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## The untimely historical sociologist

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## **‘The Untimely Historical Sociologist’**

Forum on Andrew Linklater, *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States System*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the historical sociology that informs Andrew Linklater's *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States-System*. On the sociological side, it critically assesses Linklater's use of Elias and Wight, arguing that his 'higher level synthesis' is internally incompatible. On the historical side, the article argues that the occlusion of the transnational interactions that, in great measure, drive historical development means that Linklater's analysis is inadequate for its stated purpose: to chart the development of civilising processes within the Western states-system.

### **Western civilisation?**

When asked by a reporter what he thought of Western civilization, Mahatma Gandhi is said to have replied that 'it would be a good idea'. Apocryphal or not, Gandhi's remark speaks to the 'dark side' of Western civilisation: its histories of imperialism and colonialism, authoritarianism and racism, genocide and mass warfare. In the contemporary world, these histories are under close scrutiny, both in the academy and the wider world. The former can be seen in the array of texts, from global history to post-colonial scholarship, which examines the interrelationship between the 'rise of the West' and the 'decline of the Rest'.<sup>1</sup> The latter can be seen in the malaise that infuses Western international order, whether this is found in its forums of governance, deepening levels of inequality, or in increasingly polarised debates over immigration, race, and sexuality. A transnational movement of anti-establishment groups, present in much of Europe and North America, is but one barometer of a general atmosphere of discontent that permeates Western international order.

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<sup>1</sup> No footnote can do justice to these prolific fields of activity. I therefore highlight just one work that I take to be exemplary of each: on global history, see C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2004); on post-colonial scholarship, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

It is a brave individual who marches into this landscape arguing that the contemporary Western states-system is a singularly civilised order, the inheritor of advances made over several centuries. Yet this is the path chosen by Andrew Linklater. His trilogy of interventions into the shape and trajectory of modern international order (two books published; one to come) is nothing if not 'untimely' in that it cuts against the grain of trends within contemporary world politics, while simultaneously speaking to an earlier tradition of scholarship, one associated with Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler, as well as the two figures on which Linklater most heavily draws: Norbert Elias and Martin Wight. Much of this untimeliness is welcome – Linklater has written a big book (literally as well as figuratively), one that seeks to capture the principal contours of Western historical development from ancient Greece to the present day. It is that most unfashionable of contemporary academic texts: a grand narrative, so grand as to be bordering on the monumental in its scale and ambition. The scholarship that informs *Violence and Civilisation* is deep and erudite, and its argument is arresting. It is a book that many will – and should – engage.

My goal in this article is to examine the historical sociology that informs *Violence and Civilisation* – in other words, to assess the form and content of Linklater's argument about historical development. I do so in three sections. First, I evaluate the conceptual, analytical and theoretical apparatus on which Linklater's argument rests, paying particular attention to his use of Elias and Wight. My argument is that Linklater's reliance on Elias and Wight generates a number of problems, ranging from the former's concern with fundamental human drives to the latter's view of culture as unitary and bounded. At the same time, Linklater's fusion of Elias and Wight is unsteady – where the former is relational, the latter is substantialist. The result is an unstable theoretical scaffolding. The second section explores the historical arguments presented in the book, particularly that concerning the 'when', 'where' and 'how' of modern international order. On the 'when': it was not 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe but the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'global transformation' that fuelled major changes to the character of violence. On the 'where': these changes emerged not from dynamics internal to Europe, but from transboundary interactions. And on the 'how': these developments were caused by a range of dynamics, particularly capitalism, which receive either little or no attention in Linklater's book. If

the first part of the article questions the theoretical anchors upon which *Violence and Civilisation* rests, the second section queries the book's historical interpretation. A brief conclusion reflects on what should be expected from the next volume of Linklater's 'untimely' work.

### **Theorising violence and civilisation**

The central aim of *Violence and Civilisation* is to 'analyse the extent to which agreed standards of self-restraint that were linked with shared conceptions of civility or civilisation have shaped the development of Western states-systems'.<sup>2</sup> This is followed by a supplementary, if related, question: 'what is distinctive about "international ethics" in the modern period?'<sup>3</sup> As with his previous work on harm,<sup>4</sup> Linklater seeks to answer these questions through a 'higher level synthesis' that blends insights from the work of Norbert Elias and Martin Wight.<sup>5</sup> From Elias comes the book's principal motif: the interplay between civilising ('integrative') and decivilising ('disintegrative') processes; from Wight a focus on how these dynamics take place in international states-systems.<sup>6</sup>

Linklater argues that there has been a decline in interpersonal violence – and a concomitant rise in levels of civility – over several centuries. The key concepts used to track this decline are: 'we-feeling', by which Linklater means collective attachment to a 'survival unit' (such as the state); 'we-I balance', understood as the extent to which individual demands are recognised by groups; and 'social standards of self-restraint', which captures processes ranging from 'conscience formation' to 'collective learning'.<sup>7</sup> For Linklater, contemporary Western societies have a stronger sense of 'we-feeling' than previous states-systems, a superior 'we-I' balance, and a higher 'standard of self-restraint'. The 'preconditions' for this ethical judiciousness are multiple, ranging from

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Linklater, *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Linklater, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed account of Linklater's synthesis of Elias and Wight can be found in Linklater (2011), especially chapter 6.

