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Grounds for engagement: dissonances and overlaps at the intersection of contemporary civilizations analysis and postcolonial sociology

Jeremy CA Smith, Faculty of Education and Arts, Federation University Australia

Abstract

This essay elucidates grounds for engagement between two fields of the social sciences engaged in critique of Eurocentrism: contemporary civilizations analysis and postcolonial sociology. Between the two fields there are both evident dissonances and points of potential dialogue and engagement. The essay identifies three areas of high contention: divergent perceptions of essentialism, commitments to transformative politics and evaluations of the paradigm of multiple modernities. Despite extensive theoretical and normative differences, a notional intersection of the two fields is outlined in the form of three conceptual and methodological shifts. The first is a displacement of ideal typology. The second move is the most original. 'Intercivilizational encounters' and 'intracivilizational encounters' are re-cast as 'intercivilizational engagement' The goal is demarcation of a discrete position based on a strong version of interaction that goes further than the notion of intercivilizational encounters recently re-developed in civilizational analysis. To illustrate potential grounds for engagement on this point, the essay reviews the historiography of 'connected histories' and the insights of relational historians Finally, the essay urges a nuanced definition of 'region' and deeper appreciation of the multiplicity of regionalisms as a meeting point for both fields of critique of Eurocentrism.

Keywords

Civilizations analysis, postcolonial sociology, engagement, Eurocentrism, connected histories, relational histories

Introduction

Adumbrating two fields of the social sciences that stand in critique of Eurocentrism, this essay sketches an interstitial position from which to probe for possible common ground. As fields of scholarship, contemporary civilizations analysis and postcolonial sociology are not equal in their respective critiques, nor do they draw the same conclusions as a consequence of their critical activity. They are kept apart by three conceptual and normative dissonances. Arguing from a position of 'interlocutor', I put forward the case that an intersection can be developed through three moves with which I put forward the case that an intersection can be developed through three moves. The first is a displacement of ideal typology that civilizations analysis inherited from its neo-Weberian origins. Ideal typology has proved susceptible to the unwitting construction of an image of stable and separate civilizational blocs. The second move is related. I re-examine intercivilizational encounters in light of relational histories. The goal is demarcation of a strong version of interaction that goes further than the notion of intercivilizational encounters developed recently in civilizational analysis. The third move distinguishes the great variety of regionalisms recognized in the recent scholarship of world regions as a meeting point for both fields. A nuanced definition of 'region' recognizes territorial spaces as economic, social and cultural (as well as geographical) units (Arjomand

2

2014a: 14-15). Sub-national regions count as well as world regions in this working definition. Such an adaptable conception of region can offer postcolonial sociology and contemporary civilizational analysis a multidimensional understanding of the regional contexts of power, historical connectedness, intercultural relations and conditions of coloniality. Across all three moves the essay recognizes diversity within both fields of analysis while also generalizing across them and between them. In the conclusion I point to the potential of convergence around disagreement that could open up the space for a fresh multidisciplinary emergence.

Two fields

Civilizational analysis revived in the 1980s with the major publication of a collection of histories of Axial Age civilizations marking the beginning of a debate on civilizations (Eisenstadt, 1986). The resurgence in the field is styled as a 'third generation' of comparative sociology distinct from early twentieth century sociology (notably the Durkheimian school) and a postwar generation whose work in area studies and historical sociology maintained integration of social scientific methods (Arjomand 2010). According to Arjomand, the Third Generation should include Marshall Hodgson, Benjamin Nelson, S.N. Eisenstadt, Donald Levine, Edward Tiryakian Johann Arnason, Bjorn Wittrock, and Said Arjomand, to name the major figures.The periodization of civilizational analysis advanced by Arjomand is not watertight, however. Eisenstadt and Tiryakian are reconstructed modernization theorists who have embraced post-functionalist sociology. Strictly-speaking they straddle the second and third generations and the critical dialogue they engaged in with the modernization paradigm was

formative and important to their subsequent trajectory, particularly in the case of Eisenstadt. Moreover, the third generation is characterized by the delineation of a field separate from both the dominant globalization paradigm and emergent post-colonial perspectives through critical reconstruction of earlier scholarship in classical social theory (Arjomand and Tiryakian, 2004). As well as less-well known scholarship by earlier figures such as Durkheim, Weber and Marcel Mauss, contemporary civilizational analysts have built on the 'second generation' scholarship of Marshall Hodgson (1993) and Benjamin Nelson (Huff, 2012) Guided by cultural sensibilities, contemporary researchers have been wary of an older use of the notion of 'civilization' bound up in the institution of modern colonial violence and has engaged in both immanent and extrinsic critique of its theoretical legacy (Arjomand and Tiryakian, 2004). At the same time, there was a feeling that the concept's value could be appropriated for contemporary conditions in order to animate the position of peripheries (Arjomand, 2010). In no small part, this trend reflected the many conflicting meanings that 'civilization' could connote and has connoted (Duara, 2001, 2004). A return to the historical consciousness of the comparative sociology of Weber, Elias, the later Durkheim and Mauss was deemed the antidote to postwar sociology's residual presentism and methodological nationalism. In the wake of critiques of Eurocentrism a conception of civilization taken in the singular had to give way to analysis of multiple world regions. As a result, greater emphasis fell on the pluralistic conception of civilization (Arjomand 2014b; Arnason, 2003). At the same time, contemporary civilizational analysis met a confluence of world, transnational and connected histories similarly interested in the linkages between regions resulting in a partial assimilation of new histories.

