a discipline peculiarly associated with issues of order and integration, and with social movements calling that social order into question (Habermas, 1984). Initially, these were associated with problems of class, but in recent decades new social movements, such as feminism and the lesbian/ gay movement, have been particularly significant in sociological debates. However, scholars who have attempted to revise the discipline from the perspective of these new social movements have frequently come to believe that sociology is particularly (unusually, even, when compared to other disciplines) immune to influence.

This, in essence, is the argument made by those proposing revolutions in thought – for example, ‘feminist’ and ‘queer’ – which are ‘missing’ in sociology (Stacey and Thorne, 1985, 1996; Seidman, 1994; Stein and Plummer, 1994; Alway, 1995; Stacey, 2000; Stanley, 2000; Thistle, 2000). If these arguments are correct, then we should now be beginning to see discussions of the ‘missing postcolonial revolution’, since this is the most recent claim to have purchase in the humanities and other social sciences. That this is not the case, I shall argue, can be seen to be a consequence of the particular structure of sociology, a structure that explains both the perceived ‘missing revolutions’ associated with gender and sexuality *and the seemingly paradoxical absence* of a ‘missing revolution’ of postcolonialism.<sup>3</sup>

While gender, sexuality, and race have come to be regarded as significant aspects of experience that deserve sociological consideration, they are nonetheless organized in terms of pre-existing orderings which render them an adjunct to general sociological understandings. In other words, while there may be recognition of the claims of gender or sexuality or race within standard sociological approaches, there is also an attempt to protect core categories of analysis from any reconstruction that such recognition would entail. Typically, this occurs by positing a distinction between the ‘system’ and the ‘social’, where the system refers to that which is general and the social to that which is particular (see Holmwood, 2000).

Although my concern in this paper is with postcolonialism specifically, and not with the topic of ‘race’ with which it is often elided, I suggest that the way in which sociology

has acknowledged the importance of race, while ignoring the postcolonial critique, is itself significant and analogous to the treatment of gender in the light of feminist critiques. In this paper I will show how the treatment of gender and sexuality (and, by implication, race) has been accommodated to the distinction of the 'system' and the 'social', while postcolonial critique is less amenable. Because the core sociological categories of the system and the social (or the socio-cultural) are integral to sociological conceptions of modernity, which postcolonial critiques directly call into question, these have the capacity to effect what is 'missing' in other 'revolutions'.<sup>4</sup>

### Missing Revolutions and Modern Societies

Stacey and Thorne's (1985) paper outlining a 'missing feminist revolution' in sociology was fundamental both in galvanizing a specifically feminist critique of sociology and providing the structure for subsequent discussions regarding other absences, perhaps especially, sexuality (see Warner, 1993; Seidman, 1994, 1997; Stein and Plummer, 1994). The optimism that had existed among feminist academics in the 1970s – that the insights of a feminist perspective were in the process of revolutionizing disciplines and fields of inquiry across the academic enterprise – had, a decade later, not materialized to the degree expected (Stacey and Thorne, 1985). It was this gap between expectation and outcome that provided the context for their address. While gender could be 'readily incorporated as a variable or as a source of research topics', Stacey and Thorne suggested that little was done to advance theoretical reconstruction within sociology (1985: 310). The necessity of the latter move is that as sociologists only ever study a part of the world, theory is needed 'to help us situate the part in the whole' (1985: 311). Without theoretical reconstruction, they argued, issues of gender would remain 'ghettoized' and the conception of the 'whole' unaffected.

This argument was developed by a number of other scholars, among them, Joan Acker, who also argued that while there has been increasing research about women, both empirical and theoretical, this exists 'in relative isolation from a world of sociological theory that continues in a pre-feminist mode' (1992: 65; see also, Marshall 1994;

Stanley, 2000). Similarly, Joan Alway (1995) addressed the failure of sociological theorists to learn from feminist theory and suggested that by ignoring this body of thought 'sociological theory impoverishes itself and the discipline as a whole' (1995: 210). Feminist theory, she argued, does not only offer explanations of women's situations, but is also concerned with 'how the social world is structured and critiques of how that world has been studied and understood' (1995: 211). These understandings are part of a politics of knowledge production in which sociology is necessarily embroiled.