<sup>7</sup> Linklater (2016), pp. 5, 8, 12.

increasing levels of interdependence to a heightened aversion to pain and suffering.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the contemporary states-system is home to two types of ‘harm convention’: ‘international harm conventions’, which preserve order between states; and ‘cosmopolitan harm conventions’, which protect individuals and non-state entities.<sup>9</sup> Examples of the former include practices of non-intervention; examples of the latter range from the establishment of a global human rights regime to the development of rules surrounding warfare. Linklater tracks the progress of ethical restraints on violence from the *relatively* unfettered environment of the Hellenic states-system to the *relative* ‘taming’ of unnecessary suffering in the contemporary world.<sup>10</sup>

There are several things to say about the conceptual, analytical and theoretical apparatus that Linklater constructs. First, it is not clear that the ‘higher level synthesis’ between Elias and Wight is robust. As Linklater notes, Elias is a processual sociologist – his principle contribution is the notion of ‘figuration’, a vehicle for moving beyond the ‘conceptual polarization’ that bifurcates individuals and societies, and the dividing lines between an ‘inner self’ and the ‘outside world’.<sup>11</sup> For Elias, social orders are made up of multiple, overlapping figurations, by which he means networks of relationships, from families to states. Elias sees social orders as made up of ‘people among other people’, while individuals are ‘one among others’.<sup>12</sup> Figurations, Elias argues, are drawn both from these relationships (or ‘interdependencies’) and ‘human personality structures’: their ‘affect controls’, psychological attachments, forms of recognition, capacities to feel shame, guilt, pity, compassion, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Other factors, ranging from the role of ‘monopolies of power’ to ‘incentives for cooperation’, drop in and out of the narrative, but are not theorized consistently. I come back to this point in the following section.

<sup>9</sup> Linklater (2016), p. xii.

<sup>10</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 12. The qualifications are important. Linklater presents a nuanced narrative in which the relationship between civilising and decivilising processes is dynamic, and levels of civility do not increase in a straightforward fashion. I return to this point below.

<sup>11</sup> Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), p. 122. For a more recent statement of processual sociology, see: Andrew Abbott, *Processual Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Elias, *What is Sociology* (1978), pp. 121-2.

<sup>13</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* (New York: Urizen, 1978), p. 223.

This is a long way from Wight's apparatus, which is concerned with the ways in which a common culture is a requirement of an enduring states-system. Wight states this point baldly: 'a state system presupposes a common culture'.<sup>14</sup> Far from a figurational conceptualisation of interacting relationships, Wight's international orders contain fixed attributes. Chief amongst these fixed attributes is culture, which Wight sees as bounded and unitary.<sup>15</sup> In other words, while Elias's theoretical commitments are 'relational', Wight's are 'substantialist'.<sup>16</sup> The former holds that social formations are contextually bound, historically situated configurations of events and experiences. In keeping with this orientation, Elias's figurations are not static entities with timeless properties, but 'on the move' – they are 'entities-in-motion' that are made in and through time.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Wight's position is substantialist. He posits coherent and durable entities (states systems) that possess elemental properties (cultural unity). Far from seeing these characteristics, or indeed international relations in general, as contextual, Wight argues that world politics is a 'realm of recurrence and repetition' in which progress is, at best, limited.<sup>18</sup> In Wight's world, history is circular rather than, as for Elias, directional, or at least dynamic.<sup>19</sup> The meta-commitments deployed by Elias and Wight could scarcely be more different: where the former is relational, the latter is substantialist; where the former sees history as on the move, the latter sees it as repetitive; and where the former is concerned with time and place specificity, the latter

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, 'Cultural Diversity and International Order', *International Organization* 71:4 (2017), In Press. For Wight, a common culture is not the only requirement of a states-system – other components range from the recognition of reciprocal sovereignty to the holding of regular congresses. See Wight (1977), pp. 29-33. I focus on the centrality of culture to states-systems because it is the feature that Linklater and Wight spend most time on.

<sup>16</sup> On the distinction between relational and substantialist thinking, see: Mustafa Emirbayer, 'Manifesto for a Relational Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology* 103:2 (1997): 281-317. For an application to IR, see: Patrick Jackson and Daniel Nexon, 'Relations Before States', *European Journal of International Relations* 5:3 (1999), pp. 291-332.

<sup>17</sup> On 'entities in motion', see: Julian Go and George Lawson, 'For a Global Historical Sociology', in Julian Go and George Lawson (eds), *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1-34.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Wight, 'Why is There No International Theory?', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> The extent to which Elias saw history as directional (in the sense of being progressive) is contested. See Linklater (2011), p. 162. And more generally: Stephen Menell *et al* (eds), *On the Process of Civilisation* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2012).

sees states-systems as transhistorical entities that contain timeless properties. Any synthesis that joins these meta-commitments must address these incompatibilities.

If the synthesis between Elias and Wight is uncertain, so too is the way in which Linklater adopts aspects of their individual theoretical apparatuses. The problems with Elias start with issues of scalability. As Linklater notes,<sup>20</sup> Elias made few attempts to discuss civilising processes beyond state borders. Rather, his interest was in how distinct state-society figurations generated distinct understandings of civility – his contribution sits firmly within the tradition of comparative rather than international historical sociology. Similarly, Elias assumes that the borders of the nation-state both map onto the boundaries of the nation-state and form a natural unit of analysis.<sup>21</sup> This ‘methodological nationalism’ means that Elias does not – indeed, cannot – *theorise*, even if he can – and does – *describe*, the interactions across borders that play a crucial role in civilising processes: the emulation of rituals, including manners, from more ‘advanced’ peoples, the role of transboundary conflict in developing ideas of just conduct, the fusions of cosmologies that regulate behaviour, the role of international non-governmental organisations in framing ideas of empathy, pity, shame, and more.<sup>22</sup> I return to this point below.