The second field, postcolonial sociology, emerged out of two sets of meditations on the state of anti-Eurocentrism. First, postcolonial sociologists have launched significant theoretical criticisms of existing postcolonial studies (Boatca and Costa, 2010; Connell, 2007; Bhambra, 2007). Secondly, there is critical alarm about sociology's glaring lack of engagement with postcolonialism, a situation that is very different to the disciplines of the humanities (Go, 2013a, 2013b; McLellan, 2010). Go, in particular, argues that sociology's neglect of the postcolonial turn is reflected in the academic organization of the discipline and ignores the opportunity for a re-casting of the conceptual apparatus on the basis of relational social theories (2013b). Apart from this common point of origin, postcolonial sociology is a field that is still taking shape. Unlike other posts, postcolonial sociology contends that power and epistemological domination should be central to sociological and political critique (Boatca and Costa, 2010). In tracing the lines of development of imperialism, and in tracking the consequences of the demise of Western empires (in the form of a postcolonial condition), the 'post' of postcolonial sociology has kept power on the agenda and by doing this have remained distinctly sociological producing a standpoint plainly not found in the humanities. Postcolonial sociologists implicate metropolitan social science in global relations of political, economic and structural domination (Connell 2007; Sousa Santos 2010) by challenging the epistemological foundation of metropolitan sociology. By invoking a macrosociological level of analysis of global inequalities postcolonial sociology pinpoints the problematics of power in more expansive ways than postcolonial studies. Postcolonial sociology styles itself on critique of the whole frame of social, economic

and political relations as well as bringing into question the means by which knowledge of those relations has been constituted (Connell 2000; Boatca and Costa 2010: 14-15). At the same time, postcolonial sociology is alert to the mesosociological and microsociological amongst the phenomena it hones in on (Boatca and Costa, 2010: 20-26).

Dissonances

If postcolonial sociology and contemporary civilizational analysis are pluralistic modes of analysis, then the question arises as to what points of constructive dialogue between both fields are possible. This is a challenge made all the more difficult task by the evident dissonance across a number of lines of inquiry and critiques to be found in both fields of the other field. Three areas of dissonance are elucidated below. My main aim, however, is to work around potential common ground in the critique of Eurocentrism in order to contribute to a longer-term clarification of positions. This modest contribution could add to a larger project of integration of social theory and regional studies aiming, as Arjomand puts it, to bring into the social sciences 'the vast understudied and analytically untapped historical and cultural experience of other regions and civilizations (2014a: 3).' Johann Arnason describes the task of finding common grounds from the point of view of civilizations analysis remarking that postcolonial works are 'of very unequal value and significance. Some of them deserve nothing but rapid dismissal, while others seem open to mutually instructive dialogue' (2003: x). In a similarly discerning comment on apparent dissonances Go denies that postcolonial theory and sociology are irreconcilably discordant. The postcolonial critique of sociology's imperial

standpoint preserves the 'some form of universality' (2013a: 20) from which to identify

the particularity of perspectives. This in turn is incompatible with post-positivist

epistemologies within sociology that provide understanding of sociology's standpoint. As

Boatca and Costa ask 'on the one hand, what is it that makes postcolonial theories

particularly suitable for enhancing sociological knowledge, on the other, what makes

postcolonialism as an explicitly sociological perspective useful' (2010: 14).

Compatibilities like this could also be found for contemporary civilizational analysis and

postcolonial theory on the basis of their respective critiques of Eurocentrism. Moreover,

I argue that here is a trend in contemporary civilizational analysis that meets the

interactionist objective that Go sets for a congruence of sociology and postcolonial

theory (Go, 2013b: 28). Strategies like Go's and Boatca and Costa's discernment of

compatible features and Arnason's reconstruction of dialogue can also be seen from a

different hermeneutical angle. Patrick Jackson in urging an elaboration of common

ground between civilizations analysis and international relations notes the positive

potential for a post-essentialist civilizational analysis that lies paradoxically in the

absence of consensus. By 'working *in media res*, intervening into an already ongoing

set of contentious conversations and exploring a novel combination of commitments' it

is possible to find 'commonplaces' in key arguments from which clarification of

concepts and conclusions can emerge (2010: 178-9). Applying Jackson's approach to

the dissensus of postcolonial sociology and civilizations analysis, I set a constructive

exercise in reading sharp debate in order to understand the barriers to identifying points

of overlap.