Building on the feminist critique, the challenge of queer theory has also been framed in terms of a 'missing sexual revolution'. Stein and Plummer (1994), for example, have argued that the absence of a 'sexual revolution' within sociology both consolidates the marginalization of 'sexual minorities' and weakens sociological explanations. Further, it is argued that the basis for this challenge rests in the exclusion of the sexual sphere from the classical sociologists' accounts of modernity and processes of modernization. Seidman, in particular, argues that, in their attempts 'to sketch the contours of modernity, the classical sociologists offered no accounts of the making of modern bodies and sexualities' (1994: 167).

Sexuality is not seen to be a separate sphere which could be covered by a 'sociology of homo/sexuality', rather, it is believed that sexuality is constitutive of the fabric of society and it is necessary to identify the ways in which it helps 'give shape to diverse institutions, practices and beliefs' (Epstein, 1994: 198). As it is not just personal life that is believed to be sexualized, but also 'politics and economics, and just about everything else under the sun' (Stein and Plummer, 1994: 182), the relation of queer theory to sociology involves addressing the absence of 'sexuality' in sociology's treatment of modernity, a critical relation which is directly complementary to the feminist argument concerning gender relations. However, within each position the argument that gender and sexuality are relevant to 'everything' has appeared to involve a series of empirical demonstrations of gendered and sexualized particularities.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the prior failure of sociologists adequately to address gender and sexuality has existed in stark contrast to the *presence* of women and homosexuals as

subjects of the *modern*, social world. As feminists and gay/ lesbian people began to make their presence felt within the academy, so issues of gender and sexuality began increasingly to be raised as necessary topics of investigation. While it could be argued that race has had a similar trajectory to that of gender and sexuality – at least in Britain and the USA where there have been longstanding minority communities (and indigenous groups in the case of the latter) – the historicization of race in the context of postcolonialism provides an alternative explanatory framework to that proposed to account for gender and sexuality. This is as a consequence of its association with a social movement (decolonization) that exists outside sociology as it is currently theorized and practised and, more importantly, a movement that is perceived to exist outside of, and distinct from, the processes associated with the ‘modern social’.

Since the remit of sociology has generally been understood to be ‘modern societies’ – that is, societies engaged in processes of modernization – then the ‘postcolonial’ is necessarily associated with ‘pre-modern’ societies, societies that have traditionally fallen to anthropology. For their part, feminism and the gay/ lesbian movement arose within modern Western societies and, in their critique of sociology, did not fundamentally contest the self-understanding of those societies as modern, just the exclusion of women and gays and lesbians from the dominant narratives of modernization (see Marshall, 1994; Seidman 1994). The particular identities articulated by these critiques, then, were more readily assimilated to the categories for understanding the modern social. The ‘postcolonial’, however, is not only missing from sociological understandings, but is also not recognized as present *within* the ‘modern social’ except as constituting the context of modernization for once colonized societies. Within sociology, then, the ‘postcolonial’ faces a double displacement – it can be seen as ‘missing’ from the structural framework and absent from the social framework (insofar as the social is categorized as the ‘modern social’).

## The 'Modern Social' and the Structure of Sociology

To pose the question of the 'modern social' is to return to sociology's perceived origins. Regardless of the different interpretations put forward by sociologists in terms of the nature of modernity, the timing of its emergence, or its continued character today, all agree, as I have argued, on the importance of modernity to the establishment of sociology as a discipline. Further, there is general agreement that in its attempt to understand modernity what was to be understood was a new form of society defined by rupture and difference – a temporal *rupture* that distinguished a traditional, agrarian past from the modern, industrial present; and a cultural *difference* between Europe and the rest of the world. Moreover, in its own self-understanding as a discipline, setting out these parameters was defined as a key task of modern sociology. This is highlighted in the work of the primary theorists of classical sociology – Durkheim, Weber, and Marx – who all express, in differing ways, the challenges faced by modern European society, as well as across the range of contemporary sociological positions from Parsons to Giddens and Habermas (for further discussion see Bhambra, 2007).