The second concern with Elias – and, as a result, with Linklater – is the attempt to extract explanatory content from ‘psychogenetic’ origins: ‘emotional control’, ‘standards of self-restraint’, ‘attitudes to pain and suffering’, and so on.<sup>23</sup> As noted above, for Linklater, there has been a shift from the ‘aggressive impulses’ that marked historical states-systems in the West to the impersonal, ‘mechanized struggle’ of the modern world.<sup>24</sup> This point is well made. There is something novel about attitudes and practices of violence in much of the contemporary West. Violence is no longer primarily experienced by many Western publics as immediate, intentional and physical, but often hidden from public view by the rise of states and other collective bodies, which administer and bureaucratise violence through systems of ‘coercive control’:

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<sup>20</sup> Linklater (2016), especially chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> Elias, *The Civilising Process* (1978).

<sup>22</sup> For a critique of ‘methodological nationalism’, see Go and Lawson (2017).

<sup>23</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> Linklater (2016), pp. 187, 307. The term ‘mechanized struggle’ is from Elias.

surveillance, policing, incarceration, and more.<sup>25</sup> This, in turn, reflects a changing understanding of violence – interpersonal, corporeal violence has been widely delegitimised. Non-lethal weapons programmes focus on injuring, depriving, and tormenting, but not killing, their enemies.<sup>26</sup> ‘Surgical strikes’ seek to sanitise death and minimise civilian casualties. Huge anti-war marches speak to far-reaching normative debates about the appropriate use of violence. Because of the detachment – what Linklater calls ‘critical self-distancing’ – of many people from immediate interpersonal violence in the contemporary West, a set of ethical concerns around the practice of violence can be said to have emerged.<sup>27</sup>

Linklater, therefore, is onto something. But it is not clear that he is onto this ‘something’ for the right reasons. In particular, claims about international ethics are difficult to link to psychogenetic influences. Leaving aside claims about who is the ‘we’ in concepts such as the ‘we-I’ balance, much interpersonal conflict takes place *within* ‘we’ groups, such as families. The same is true of ‘we’ groups internationally, whether these groups are associated with religions (Sunni and Shia, Catholic and Protestant), regions (consider Europe’s many centuries of inter-state wars), or political ideologies (Marxist and Anarchist). While it is clear that core attachments and capabilities play a role in how *individuals* perceive and act in the world, it is less clear that these factors significantly affect international processes. After all, human beings are, in comparison to other animals, not well suited to violence – children are defenceless for many years, while adults do not possess the teeth, claws, jaws, horns, venom, speed, smell or eyesight of many other animals.<sup>28</sup> Rather than being ‘wired for violence’,<sup>29</sup> it may be that the relative weakness of human’s capacity for violence has prompted their development in other spheres, particularly cognition. As with other micro-dynamics, psychogenetic factors leave an indeterminate legacy at higher levels of social aggregation.

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<sup>25</sup> Siniša Malešević, *The Rise of Organised Brutality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 311-312.

<sup>26</sup> Malešević (2017), p. 310.

<sup>27</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 280.

<sup>28</sup> Malešević (2017), p. 72.

<sup>29</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. 483.



At the same time, it is not clear that, even with recent declines in interpersonal violence,<sup>30</sup> the 'self-restraint' of bureaucratic violence should be preferred to the more direct impulses of pre-modern 'warriors'. The 'weapons lethality index' ranks a longbow at 34, an 18<sup>th</sup> century flintlock musket at 150, a First World War rifle at 13,000, and a Second World War machine gun at 68,000.<sup>31</sup> On this scale, an 18<sup>th</sup> century 12 pounder field gun ranks 4,000, a modern howitzer 3,500,000, a heavy bomber with conventional weapons 210,000,000, and an ICBM with a one megaton nuclear warhead 210,000,000,000. As interpersonal violence has declined in some parts of the world, weapons have become increasingly destructive. And the self-distancing that accompanies these weapons has generated a new rationality of killing, from the air campaigns against major cities in World War Two to contemporary drone warfare, robotics and precision targeting.

At times, as Linklater notes, the destructive power of modern weapons has led to their containment – agreements over chemical, biological and nuclear weapons are cases in point.<sup>32</sup> But the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the bloodiest in human history – its casualties from war and associated processes can be measured in the hundreds of millions.<sup>33</sup> It was also the century that saw a major increase in the speed of killing. In the Battle of the Somme during World War One, over 50,000 British soldiers lost their lives in a single day. By the latter stages of World War Two, the Nazi killing machine at Auschwitz had the capacity to gas and cremate over 20,000 Jews every day.<sup>34</sup> In the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, up to one million Rwandans were killed in a genocide that lasted only 100 days. Today's weapons of mass destruction make the spectre of a global 'elimination contest' immediate – the organisational and technological capacity for violence has never been greater.<sup>35</sup> It is worth remembering that the two largest employers in the world are the

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<sup>30</sup> An attempt to provide empirical ballast for this claim can be found in Pinker (2011). For an argument that declining levels of violence are much more recent and limited than Pinker suggests, see: Malešević (2017), pp. 132-141.

<sup>31</sup> Julian Perry Robinson, 'The Neutron Bomb and Conventional Weapons of Mass Destruction', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 34:March (1978): pp. 42-45.