Postcolonial sociology and contemporary civilizations analysis stand apart on three issues: allegations of cultural essentialism, political purpose and divergence over the fundamental history and character of Modernity. Much of the express and more extensive critique comes from postcolonial sociology but there are counter-views from within civilizational analysis. On the whole, positions appear entrenched. Postcolonial critique of essentialist conceptions of civilization pinpoints neo-Weberian strategy of privileging European cultural dynamics in the outgrowth of multiple modernities (Boatca and Costa, 2010: 18). Claims of the cultural exceptionalism of Europe and the autonomy of its historical institution of cultural forms are disputed outright (Bhambra, 2007: 5-8; 2010:40-42). The alleged essentialism that results from the premise of European exceptionalism is at issue here. Essentialism is the object of postcolonialism's critique of Orientalism, starting at the outset with Said's seminal text (Go, 2013b: 7). Orientalist representations mistook images as essences in Western culture and in sociology at its founding stage in which it confronted the colonized non-Western world. Sociology's constructions of culture occlude imperial power and inequalities in analyses that bring forth the internal complexities of Western societies while homogenizing complex global landscapes of hierarchy, identity and conflict and the relationships between the internal and the global. Go posits 'relationalism' as the alternative to essentialism defining this alternative as historical sociologies of 'relations that constitute the ostensible essences in the first place' (2013b: 42). In a similar vein, Bhambra argues eloquently for a framework of 'connected sociologies' that would construct a new notion of Modernity as a consubstantial emergence from the relations between societies particularly the hierarchies of imperialism (2014). Postcolonial sociologists perceive that

mainstream sociology's conceptions of culture are carried forward in the maps of civilizational blocs variously drawn up across the course of the history of civilizations analysis and multiple modernities. Weber's notion of cultural zones is the principal vehicle of essentialist classification of civilizations. Even Arnason's notion of 'civilizational complexes' which works with a more pliable concept of culture does not incorporate a meso- or microsociology of culture that would resemble culture as construed by postcolonial sociologists (Boatca and Costa, 2010: 20-26). The charge of essentialism has more force when levelled and expounded judiciously. For example, as is widely observed, Weber's comparative methodology focussed on deficits of Indian, Islamic and Chinese civilizations that he elucidated on the basis of the historical experiences of Western figurations.

However, in contemporary civilizational analysis there are answers for the critiques and to the evident traditions of reification of cultures particularly in world history. Three perspectives separate from the major current around Eisenstadt are canvassed briefly for non-essentialist social theory. Their existence reveals a diversity within the field with which common ground is conceivable. Two are recent works in international relations. Emphasizing themes of power, process and discourse, Katzenstein presents a different picture of civilizations (2010; 2005). Taking departure from Huntington's crass essentialization of civilizational blocs, Katzenstein posits trans-civilizational and intercivilizational engagements as more likely than unified civilizations. Inter- and trans-civilizational engagements are processes of formation and flux of regions. The processes privileged by Katzenstein are in no way essentialist reconstructions. Hall and

Jackson also privilege process over essence in strategic response to concerns over essentialist notions of culture (Hall and Jackson 2007). In fact, they elaborate an emphatically 'post-essentialist' perspective. Noting the shared analytical assumptions of Huntington and many of his detractors that a civilization is composed of 'a coherent ensemble of values' Hall and Jackson project 'a serious effort to suggest and develop modes of civilizational analysis that do not rest on such misleading foundations (2007: 2). In doing so they seek to compel theoretical consideration of social scientific concepts in the discipline of international relations. The project they see emerging is a fourth generation 'sceptical of essentialist claims about civilizations or other forms of community, but sensitive to the power that such claims exercise in social and political practice' (2007: 4). After surveying historical sociological notions of civilization from Randall Collins to Elias to Robert Cox's neo-Gramscian approach they define civilizations as processual. They clearly push beyond throwbacks to essentialism in earlier civilizational analysis.

Mention of interaction of civilizations brings Arnason to mind as the chief current-day proponent of 'intercivilizational encounters' that shape civilizations. This is explored below. Arnason refuses the critique of essentialism, however, rather than assimiliating it as Hall and Jackson do. In his view it is a prelude to evasion of serious theorization of differences between social formations, particularly their differing scales of continuity, coherence and spread of encounters (Blokker and Delanty, 2011: 127). The critique of essentialism is, of course, directed at the manner in which pluralities of continuity and coherence are theorized as a version of Modernity generated within Europe and not

only the fact that pluralities have been previously overlooked. Actually, it should be

pointed out that Arnason's hermeneutical framework goes further than any other in

civilizational analysis to address such concerns, despite his palpable hostility to

suggestions that it might do otherwise. For present purposes, I would argue that to the

extent that contemporary civilizational analysis has launched projects of investigation

along these lines, there are achievements to point to. Hall and Jackson, Katzenstein

and Arnason have all led collective research enterprises of this sort.