As argued by Habermas (1984), the emergence of sociology also has to be understood in the context of economics and politics establishing themselves as specialized sciences and, as a consequence, leaving sociology with the residue of problems that were no longer of concern to them. This disciplinary construction separates the sphere of the rational (system) – that is, economics, with its object being the market; and politics, with its object being administration and strategic action (or bureaucracy) – from the sphere of the non-rational (social). Where economics and politics became disciplines restricted to questions of economic equilibrium and rational choice, framed within an understanding of system integration, Habermas argues that sociology's focus was framed by the problems of social integration which were seen to have been brought about 'by the rise of the modern system of national states and by the differentiation of a market-regulated economy' (1984: 4).<sup>6</sup> In this perspective, sociology emerges as a particular form of reflection upon the sphere of the 'system', how it impinges on the social and, in turn, how it is impinged upon by the social.



Sociology, then, is integral to the understanding of the structural differentiation of modernity into distinct spheres and their interaction. In distinction from the objects of economics and politics, sociology's specific object of investigation is the social, understood as the particular and 'non-rational' that deviates from the 'rational'. At the same time, however, sociology is also associated with an overarching framework which locates these other disciplines in relation to itself. This is done by putting forward a *general* definition of the 'social' (alongside its meaning as the particular) that encompasses the two dimensions of system integration and social integration (as Habermas puts it).

With these distinctions in mind, questions of difference and identity have traditionally been taken up in terms of the theorization of the social in its more restricted sense. It is their absence from the sphere of the system and the general framework – which locates (or relates) the system and the social – that is highlighted as an area of concern by theorists arguing for the 'missing revolutions' of feminism and sexuality. For example, while gender has been recognized in recent decades as an important social variable there has been little revision of sociology in terms of any particular identity claim being made. It is the extent to which gender, or any other social variable, is taken simply to *inflect* the structural form of the system (see, for example, Sayer, 2000), as opposed to being understood as constitutive of that system, that has led scholars to put forward arguments for a 'missing feminist/ sexual revolution' in sociology.

Understanding the way in which sociology focuses on the social, as distinct from the system, and at the same time creates the general framework within which its relation to the 'system' is located, is of primary importance. It is the argument of this paper, that it is this understanding of sociology in terms of a system/ social division and its consequent relation to the idea of general theory that poses fundamental limitations for sociological projects (see Holmwood, 1996, 2001). Thus, the failure of feminism and queer theory – the 'missing revolutions' of gender and sexuality – to effect a transformation of the disciplinary categories of sociology rests on their reproduction of the very aspects of sociology that constitute the problem in the first place. Once the space of the social had been opened up by feminists and queer theorists it was easy to be

absorbed within the ‘diffuse complexity’ of the social in terms of addressing just another potential (non-rational) identity within it. Ditto race.

Although feminists and queer theorists have frequently sought to question the fundamental parameters of the discipline, the particular identities of gender and sexuality have, in fact, been assimilable to the standard sociological understandings of the social. In this way, the initial address by feminist and queer studies, challenging the absence of women and ‘the sexual self’ within sociology, could be absorbed by the discipline to the chagrin of those proclaiming a ‘missing revolution’. That this initial acknowledgement of particular identities did not have subsequent effect, in terms of reconsidering the very categories of the discipline, can be understood in terms of the failure of these bodies of thought to develop their critique beyond a concern with the particular. In the end, neither feminist nor queer theory has challenged the constitution of sociology in terms of its founding categories of modernity, but instead, has made an accommodation within it: an accommodation, I shall argue, that has the effect of reducing the social to identity and the challenge of gender and sexuality (and race) to *issues* of identity. The promise of postcolonialism is precisely to bring about a revolution in thought so far missing from other challenges.<sup>7</sup>