<sup>32</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 459

<sup>33</sup> Malešević (2017), pp. 6, 127.

<sup>34</sup> Malešević (2017), pp. 128-129.

<sup>35</sup> Linklater uses the term 'elimination contest' frequently. It is one he borrows from Elias.

US Defence Department and the Chinese People's Liberation Army.<sup>36</sup> The threat of global annihilation is ever present, if made distant from everyday life through bureaucratic rationality, technologies of war, and a detachment between operator and target. I come back to this point in the following section.

Similarly, a 'pacified' environment is not one that necessarily denotes civilising processes.<sup>37</sup> Elias saw stable monopolies of power as central to security and, thereby, to civilising processes. Linklater extends this point to the international realm. Given that civilising processes might, at times, require contestation (in the form of just war and just revolt, or through the actions of social movements), it is not clear how much stability is required for there to be a balance between security and civilisational processes. It is similarly unclear what happens when security trumps civilising processes. Very often, stability comes at a price. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, authoritarian regimes from apartheid South Africa to the Khmer Rouge used their monopolies of force to commit egregious acts of violence. Such policies had their roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century 'invasions of social life', in which states sought to extend their control over populations through a range of measures, ranging from the advent of policing as a formal institution to regular censuses.<sup>38</sup> The despotic capabilities of states grew commensurately with these encroachments. In Britain, those out of work were forced into workhouses, where they were kept in abject conditions and paid a pittance for their labour. Orphanages and prisons became additional sources of bonded labour. Disciplinary forms of power, from surveillance to incarceration, have undergone a major expansion in recent decades. All around the world, there has been a *coercive* pacification of domestic publics – not for nothing did Charles Tilly call modern states 'protection rackets'.<sup>39</sup> These histories have little place in Linklater's account. Yet it is not possible to tell a story of power monopolies without them.

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<sup>36</sup> Malešević (2017), p. 139.

<sup>37</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, Tilly, 1990), p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Tilly, 'War Making and State Making as Organized Crime' in Peter Evans *et al* (eds), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169-191.

The third issue with the conceptual and analytical tools that Linklater appropriates from Elias is the latter's focus on court society as the repository of civility.<sup>40</sup> For Elias, civility is rooted in the discourses, practices and sociability of court society.<sup>41</sup> So it is for Linklater – in *Violence and Civilisation*, psychogenetic changes take place within a 'ruling strata' before being internalised by the wider population.<sup>42</sup> This view limits historical agency to elite, white, European men. It is not a convincing argument. If the supposed source for this agency lies in the patrimonial orders that were common features of the Western states system, it ignores the central role played by elite women in sustaining these orders.<sup>43</sup> Beyond elites, it omits the ways in which publics have played a central role in civilising processes, whether through radical action or by initiating reform processes. History does not flow in one direction, whether from men to women, or from elites to mass publics.

Nor does history flow from 'the West' to 'the Rest'. Linklater largely replicates early English School accounts of the expansion of international society,<sup>44</sup> arguing that the Western states-system diffused from Europe to other parts of the world. But history presents a much messier picture of incorporation and adaptation.<sup>45</sup> In their interactions with European polities, the Ottomans and Chinese thought of themselves as the culturally and politically superior party. In Africa and the Americas, Europeans engaged in diplomacy and made treaties with local peoples, chiefdoms and kingdoms. When they moved into the Indian Ocean, the Europeans found a well-developed international society in place.<sup>46</sup> Grotius' 17<sup>th</sup> century argument that Europeans should accept the principle that the high seas constituted international territory was based on the

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<sup>40</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Elias, *Civilising Process* (1978); Elias (1985).

<sup>42</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 119.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Adams, *The Familial State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds) *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). Also see Linklater (2011), p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2009); Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Paul MacDonald, *Networks of Domination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Andrew Phillips and Jason Sharman, *Explaining Durable Diversity in International Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Phillips and Sharman (2015).

precedent provided by the Indian Ocean states-system,<sup>47</sup> just as trade between Britain and India helped to form Adam Smith's ideas about free trade,<sup>48</sup> and utilitarian thought was forged in the imperial encounters between Britain and the sub-continent.<sup>49</sup> Any narrative of Western civilizational resources diffusing outwards misses the back-and-forth of these interactions, and the ways in which they spurred historical development. History is not unidirectional, but an interactive series of events and experiences that generate multilinear developmental pathways.<sup>50</sup>

The problems with Linklater's use of Wight are also multiple, if stemming from a common cause: the requirement that international orders contain a high degree of cultural unity. Linklater accepts Wight's notion that states-systems can be understood as a 'bounded cultural region'.<sup>51</sup> However, culture is not a coherent whole that is unified and bounded, but a diverse web of symbols and rituals that are negotiated, contested and subject to diverse interpretations.<sup>52</sup> International orders regulate cultural diversity by authorising forms of cultural difference and tying these to political units: states and religion, empires and civilisation, etc.<sup>53</sup> In other words, cultural heterogeneity is not the mark of an *unsuccessful* international order, but a *requirement* of international order. Given this, it is no surprise that many of the most durable historical international orders have been culturally plural and geographically dispersed. The British imperial web, for example, encompassed China, Argentina, Fiji, Australia, Afghanistan, India, Egypt, Nigeria, Cyprus and Ireland. This scattered geography was not maintained through the enforcement of cultural similitude, but through symbolic amalgams that regulated unequal recognition. The legal structure of the British Empire was a layered, 'lumpy'

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<sup>47</sup> C.H. Alexandrowicz, C.H., *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East Indies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

<sup>48</sup> Emily Erikson, 'The Global Origins of Economic Theory', in Julian Go and George Lawson (eds), *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 182–198.