All three strands of civilizational analysis are a basis for a viable future for the field. The

charge of essentialism does not really hit the mark with such process-based and

interactionist perspectives on civilizations, especially given their emphasis on analyses

of power. In this respect, all three should be distinguished from the multiple modernities

paradigm of Eisenstadt and associates. Possibilities for exchange with postcolonial

thought grow with the development of non-essentialist civilizational analyses such as

these.

The second evident dissonance is political principles and values. Contemporary

civilizations analysis stands with no singular defining political project, which is not to

state that it has no conception of the political. Postcolonial sociology sees mainstream

sociology as confined to a metropolitan standpoint and to a universe of political

discourse that reflects older imperial centres (Boatca and Costa, 2010; Go, 2013a: 17-

20). Established postcolonial approaches have reached critical limits in metropolitan

universities by an accommodation with a 'politics of image' derived from the ethos of

tolerance of existing multiculturalisms. By contrast the call for connected histories and sociologies championed by postcolonial sociology promotes a global frame of knowledge incorporating not only the historical experiences of peripheries but also the relations of domination that institute peripheralization (Bhambra, 2014). Arguably, Connell has developed the most extensive sociological survey of putatively peripheral knowledges qua 'southern theory' (2007). Her political objective makes epistemic domination a foremost concern. She begins with the premise that metropolitan social science cannot be transposed from the West to the South. Her comparison of southern ideas, beliefs and doctrines pieces together an impression of a quest for science that more adequately reflects southern worlds. Her preference for twentieth century thinkers echoes a shared commitment of postcolonial sociologists to critique of current day relations of domination. More than a critique of historical colonialism, postcolonial sociology invokes a politics of 'the social and political conditions of the present' (Bhambra, 2013: 300) in its agenda and self-distinction from postcolonial studies. With a transformative purpose of highlighting 'the importance of the politics of the present (and the past) in our interpretations' (Bhambra, 2007: 147-8) postcolonial sociology exceeds postcolonialism-at-large on many of the political points for which the latter has been criticized from Marxist, and some indigenous and feminist perspectives. The interconnections of the past should be reinterpreted from many standpoints and potentially with new facts in order to effect the provincialization of Europe (Bhambra, 2007: 153-5). Values invoked in critiques of present-day globalization cannot and should not be divorced from the process of historical interpretation. One of the divisions within postcolonial sociology turns on this point. Latin American decolonial thought and

praxis establish a more theoretically comprehensive scholarship better placed to serve a politics of the present. In decolonial scholarship Modernity has a longer history and imperialism features as a central force in defining the parameters of human experience (Dussel, 2000; Quijano 1999). Latin American postcolonialism's findings have been paradoxically overlooked by postcolonial theory (Coronil, 2008) but they have a pronounced affinity with postcolonial sociology due to the latter's focus on power and social movements (Boatca and Costa, 2010). Drawing on a strong historicity, an acute sense of the *longue duree* of colonialism as well as the resources of dependency theory and liberation theology, indigenous movements and Latin American social scientists correct the loss of critical impetus evident in the one-sided cultural criticism of much of postcolonial studies (Dirlik, 1997). Dependency theory has had a distinct influence on Latin American decolonial scholarship and politics. From the beginning, in Frank's early work (1967), dependency as a formative concept has been part of the complex genealogy of Latin American post-colonialism. In part this is due to the particular history of the Latin American Left. Consequently the politics of the movements (particularly in Andoamerica) express an admixture of conceptions of equality, socialism, democracy, pluriculturalism and emancipation as counterpoint to conditions of neo-colonialism. Their very polyvocality (Davalos, 2002; Gow and Rappaport, 2002) makes this a prime candidate for postcolonial sociology to reflect on in extending its commitment to the politics of the present.