### Multiple Modernities as Cultural Difference

It is my contention that any ‘revolution’, or transformation, cannot come without a re-examination of the emergence of sociology as a discipline – both in terms of what it set up as its object of investigation and the general framework within which it located that object. It is precisely the examination of the latter, I suggest, that is missing in the arguments concerning the ‘missing feminist/ sexual revolutions’ in sociology. It is also missing in the recent attempts by theorists of multiple modernities to engage with postcolonialism and it is to their arguments that I now turn. While they acknowledge the basic substance of the postcolonial critique, namely a need to address the world beyond Europe and West, this engagement has no discernable impact upon pre-existing notions

of modernity, its development, nor the sociological categories associated with it (see Eisenstadt and Schluchter, 1998; Wittrock, 1998; Gaonkar, 2001).

The literature on multiple modernities, in a similar fashion to that of earlier debates on modernization theory, identifies modernity with ‘the momentous transformations of Western societies during the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and political change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’ (Wittrock, 1998: 19). As such, modernity is understood 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, 2000: 7). Understanding modernity in this way permits scholars to situate European modernity – seen in terms of a unique combination of the original institutional and cultural forms – as the originary modernity and, at the same time, allows for different cultural encodings that result in *multiple* modernities. This explains the paradox whereby theorists of multiple modernities dissociate themselves from Eurocentrism at the same time as embracing its core assumptions, namely, ‘the Enlightenment assumptions of the centrality of a Eurocentred type of modernity’ (Eisenstadt and Schluchter, 1998: 5).

The focus on different non-European civilizational trajectories is based on the assumption that, as Wittrock (1998) argues, these societies were not stagnant, traditional societies but were developing and transforming their own institutional and cultural contexts prior to the advent of Western modernity. However, it was not until the institutional patterns associated with Western modernity were *exported* to these other societies that multiple modernities were seen to emerge within them. Thus, it is believed to be the conjunction between the institutional patterns of the Western civilizational complex with the different cultural codes of other societies that creates various distinct modernities (for further discussion see Bhambra, 2007).

Theorists of multiple modernities, then, address modernity in terms of two aspects, its institutional framework and its cultural codes. This separation allows the former to be

understood as that which is common to the different varieties of modernity – and thus allows all types of modernity to be understood as such – while the latter, being the location of crucial antinomies, provides the basis for variability and thus the divergence that results in *multiple* modernities. By continuing to maintain a general framework within which particularities are located – and identifying the particularities with culture (or the social) and the experience of Europe with the general framework itself – theorists of multiple modernities have, in effect, neutered any challenge that a consideration of the postcolonial could have posed. As Dirlik argues, by identifying ‘multiplicity’ with the cultural aspect, ‘the idea of “multiple modernities” seeks to contain challenges to modernity’ – and, I would argue, to sociology – ‘by conceding the possibility of culturally different ways of being modern’ (2003: 285), but not contesting *what it is to be modern*.

In a similar way to scholars such as Sayer (2000) in the context of gender, then, theorists of multiple modernities seek to contain challenges to the dominant theoretical framework of sociology by not allowing ‘difference’ *to make a difference* to the original categories of modernity, that is, to the formal constituents of state and market held to be definitive of the modern, and thus of sociology’s core concepts. As with feminist and queer critiques of modernity, the idea of multiple modernities fulfils the function of identifying social or cultural variations in modernity as a consequence of which its core features are seen to be modulated in some way.<sup>8</sup> This allows space for difference but, at the same time, no difference is made to the categories of modernity that pre-existed the ‘discovery’ of these new modernities. The European experience is taken as foundational to these categories and other histories simply provide local colour. Theories of multiple modernities, then, can be seen as a reaction to the rise of postcolonialism and an attempt to contain it within those pre-existing categories as opposed to a positive engagement with it.