<sup>49</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Justin Rosenberg, 'Why is there No International Historical Sociology', *European Journal of International Relations* 12:3 (2006): 307-340.

<sup>51</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 468.

<sup>52</sup> Reus-Smit (2017). Also see: Ann Swidler, 'Culture in Action', *American Sociological Review* 51:2 (1986): 273-286.

<sup>53</sup> Reus-Smit (2017).

fusion of imperial and indigenous.<sup>54</sup> The penal code of the Raj blended British and Indian jurisprudence, and it was this blend that was exported to many of Britain's imperial territories in South East Asia and East Africa.<sup>55</sup> Where British imperialism was successful, it relied on establishing close partnerships with local power brokers: the Straits Chinese, the Krio of West Africa, the 'teak-wallahs' of Burma, the Chettiar of South India, and others.<sup>56</sup>

Although some Victorians favoured an Anglo-American alliance premised on cultural homogeneity, largely as a vehicle for maintaining white supremacy,<sup>57</sup> it was not shared culture, but a collective belief that it paid to make the system work (what Adam Watson calls '*raison de système*') that served as the building block of modern international order.<sup>58</sup> The development of human rights, something central to Linklater's argument, serves as an illustration. Contrary to Linklater's claims, the contemporary human rights regime is not a Western invention that has been subsequently exported around the world, but the product of negotiations between northern and southern states in which histories of race and decolonisation have played leading roles.<sup>59</sup> In the contemporary world, it is the pluralist promise of the G20 and related institutions, not ideas such as the 'Concert of Democracies', a notion emanating from a commitment to Western cultural homogeneity, which provide the surest prospects of generating enduring order.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 19, 32.

<sup>56</sup> John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Duncan Bell, 'The Project for a New Anglo Century: Race, Space and Global Order', in Peter Katzenstein (ed), *Anglo-America and Its Discontents* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 33-56.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Steven L.G. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Barry Buzan and George Lawson, 'Capitalism and the Emergent World Order', *International Affairs*, 90:1 (2014): 71-91. At one point, Linklater (2016, p. 435) refers to contemporary global order as 'multicultural'. However, multiculturalism rests on a foundation of bounded, co-existing cultural units rather than a notion of culture as a messy amalgam of diverse influences.

## The 'when', 'where' and 'how' of modern international order

If the theoretical foundations of *Violence and Civilisation* are insecure, so too are the book's historical arguments. Implicit in Linklater's historical narrative are three commitments. The first is temporal: that there is a disjuncture between 'modern' and 'pre-modern' eras when it comes to levels of civility and violence. The second is spatial: that there is something distinctive about *Western* states-systems and their development of harm conventions. The third is causal: that the primary dynamic that lies behind decreasing levels of interpersonal violence is self-restraint and its relationship to broader social forces, particularly increasing levels of interdependence. All three assumptions are questionable.

### *When*

For Linklater, each states system varies in its civility quotient. In the Hellenic states-system, despite relatively low civility metrics, hoplites practiced 'aristocratic principles of restraint'.<sup>61</sup> In the contemporary world, despite high levels of we-feeling and standards of self-restraint, civilising processes represent an 'unfinished transition'.<sup>62</sup> Notwithstanding these qualifications, *Violence and Civilisation* contains a central narrative in which the Western states-systems has travelled from a predominantly decivilised past to a predominantly civilised present, a journey, as Linklater puts it, from 'taming the warriors' to 'taming the imperialists' and, more recently, 'taming the sovereigns'.<sup>63</sup> Linklater argues, following Wight and Elias, that the key rupture within the 'long curve of European social and political development' took place in the fifteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Although, for Linklater, there is an initial break around 1300CE from disintegrated, decivilising societies to interconnected polities that begin to restrain violence,<sup>65</sup> it is Renaissance Italy that witnessed 'a revolution in the history of the Western states-system that would alter the whole course of human development'.

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<sup>61</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Linklater (2016), pp. 440, 447.

<sup>63</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 305.

<sup>64</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 188. For Wight, the key event is the Council of Constance, 1414-18; for Elias it is the gradual shift to individual self-control represented by the spread of ideas such as politesse, civilité and courtoisie. See: Wight (1977), p. 151; Elias, *Civilising Process* (1978), pp. 39, 62, 102.

<sup>65</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 109.

‘Modern standpoints on violence and civilisation’, Linklater writes, ‘first emerged in the Italian city-state system’.<sup>66</sup>

The problem is that modern international order did not emerge in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy. For many centuries after this, life for most Europeans remained brutish and short, while levels of interdependence were minimal. Although commodity chains established long-distance trading networks in luxury goods that connected entrepôts such as Malacca, Samarkand, Hangzhou, Genoa and the Malabar Coast, the vast majority of economic activities took part in ‘microeconomies’ with a 20-mile circumference until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>67</sup> It was the revolutions in interaction capacity generated by the railways, steamships and telegraph that brought the world into some kind of global commons. Although this process had long-roots and multiple points of origin, it was only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a cluster of deep changes occurred together, on a global scale, and within a relatively short time-span.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, it is difficult to see how psychogenetic processes could have spread very far without mass travel or widespread media, developments that, once again, are found most prominently in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was during this period that industrial capitalism, imperialism, state formation and novel political ideologies fashioned a world that was deeply interdependent. They also fashioned a world in which what Linklater calls ‘incentives to cooperate’ were sharply intensified by rapid, permanent advances in military technologies.<sup>69</sup>

Linklater’s narrative also has a hard time explaining the intensification of decivilising processes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although he spends a chapter on the Holocaust, and does discuss the dark side of imperialism, *Violence and Civilisation* reads like a game of snakes and ladders in which the game is rigged: the ladders (the climb towards global civility) are always more powerful, and more pronounced, than the snakes (the slide to decivility). Yet, as noted in the previous section, the scale of decivilising processes over the past two centuries takes some explaining. The casualty list of 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>66</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 184.