There is no common denominator like the politics of present conditions or a nexus with social movement activism in civilizational analysis. Instead the field has a democratic

horizon that accommodates a variety of political positions including a strong stance on the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century (Eisenstadt, 1999a; Wittrock, 2002). Contemporary civilizational research is committed to a particular conception of democracy as a horizon informing how social orders are instituted, how conflict is shaped, how goods are constructed and sought and how social relations are mediated. Regarded as such, democracy is not composed of constitutions, procedures and laws in isolation from an affective investment of meaning and active participation. Rarely do civilizational thinkers explicitly follow Claude Lefort's and Cornelius Castoriadis's perspectives on the political imaginary. Yet the democratic horizon informing current-day civilizations analysis, along with its self-understanding of democracy, resonates with the notion of democracy and the political as a broad and indeterminate imaginary (Adams, Smith and Straume, 2012; Howard, 2010). Thus Eisenstadt discussed the fragility and continuity of modern democracy in terms of the 'central premises' of political life (1999b). There is a sense of the contingency of the ideals of democracy (hence *fragility*), even when set against the Axial tensions and traditions instituted by the political revolutions of Modernity that suggested the weight of history (Eisenstadt, 2006). Looking at the early twenty-first century, the upsurge around the 'Arab Spring' show the challenges to established combinations of constitutionalism and religion put forth by revolutionary movements and how unexpected, contingent results can emerge (Arjomand and Brown, 2013). Politics is therefore more of a backdrop for understanding other dynamics of Modernity (as well as a normative alignment) for civilizational analysts. By contrast, the 'politics of the present' orientates postcolonial sociology in its epistemological and methodological arguments around history.

Multiple modernities is the crux of highest contention (Boatca and Costa, 2010; Patel, 2013). Bhambra's work best represents this critique. For Bhambra (2010: 37-8; 2007 :56-74; 2014: 33-7) the multiple modernities paradigm pioneered by Eisenstadt is too constrained by an assumption of the originality of Europe's cultural program to act as a thoroughgoing alternative to Eurocentric social science. The presumption of originality then becomes the yardstick of comparative analysis. The West is 'both the *origin of modernity* and…the *origin of multiple modernities* (Bhambra 2007: 67 emphasis in original). European Modernity remains special for Eisenstadt and associates as well as in the distinctive work of Arnason and Wittrock, notwithstanding their denunciations of doctrines of European supremacy (2007: 67-71). Bhambra's alternative is to extend the recognition of plurality to an interrogation of the very notion of Modernity itself and the very structure of categories that premise that notion (2007: 75-6). The authoritarianism of Modernity's intrinsic colonialism has to be brought back in and it has to matter in social theory (2014: 12-3). Following the decolonial tradition, Bhambra argues also for a repositioning of Modernity as a longer-term project starting with the Conquest of the Americas. Elsewhere I argue for a similar periodization (Smith, 2006) and it is a view with a growing number of advocates. In the wake of her deconstruction of the concept of Modernity two moves point the way to a truly non-Eurocentric global sociology. A cosmopolitan sociology that 'provincialized European understandings' (Bhambra, 2010: 40) and aimed at 'recognizing and deconstructing – and then reconstructing – the scholarly positions that privilege a part of the world' (2007: 145-6) could demolish the universalism of the notion of Modernity. Bhambra has mapped the project of connected

sociologies more fully to present a model of sociology in which slavery, imperialism and racism are connected to Modernity (2014). Undoubtedly, aspects of this critique hit the mark and I can find no specific response to postcolonial sociology from authors of multiple modernities. Other aspects are bracketed out. For example, theories of power in multiple modernities carry potential for development of an illuminating political sociology (see Knoebl, 2006) and there is little engagements with that potential from postcolonial sociologists.

Beyond ideal types

As an initial observation, there seems to be an unbridgeable distance between multiple modernities and postcolonial sociology. But, that is less important to my purpose here than Bhambra's argument around ideal types and what that can contribute to elucidation of an interstitial position.

Bhambra's cosmopolitan sociology harnesses the 'connected histories' modus operandi of scholarship associated with Sanjay Subrahmanyam as an alternative to the use of ideal types evident in the multiple modernities paradigm. The fact that there are other histories pursuing problematics of interconnection of states and civilizations demonstrates a growing spectrum of perspectives applying themselves to problems of intersocietal, intercultural and intercivilizational relationships. Randeria has theorized 'uneven and entangled modernities' as a discrete version of multiplicity framed to address global hierarchies installed in the modern era (2002). She emphasizes intra-

societal modernities in a unique approach. A new generation of global historians explore

multidimensional phenomena also. The outgrowth of global history has brought

'intercultural connections' and 'worldwide exchanges' back into the scope of analysis

(Conrad and Sachsensmaier 2007a: 9). For Conrad and Sachsensmaier, some

historical conjunctures produce more and denser connections. Empirically, they

privilege the 1880s to the 1930s (2007). There is a great deal to be said for global

history but it has mostly focused on late Modernity. Along with Sheldon Pollock,

Subrahmanyam's work brings the benefit of addressing the *longue duree* (Pollock,

1998a, 1998b, 2004; Subrahmanyam, 1997) in ways not easily subsumed under

postcolonial sociology and yet not fully embraced by contemporary civilizations analysis

either.