## Conclusion

The demise of colonialism as an explicit political formation has given rise to understandings of postcoloniality and, perhaps ironically, an increased recognition of the role of colonialism in the formation of modernity. In this context, then, it is insufficient to regard postcolonialism as simply implying new ways of understanding modernity's future(s), but, also, the contribution of postcolonialism to reconstructing modernity's past(s) needs to be acknowledged. To do the latter, however, requires a reconstruction of the forms of understanding – concepts, categories, and methods – within which past events were rendered insignificant. Pluralizing understandings of the social, to include the experiences and histories of other cultures and societies (in a similar manner to that of gender and sexuality), does no more than lay those experiences and histories in parallel to European ones and within a framework determined by the dominant experiences. What is necessary is to identify and explain the existing partiality with a view to the *reconstruction* of those theories – a reconstruction that, while it could be more adequate, could never be final.

As suggested, then, the simple pluralization of 'other' voices in fields previously dominated by particular voices can never be enough. The emergence of these new voices must call into question the structures of knowledge that had previously occluded such voices and, further, necessitates a reconsideration of previous theoretical categories. One way in which this can be done, I suggest, is by addressing difference in the context of what the historian, Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997) calls, *connected histories*. These are histories that do not derive from a singular standpoint, be that a universal standpoint, or the standpoint of any particular identity claimant. Instead, connected histories allow for the deconstruction of dominant narratives at the same time as being open to different perspectives and seeking to reconcile these perspectives systematically, both in the incorporation of new data and evidence and in terms of the reconstruction of theoretical categories.

The usual response to such an argument, however, has been to assert the necessity of the categories being challenged (Sayer, 2000; Delanty, 2006; McLennan, 2006). While, for

the most part, sociologists have given up a once-standard positivistic account of agreement on substance, there is still a wish for an ‘objective’, or ‘analytical’, agreement on concepts, concepts which are regarded as necessary for intelligibility in sociology. This is ironic, given that much of the rhetoric associated with claims to recognize and accommodate the voices of new social movements emphasizes a conception of sociological undertakings as dialogue (see Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1988). However, it is usually a dialogue in which the possibility of speaking is given in a framework that is itself *outside* a dialogue (or, as I have suggested here, might properly be considered to be a consequence of a dialogue that was European social thought structured through its exclusions of ‘others’). The problem with dominant sociological accounts, then, is that they want something outside dialogue which does not itself determine the substance of the dialogue. By locating gender, sexuality, and race within the domain of the ‘social’, these have become issues to be talked about, but they have not themselves been allowed to challenge the structures of dialogue that facilitate recognition and generate conceptual understandings of the world.

While feminism and queer studies have opened up interesting and productive avenues of thinking about gender and sexuality, to the extent that they have allowed these concepts to be regarded as constitutive of the social, merely inflecting processes of the system, they have remained, and reproduced, a way of thinking that undermines the force of the challenge posed. The postcolonial critique is not substantially different from that made by feminism and queer studies, but the nature of its location outside of the dominant understanding of the ‘modern social’ enables it to resist assimilation into the domain of the socio-cultural (despite the efforts of theorists of multiple modernities to so contain it) and open up discussion of general categories. The postcolonial revolution, then, points to what is missing in sociology: an engagement with difference that makes a difference to what was initially thought. While it may be seen as threatening by some, what postcolonial thought truly threatens is to provide a revolution in thinking that would make sociology genuinely dialogic by making its fundamental categories part of that dialogue.

## Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the editors of this special issue, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for their constructive comments on this paper. Thanks are also due to Mihnea Panu.