<sup>67</sup> Herman Schwartz, *States and Markets* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Barry Buzan and George Lawson, ‘Theory, History, and the Global Transformation’, *International Theory* 8:3 (2017), pp. 502-522.

<sup>69</sup> Buzan and Lawson (2015): chapter 8.

imperialism numbered tens of millions.<sup>70</sup> The Japanese attempt to be accepted as racial equals at Versailles was rejected by Western powers, perhaps unsurprisingly: the British empire still encompassed more than 30 million square miles of territory in the 1930s. During the 1950s, the French fought a bloody campaign to ‘keep Algeria French’, while the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya during the same decade stands as one of the more vicious episodes in British imperial history. Over twenty million people died in conflicts during the Cold War,<sup>71</sup> a period Linklater associates with the ‘taming of great power rivalries’.<sup>72</sup> If the first decade of the post-Cold War world were marked by genocide and war, the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been even less hospitable to standards of self-restraint. Massacres, terrorism, expulsions and the mass movement of refugees are depressingly familiar features of world politics. It is difficult to see how these processes can be squared with Linklater’s core dynamics: an ‘expanding circle’ of moral concern,<sup>73</sup> an increasing identification with the suffering of distant strangers, and a shift towards universal humanity,<sup>74</sup> let alone with his claim that ‘larger social webs have encouraged the dampening of aggressive impulses’.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps people’s capacity for ‘collective learning’ has seen them learn the wrong lessons, or simply learn how to kill and torture each other more effectively.

The directionality that lies behind Linklater’s historical sweep also induces misreadings of landmark events. One example is the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, which Linklater sees as ‘one of the more remarkable examples of “moral progress”’.<sup>76</sup> Despite the abolition of the slave trade during the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and slavery more generally during the middle part of the century, slavery remained a core component of the Atlantic economy until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a whole, an estimated 3.3 million African slaves were transported from

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<sup>70</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, Translated by Partick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 124-127.

<sup>71</sup> Fred Halliday, ‘Third World Socialism: 1989 and After’, in George Lawson, Chris Armbruster and Michael Cox (eds), *The Global 1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 116.

<sup>72</sup> Linklater (2016). p. 438.

<sup>73</sup> Linklater (2011), p. 25.

<sup>74</sup> Linklater (2016), pp. 265, 291.

<sup>75</sup> Linklater (2011), p. 174.

<sup>76</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 265.



Africa to the Americas.<sup>77</sup> Abolition was accompanied by a marked increase in the numbers of both bonded labourers and transported convicts. Britain's Asian convicts were transported to penal colonies in the Indian Ocean (such as the Andaman Islands, Penang and Singapore) where they were put to work felling timber and draining swamps in brutal conditions.<sup>78</sup> These histories make it difficult to see the abolition of the slave trade as an illustration of how 'the social gradient between Europe and other peoples became less steep because of increased support for the idea of human equality'.<sup>79</sup> It is even more difficult to justify these claims in a narrative that associates abolition almost entirely with Western reformers, and only marginally with the slave revolts that shook the Atlantic world during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>80</sup> Here, as in other places, Linklater's theoretical commitments prompt questionable historical interpretations.

The wider problem facing Linklater's historical narrative stems from the duality he maintains between civilising and decivilising processes, which he likens to a 'Janus-faced' process that promotes justice within the 'civilised' realm, and force outside it.<sup>81</sup> However, the 'barbarians' in the Roman states-system were not just 'others' whose influence stopped at the gates, but 'insiders' whose influence spread within the gates.<sup>82</sup> 'Small wars' in Ethiopia, Algeria and Vietnam were deeply generative of historical trajectories in the core.<sup>83</sup> Or to take an example closer to Linklater's core narrative – his analysis of human rights, like his account of abolition, rests entirely on elite Western agency. There is no mention of Hansa Mehta, the Indian delegate on the UN Human Rights Commission, who was responsible for the text of the Covenant reading as 'all human beings are created equal' rather than 'all men are created equal'. Nor is there space for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), with its

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<sup>77</sup> Bayly (2004), p. 403.

<sup>78</sup> Claire Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 265.

<sup>80</sup> David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 127. Also see: Wight (1977), p. 128.

<sup>82</sup> An excerpt from Constandine Cadavy's 'Waiting for the Barbarians' makes the point well: 'The barbarians are coming today. What laws can the senators make now? Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating'. Quite often, they did.

<sup>83</sup> Tarak Barkawi, 'On the Pedagogy of Small Wars', *International Affairs* 80:1 (2004), pp. 19-37.

50,000 members from 40 countries and two Nobel Prize winners (Jane Addams and Emily Greene Balch), despite its centrality to the emergence of campaigns for human rights and social justice. As discussed in the previous section, and as I return to below, the substantialist commitments that Linklater adopts from Wight run-up against the processual interplay between people and groups that Elias endorsed, and that in large measure drive historical development.