I rehearse the position of connected histories in respect of each field below with a view

to finding common ground. For the moment note a crucial point drawn out by Bhambra

(2007: 153, 2014: 146-9). Connected histories enacts a displacement of ideal typology –

the methodological framework bequeathed civilizations analysis by its Weberian

antecedents. Noting Bhambra's point about the displacement of ideal typology and the

stress on entanglement in global history I argue that ideal typology has encouraged in

civilizational analysis a conception of civilizations as relatively detached and

endogenously-generated units of analysis. Analytically isolating components of social

formations for the purposes of comparison can yield distinctive results. Yet isolation of

analytical types of action and rationality, economies, states and legitimation, law, cities

and ethics can also suppress contexts of connection and overarching imaginaries and

thus contingency. Comparativists influenced by Weber catalogue components of civilizational constellations as types by reserving the ensemble of objectified institutions as the unit of research. Civilizations and societies appear as extraordinarily unique and enclosed rather than connected and responsive to outside influences and flows (Kalberg, 2012: 122-6). Furthermore, the shift to plurality that those contemporary civilizational analysts have made remains unfinished (Costa et al, 2006). Fitting civilizations to ensembles of types of components – rather than setting them against the historical background of their situated contexts and connections – inhibits a fuller picture of the abundant plurality of the social historical world (see Castoriadis, 1987) including forms of domination, exploitation and violence. The emphasis on linkages that is foregrounded in connected and relational histories restores to analysis of civilizations macroregional and mesoregional contexts and the exogenous influences that may issue from them. Below I argue that taking the key problematic of intercivilizational encounters to its fullest logical conclusion produces similar emphases.

Of course the comparative temper need not be abandoned along with methods of ideal types. As Wittrock emphasizes from a civilizational viewpoint 'connected histories' as an approach may suffer a converse deficit — a lack of theoretical framework for analysis of connectedness on a larger transregional scale (Wittrock, 2005). Comparative sociology, on the other hand, can offer the benefits of a disposition towards exploration of neglected commonalities, newly hypothesized links and elucidation of trends. The benefits of comparison accrue most when comparisons are treated as subjects and not as methodology (Seigel, 2005). Subjects like comparison of state formation processes,

ideological fields or religious movements, for instance, taken in context can draw out relationships as powerful comparisons without reverting to risky generalizations. Exercised in this manner, comparative analysis can chart regional contexts of development, connection and engagement.

Intercivilizational encounters and beyond

Arnason's recovery of the notion of intercivilizational encounters (first developed by Benjamin Nelson in the 1960s and 1970s) brought into contemporary civilizational analysis a much-needed problematic (2006, 2003: 139-157, 287-296, 323-339). Along with his insistence on a hermeneutical approach to civilizational theory, the notion has become the signature of Arnason's position in civilizational analysis. Posed directly as an alternative to Huntington's 'ideological' (2006: 40) clash thesis, the problematic of intercivilizational encounters solves one problem of the multiple modernities paradigm through an emphasis on interaction: the positing of separate modernities in a model that suppresses rather than investigates their interrelationships. Historical and modern encounters involve exchanges and creations of new political, economic and cultural patterns and can impact on the construction of patterns of power. In other words, it is the most *momentous* encounters that are worth exploring. Arnason is in no doubt about what counts and what should be classed differently, 'it is not enough to point to the omnipresence and variety of economic contacts: only major turning-points with far-reaching consequences on a civilizational scale will fit the term. (2003: 289). Despite

benignly designating the wide arc of interactions as 'encounters' (as Nelson had),
Arnason is particular in stressing that the most asymmetrical and power-laden
interactions can still entail encounters and exchanges. Thus, the most significant
colonial modernities fit also—India under British domination is a major illustration.

Extended by elaboration of a notion of intra-civilizational encounters (Arjomand, 2001;
Arnason, 2006), this has developed into a defensible and productive offshoot of
contemporary civilizational analysis. Still, it does not do justice to the full range of
interactions and connections. I propose a concept of intercivilizational engagement
defined as the regularization of contact and encounter to the point of deeper connection.
The kinds of contacts I include are more routine than full-scale encounters. Many are
untraceable economic, political, demographic, philosophical and religious accretions of
traffic that can be described briefly in five spheres and include the 'dark side' of
Modernity. The first is conflictual involving historical experiences of invasion, conquest,
occupation and civilizational rivalries. The second sphere is commercial involving deep
engagement especially where channels of long-distance trade become established. The
third sphere is the broadest religious, scientific, linguistic, mythological, philosophical,
political, and aesthetic creation. 'Encounters' are critical to creation, to be sure, but they
are underpinned by the accretion of engagement. Moreover, they need to be considered
on the 'creative' side of a dialectic of creation and destruction but can also be
destructive creations. The fourth sphere is enmity, blockage and refusal of engagement.
This too can be a kind of engagement as it impacts on the societies and civilizations in
question. As Marcel Mauss notes, 'non-borrowings' are important as well as exchanges

in defining identity. The fifth sphere is modern planetary consciousness that builds on intercivilizational and inter-societal connections of the last two centuries. That consciousness itself is a fund of cosmopolitan worldviews about global issues that is drawn upon in fresh instances of engagement.