## References

- Acker, J. (1992) 'Making Gender Visible', in Ruth A Wallace (ed.) *Feminism and Sociological Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Alway, J. (1995) 'The Trouble with Gender: Tales of the Still-Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociological Theory', *Sociological Theory* 13(3): 209-228.
- Badham, R. (1984) 'The Sociology of Industrial and Post-Industrial Societies', *Current Sociology: The Journal of the International Sociological Association* 32(1): 1-141.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabra, G. K. (2007) *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Calhoun, C. (1996) 'Whose Classics? Which Readings? Interpretation and Cultural Difference in the Canonization of Sociological Theory', in Stephen P. Turner (ed.) *Social Theory and Sociology: The Classics and Beyond*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Delanty, G. (2006) 'Modernity and the Escape from Eurocentrism', in Gerard Delanty (ed.) *Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (2000) 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus: Multiple Modernities* 129(1): 1-29.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. and W. Schluchter (1998) 'Introduction: Paths to Early Modernities – A Comparative View', *Daedalus: Early Modernities* 127(3): 1-18.
- Epstein, S. (1994) 'A Queer Encounter: Sociology and the Study of Sexuality', *Sociological Theory* 12(2): 188-202.

- Gaonkar, D. P. (2001) 'On Alternative Modernities', in Dilip P. Gaonkar (ed.) *Alternative Modernities*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1987) *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Green, A. I. (2002) 'Gay but not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality', *Theory and Society* 31(4): 521-45.
- Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. London: Heinemann.
- Habermas, J. (1988) *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (1992) 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in S. Hall and B. Gieben (eds.) *Formations of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press/ Open University.
- Hall, S. (1996) 'When was "the Post-Colonial"? Thinking at the Limit', in I. Chambers and L. Curti (eds) *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. London: Routledge.
- Hawthorn, G. (1976) *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heilbron, J. (1995) *The Rise of Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Himes Jr., J. S. (1949) 'Development and Status of Sociology in Negro Colleges', *Journal of Educational Sociology* 23(1): 17-32.
- Holmwood, J. (1996) *Founding Sociology? Talcott Parsons and the Idea of General Theory*. Harlow: Longman.
- Holmwood, J. (2000) 'Sociology and its Audience(s): Changing Perceptions of Sociological Argument', in John Eldridge et al (eds) *For Sociology: Legacies and Prospects*. Durham: sociologypress.
- Holmwood, J. (2001) 'Gender and Critical Realism: A Critique of Sayer', *Sociology* 35(4): 947-65.
- Ladner, Joyce A. (ed.) (1973) *The Death of White Sociology*. New York: Random House.
- McLennan, G. (2006) *Sociological Cultural Studies: Reflexivity and Positivity in the Human Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.



- Marshall, B. L. (1994) *Engendering Modernity: Feminism, Social Theory and Social Change*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Nisbet, R. A. (1966) *The Sociological Tradition*. London: Heinemann.
- Parsons, T. (1937) *The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Said, E. W. (1978) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Sayer, A. (2000) 'System, Lifeworld and Gender: Associational versus Counterfactual Thinking', *Sociology* 34(4): 707-725.
- Seidman, S. (1994) 'Queer-ing Sociology, Sociologizing Queer Theory: An Introduction', *Sociological Theory* 12(2):166-77.
- Seidman, S. (1996) 'Empire and Knowledge: More Troubles, New Opportunities for Sociology', *Contemporary Sociology* 25(3): 313-316.
- Seidman, S. (1997) *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Singh, N. P. (2004) *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stacey, J. (2000) 'Is Academic Feminism an Oxymoron?', *Signs* 25(4): 1189-94.
- Stacey, J. and B. Thorne (1985) 'The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology', *Social Problems* 32(4): 301-316.
- Stacey, J. and B. Thorne (1996) 'Is Sociology Still Missing its Feminist Revolution?', *Perspectives: The ASA Theory Section Newsletter* 18(3): 1-3.
- Stanley, L. (2000) 'For Sociology, Gouldner's and Ours', John Eldridge et al (eds) *For Sociology: Legacies and Prospects*. Durham: sociologypress.
- Stein, A. and K. Plummer (1994) 'I Can't Even Think Straight': 'Queer Theory' and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology', *Sociological Theory* 12(2): 178-187.
- Subrahmanyam, S. (1997) 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies* 31(3): 735-62.
- Thapar, R. (1992) *Interpreting Early India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Thistle, S. (2000) 'The Trouble with Modernity: Gender and the Remaking of Social Theory', *Sociological Theory* 18(2): 275-88.