### *Where*

Linklater's account of international states-system draws far more heavily on Wight than Elias – as such it is resolutely substantialist. For Linklater, as for Wight, the fundamental shape of states-systems is bounded, and their fundamental logic is dualistic: a realm of self-restraint and we-feeling inside, a realm of force and violence outside. The procedure for examining what makes Western states-systems Western is, for both Linklater and Wight, a comparison, either explicit or implicit, with 'other' cultural blocs. Wight's comparative method sought to establish both the importance of cultural unity to states-systems (as in his discussion of ancient China, the Greco-Roman system, and the modern West) and the ways in which the absence of a common culture contributed to failures to establish enduring states-systems (as in Persia, Carthage, and elsewhere).<sup>84</sup> *Violence and Civilisation* follows a similar path. First, Linklater takes the West, a cultural unit he sees as historically identifiable over many centuries, as his definitive unit of analysis. Second, he outlines a historical narrative that takes place via dynamics both *within* this integrated, bounded cultural unit (e.g. increasing expressions of self-restraint) and through differentiation with those *outside* the cultural unit (e.g. 'barbarians').

However, as discussed in the previous section, civilisations are the products rather than the producers of cultural flows – they are 'hybrid amalgams' rather than 'self-constituting entities'.<sup>85</sup> These hybrid amalgams encompass a promiscuous array of

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<sup>84</sup> Wight (1977). Also see: Martin Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966): pp. 89–131.

<sup>85</sup> John Hobson, 'Worlding the Rise of Capitalism', in Julian Go and George Lawson (eds), *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 221–

ideas, inventions and institutions, from cosmologies to productive techniques.<sup>86</sup> Major religions do not just cross borders, but are constituted in novel blends of indigenous and transnational; technologies and strategies of warfare are emulated and fused with existing capacities; cartographic techniques used to map colonial spaces serve as the basis for territorial claims within metropolises.<sup>87</sup> In other words, history is not Western first and 'other' second; it is global all the way down. Any narrative that focuses on a dualistic logic between inside and outside cannot tell the story of the West any more than it can tell the history of any other part of the world. To take one prominent example: British industrialisation is necessarily conjoined with the de-industrialisation of India. After 1800, the British government ensured that British products undercut Indian goods and charged prohibitive tariffs on Indian textiles. By 1820, British products were being exported in bulk to the subcontinent. By 1850, Lancashire was the centre of a global textile industry, reversing centuries of subcontinental pre-eminence in this area.<sup>88</sup>

Given the ways in which these dynamics are generative of the historical developments that Linklater examines, it makes more sense to see civilisations as constituted *by* transboundary encounters rather than as bounded units that subsequently interact with other blocs. In each part of Linklater's account, civilisations are taken to be bounded units of analysis – he proceeds from unit to interactions. But this is the wrong way around. A processual sociology should run from interactions to units.<sup>89</sup>

### *How*

While the explanandum of Linklater's analysis is clear (an increase in civility within the Western, now global, states-system), the explanans in his account is less so. Partly this confusion arises from fuzzy language. Linklater writes that there is an 'interrelationship'

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240. Also see Peter Katzenstein ed., *Civilizations in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Hobson (2017). Also see: John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>87</sup> Jordan Branch, 'Colonial Reflection and Territoriality', *European Journal of International Relations* 18:2 (2012), pp. 277-297.

<sup>88</sup> Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Abbott (2016).

between psychogenetic processes and broader social forces, but the status of this interrelationship is unspecified. I noted above that a wide range of factors, from ‘reality-congruent knowledge’ to ‘incentives for cooperation’,<sup>90</sup> drop in and out of *Violence and Civilisation* without being consistently applied or theorized. Nor is it clear how the ‘conveyor belt’ from the ancient to the modern worlds operates.<sup>91</sup> Linklater draws a line, albeit a jumpy one, from the past to the present. His is a stadial account, which begins with the ‘simpler civilisations’ of the Greeks and Romans,<sup>92</sup> with their limited attention to international ethics, through to Latin Christendom in which violence and cruelty are widespread, but that also witness a ‘civilisational offensive’ and ‘a religiously inspired quest to tame the warriors’,<sup>93</sup> to the emergence in the Renaissance of a sustained commitment to care, restraint and non-violent dispute resolution.<sup>94</sup> But how exactly were standards of self-restraint carried from one era to another? For Linklater, the answer appears to be (broadly) humanist tracts:<sup>95</sup> the book spends considerable time on publications by Cicero, Seneca, Erasmus, Raynal, Kant, and like-minded figures. Ideas such as ‘virtus’ (‘the moral expression of manly virtue’) are seen as the carriers of civility,<sup>96</sup> working to ‘tame warrior impulses’.<sup>97</sup> But how did these figures and their publications infuse wider publics with self-restraint and we-feeling? And what is the relationship between their work and wider causal factors, such as interdependence?

This issue is not helped by the interchangeable way in which Linklater treats terms such as interdependence and interconnection. These are not the same thing. The latter describes points of connection, as with those provided by a train line, telephone or diaspora. The former is a stronger claim, denoting mutual (if asymmetrical) dependence. Take the example of the failure of the British bank Barings in 1889, one of

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<sup>90</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 172, 430.

<sup>91</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 77.

<sup>92</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 147. The term ‘simpler civilisations’ is taken from Wight, who uses it when discussing the Greek and Roman states-systems.

<sup>93</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 147.