With a deeper appreciation of intercivilizational engagement two original points can be made. First, there are so many examples of the capacity for exchange, conflict, adaptation and reform on a frequent basis evident in world history that it does not seem too bold to claim that engagement co-institutes civilizations. In other words, civilizations are exogenously (as well as endogenously) instituted. Moreover, this ought to incorporate different forms of violence, enslavement and expropriation as well as more or less mutually-joined inter-relationships.

The second point draws attention to the social imaginary of 'civilizations'. If civilizations are made meaningful and can be concretized, then they are made meaningful through broader codes of meaning as well as in and by sharing of texts, languages, sciences, methods of warfare, arts, architectural and urban styles. In this respect I argue that the commerce of ideas, aesthetics, sciences and techniques are animated by what Cornelius Castoriadis terms 'social imaginary significations' (1987). Though detailed explanation of Castoriadis's notion is beyond the current work it will suffice to note that Castoriadis theorizes social imaginary significations as the ontological framework of meaning and they include the symbolic codes of intercultural dialogue, borrowing, exchange and transformation as well as those of oppression and totalitarianism.

With these two points I turn to approaches in connected and relational histories as a further step beyond intercivilizational encounters. Above, I signalled that an elaboration of connected and relational histories would help pinpoint prospective common ground between contemporary civilizations analysis and postcolonial sociology. I now turn to examination of Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Sheldon Pollock as practitioners of 'connected histories' to see how they are treated in each field. Even though it is not easily subsumed under postcolonial sociology the 'connected histories' methodology of Sanjay Subrahmanyam is acclaimed by postcolonial sociologists. At the same time Subrahmanyam receives only passing attention from comparative and historical sociologists, which at first sight seems odd given his involvement in Eisenstadt's project on early modernities. Subrahmanyam's approach embodies one version of periodization of early modernity running from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries and perceiving a conjuncture of forces of cohesion operative across a wider area (Subrahmanyam, 1997, 1998). Early modernity was a global conjuncture that should be 'delinked' from specifically European paths (1997: 736-7) and re-scoped as a wider unity drawing out the networks traversing many regions and sometimes distant trajectories and formations. His is an argument for discerning specific connections between and within empires and states across a Eurasian Modernity. In addition, he studied connected colonial systems constructed by the Iberian monarchies across colonies in the Western hemisphere and Asia (2007).

Sheldon Pollock features in the collaborations of contemporary civilizational analysis as well as being known for collaboration with postcolonial figures such as Dipesh Chakrabarty. Pollock's 'connected histories' are interesting for both their substantive and methodological innovations. Connected histories bring to life disregarded regions in phases not considered historically vital (1998a: 6). His variety of connected histories focusses on centripetal and centrifugal processes of regionalization, regional breakdown and, in some instances, re-regionalization. Methodologically, he also focusses on figurations of culture and power particularly the relationship between the vernacularization of Sanskrit and the development of courtly power (Pollock, 2004). In Pollock's hands culture shapes the kinds of power that ruling classes develop and exercise. Moreover, primary forms of culture shape regional dynamics. Pollock's historical sociology expands the scope of connected histories by adding a dimension of analysis of the confluence of language, regionalism and power,

On the whole, early modern history can start to look quite different when viewed through this lens. Connected histories help to shed light on a variety of forms of intercivilizational engagement. While Pollock's approach is situated more in civilizational analysis and receives better recognition, Subrahmanyam's histories are only scantily referred to by civilizational sociologists. For example, Eisenstadt and Schlucter's *Daedalus* issue on early modernities includes an essay from Subrahmanyam. Arnason compliments Subrahmanyam's chief finding of widespread diffusion of a millenarian imagination as 'one of the most intriguing offshoots of the debate on early modernities' (2003: 353). However, he modifies Subrahmanyam's general rejection of the diffusionist model when

it comes to structural, institutional and economic dynamics by emphasizing a greater European contribution to global processes than Subrahmanyam gives credit for. As a methodology, 'connected histories' draws no comment. In a similar spirit Babak Rahimi notes Subrahmanyam's revised history of the spread of millenarian ideas turning it to a study of intracivilizational experiences within Islamicate civilization (Rahimi, 2006: 56-64). Luis Roniger is similarly sanguine and applies Subrahmanyam's insights to notions of transnationalism and interregionalism in modern Central America (2011a). Wittrock (2005: 59-61) goes the furthest by declaring affinity with efforts to develop approaches in world history to macro-connections including Subrahmanyam's. However, he counters that only social theory can complete the picture by framing institutional and cultural transformations as well as employing the insights of historians.