Warner, M. (1993) 'Introduction' in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Wittrock, B. (1998) 'Early Modernities: Varieties and Transitions', *Daedalus: Early Modernities* summer 127(3): 19-40.

---

<sup>1</sup> While Marx did refer to colonial relationships, his analysis of them made no difference to the dynamic of progressive change that he set out, reinforcing the more standard sociological view of a Eurocentric modernity accompanied by a theory of Oriental Despotism and stagnant Asian societies (see Thapar, 1992; Chakrabarty, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Seidman's (1996) review of Edward W. Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, for example, was published almost twenty years after its initial publication and appears to be the only review of this seminal book in a Western sociology journal.

<sup>3</sup> Significantly, the civil rights movement in the US, which was contemporaneous with feminist and queer movements, has not generated discussion in terms of a 'missing revolution' of race within sociology. The longstanding existence of separate black higher educational institutions in the US, where sociology was an early part of the curriculum and was inextricably linked with race, occurred alongside a separate consideration of race as a social problem within predominantly white institutions (see Himes, 1949; Singh, 2004). The lack of dialogue between them allowed both a consideration of race that developed into various forms of Race and Ethnic Studies, and the positing of race as a problem within mainstream white sociology, but it did not lead to race being analyzed as constitutive of sociology. Although one can find some contributions making the latter claim (see the edited volume by Ladner, 1973) it was not one that was taken up systematically within sociology as a whole. As such, the relationship of sociology to race can be seen to be one of an 'unfinished' revolution and is one that requires further address by sociologists. While I am unable to do this here, I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for highlighting this issue.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that there are no powerful critiques available of the sort that I am advocating. Sociologists such as Stuart Hall (1992, 1996) and Paul Gilroy (1993) have been exemplary in addressing aspects of the relationship between postcolonialism and sociology and are, therefore, largely exempt from the critique that I put forward which concerns the *reception* of postcolonial ideas more generally within the sociological mainstream. My argument is that mainstream sociology insulates itself from thoroughgoing reconstruction in light of the critical perspectives presented by feminism, queer theory, and postcolonialism by distinguishing the system and the social (or the structural and the cultural) and assigning the critical position to that of the particular. While Hall and Gilroy are resistant to this kind of assimilation of critical ideas, their sympathy to Marxist analysis and, in particular, a form of Marxist

---

analysis that itself distinguishes the structural and cultural, facilitates the rendering of postcolonial criticism as largely a cultural matter.

<sup>5</sup> See Sayer (2000) for a critique of feminism in these terms and Green (2002)'s critique of queer studies for its neglect of the social.

<sup>6</sup> Giddens, for his part, argues that 'sociology involves a disciplinary concentration upon those institutions and modes of life brought into being by 'modernity' – that massive set of social changes emanating first of all from Europe (and which today have become global in scope) creating modern social institutions' (1987: 25). This also echoes Parsons's earlier claim for sociology to be seen as emerging as a distinct discipline in terms of its association 'with factors which emerge in 'economics' ... but lie outside its central categories' (Parsons, 1937; for discussion, see Holmwood, 1996: 33).

<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that feminists, queer theorists, and race scholars have not contributed substantially to sociology, but rather to make the argument that these contributions, to the extent that they do not challenge the accepted structure of sociology, are liable to assimilation within its dominant categories thereby diminishing the force of any critique. As such, the missing revolution that is being referred to, is that relating to the structure of the discipline itself and not the engagement of scholars seeking to make a difference to it.

<sup>8</sup> In a similar way, Marshall's (1994) feminist critique of modernity sought to retrieve women's experiences from the margins of theory and locate them in the centre of such understandings, but her analysis does not go much beyond adding the category of gender to traditionally conceived categories of modernity with little discussion of the difference such a move would make to the original categories themselves.