<sup>94</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 171.

<sup>95</sup> Here Linklater’s debts to Elias are stark, particularly his focus on Erasmus, who is a central figure in *The Civilising Process*. Like Linklater, Elias argues that the ‘nucleus’ of civilising ideas circulating in courtly society was extended to wider publics through the writings of (mostly humanist) intellectuals.

<sup>96</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 153.

<sup>97</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 127.

the largest investment houses in the world, following its failure to sell a large issue of Argentinian bonds. When, the following year, the Argentinian government defaulted, Barings' holdings became worthless. The subsequent 'panic' meant that capital flows to Argentina all but ceased for five years. Here an event in one sphere of activity (banking) in one part of the world (Britain) caused a general crisis (a depression) in another part of the world (Argentina). No wonder that the great student of banking, Norman Angell, was keen to stress the interdependencies that banking generated.<sup>98</sup> So too did Karl Marx, albeit in an altogether more critical register.<sup>99</sup>

The lack of conceptual clarity between interconnection and interdependence speaks to a surprising – and crucial – absence in Linklater's book: capitalism. The word 'capitalism' appears twice in the main body of the text, neither time in an analytical or explanatory sense. Related terms, such as commerce or market, appear more often, but again, without forming part of the book's causal apparatus or analytical schema. In fact, commerce is seen mainly as a form of restraint,<sup>100</sup> something that would be news to most observers of the practices of new world plantation owners, late 19<sup>th</sup> century robber barons, and early 21<sup>st</sup> century financiers. Given Linklater's previous interest in Marx,<sup>101</sup> as well as the return of broadly Marxian themes in recent tracts by Thomas Piketty and Branko Milanovic,<sup>102</sup> Marx's absence from *Violence and Civilisation* is surprising. A deeper engagement with this tradition would have bolstered the book's theoretical resources by offering alternative segues into relational, perhaps even dialectical, thinking. Substantively, they would have linked Linklater's interest in global ethics with issues of inequality, exploitation and dispossession, issues that are central to many of the dynamics that underpin both integrative and disintegrative processes in the contemporary world.

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<sup>98</sup> Norman Angell, 'The Influence of Credit Upon International Relations', in *The Foundations of International Polity* (London: Heinemann, 1912).

<sup>99</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 1967[1848]).

<sup>100</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 292.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1990); Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Branko Milanovic, *Global Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

## The untimely historical sociologist

In an essay written almost 100 years ago, the South Asian writer, B. K. Sarkar critiqued the ways in which Western writers essentialised India.<sup>103</sup> Sarkar turned the gaze of the West back on itself, using a reading of the Iliad to ‘Occidentalise’ the Europeans as ‘fractious; immoral; licentious; polygamous; in thrall to despotic government and the rule of tyrants.’ Writing a few years earlier, Okakura Kakuzō, a prominent Japanese scholar, wrote of Western civilisation: ‘In the days when Japan was engaging in peaceful acts, the West used to think of it as an uncivilized country. Since Japan started massacring thousands of people in the battlefields of Manchuria, the West has called it a civilized country’.<sup>104</sup> For many people around the world, both a century ago and now, Western civilisation stands not for ‘self-restraint’ and ‘emotional control’, but for violence and cultural debasement.

How much has changed since Sarkar’s essay and Kakuzō’s book? Linklater’s long-term project to foster a more just, empathetic global order is one that many people will support. And he is right to point to the many dynamics that support this vision in the contemporary world: the depersonalisation of violence in many parts of the West, the legal structures and resolution mechanisms that often foster restraint, and heightened reflection about ethical responsibilities towards collective violence. However, in explaining how we got here, *Violence and Civilisation* works back from the present day to a pre-ordained point of origin, retroactively feeding the ingredients of today’s world into the past. This serves to make history closed rather than open-ended, pre-determined rather than contingent, and linear rather than multilinear. At the same time, the principal cast-list of *Violence and Civilisation* is made up of a handful of elite, white, European men who exemplify a ‘cosmopolitan ethos’.<sup>105</sup> The book has little place for labour movements, suffragettes, anti-colonial thinkers, slaves or serfs. The result of this narrow vision is that the dynamics Linklater rightly stresses end up being less important than the thematics and histories that are omitted from, or marginalised in, the book. The main thematic that is lost is the notion of history as relational, driven by interactions between peoples. When it comes to lost histories, both movements from

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<sup>103</sup> B.K. Sarkar, ‘The Hindu Theory of the State’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 36:1 (1921), pp. 79-90. Thanks to Martin Bayly for alerting me to this text.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in Suzuki (2009), p. 137.

<sup>105</sup> Linklater (2016), p. 418.

below and transnational connections receive short shrift. This article has sought to explain why these omissions matter.

The question to come is whether these lost, or at least minimised, thematics and histories will be recovered in the third volume of Linklater's trilogy. What is clear is that it will not be enough for Linklater to extend his historical purview beyond the West while retaining a substantialist view of culture and civilising processes, and an internalist approach to Western historical development. No convincing historical sociology of global historical development can be constructed as 'West first, then global', just as no such enterprise can proceed from the standpoint of bounded units defined by the cultural attributes they share, or lack. If these commitments are retained in Linklater's next volume, the result is likely to be more of the same, except with an 'add and stir' spice of diffusion, emulation and imitation thrown into the mix. This would be a shame. Because if it does come to pass, Linklater's trilogy is likely to stand as an 'untimely' reminder of a historical sociology whose time has come – and gone.