To my mind Wittrock's counter-point that social theory is needed alongside connected histories is potent. It highlights how Subrahmanyam may be good at taking positions in a debate and developing a creative and viable methodology but does not advance a more systematic explanatory framework for the early modern environment of thickening connections. The reason why contemporary civilizational analysis' engagement with Subrahmanyam's histories is limited may relate to his distance from civilizational sociology's neo-Weberian lineage. He is sceptical of the idea of civilizations as enduring formations. Moreover, Weber's 'cultural explanation' finds no favour with him (1997: 760) for the privilege it accords to Western Europe. Mutual detachment between the two areas of analysis may turn on this point.

Of course, it is on the disdain for Weber that postcolonial sociologists find more to applaud Subrahmanyam for. Here is a version of decentring of European exceptionalism that is welcomed in postcolonial studies and postcolonial sociology in particular makes much use of it. The applause is not returned by Subrahmanyam. Where, to the best of my knowledge, he makes no mention of any civilizational perspectives as a mode of analysis, Subrahmanyam is scathing about postcolonial currents. He spurns postcolonial critique of historiography in its entirety noting the paradox that postcolonialists miss the sixteenth century juncture in which efforts at writing world history started to emerge because of their preoccupation with European monopoly of history (Subrahmanyan, 2005). His hostility explains his neglect of the decolonial tradition in his histories of the Iberian empires. As observed above Latin American postcolonial thinkers have distinguished themselves by arguing that Modernity should be reconceived as a figuration of coloniality derived from the imperial formations considered here by Subrahmanyam. Extraordinarily Subrahmanyam overlooks the work of decolonial scholars and does not discuss the Iberian empires as vehicles of coloniality. Of course, it is the ahistorical character of poststructuralist versions of postcolonialism he has in mind. Subrahmanyam spares nothing for the historical amnesia that lies in the 'intellectual Jonestown' of postcolonial studies (2010: 119).If I was as hostile as Subrahmanyam, then I would not aim to explore the intersection of ostensibly different fields. He has a point about the absence of long histories from the postcolonial register, but others have noted that (Gandhi, 1998). Furthermore, Bhambra has from a postcolonial sociological standpoint sought a

historical perspective on coloniality and – remembering Wittrock's counter-point – a *theoretical* perspective.

Other world histories are certainly germane to this historical sensibility and expand the material available in social theory. Relational histories highlighted by Randeria and Conrad produce similar consequences to connected histories. . Alongside the work of Subrahmanyam and Pollock, linkages and interaction have been worked over as the *explicandum* of renewed historiography (Bentley, 2005). Transnational history has emerged amidst the general surge of historical and geographical sensibilities (Curthoys and Lake, 2005), to which revision of oceanic space should be added (Klein and Mackentheun, 2004; 1997). Its methods are distinct from world and international histories as such and particularly given to research into networks, kinship connections, as well as shining light on global agents of the past. Historians working in this vein problematize the metageography of oceans, cities, inter and intra-imperial boundaries and sub-regions. The argument for comparative historical method returns in this approach and it is held to be compatible with a history of networks, relationships and associations (see Bayly, 2012).

The empirical findings that inform the insightful works of global historians buttress the connected histories approach. However, at this juncture I am going to reinforce the point made above by Wittrock (2005: 59-61) and in a way also Arjomand (2014a). Connected histories would be even more effective if they were cross-fertilized with the project of integrating regional studies into social theory. Viewed through the prism of interregional

history a specific point of comparison of connected histories with civilizational

perspectives comes into sight. Comparative sociologists exhibit historical sensibilities

characteristic of the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) that are also operative in

connected histories and related transnational histories. However, they do more in

exercising *regional* sensibilities; that is, deep appreciation of regional, interregional and

transregional patterns and dynamics. Arnason's view is striking here on one point here.

In an argument that might apply to Subrahmanyam also, he enjoins civilizational

perspectives to take regionalism seriously (Arnason, 2003: 314-322; 2007: 28-9). As

things stand, civilizational analysis largely conceives of blocs in part because of the way

it attends to world regions. However, once a working definition of region that

emphasizes linkages, such as the provisional one put in the introduction of the current

work, is invoked some rethinking can go into recasting the relationship of civilizations

and regions. With a more nuanced conception of regions at work, transnational, cross-

border, sub-national and cross-cultural regions come into view. Regional contexts differ

from zone to zone according to the interaction of endogenous dynamics of societies

within a region with the orbit of that region. In investigating multiple patterns of

regionalism contemporary civilizational analysts could reflect the interactive

environments in which civilizations take on meaning. If there are many variations of

regionalism, then it would not be a large leap to the argument that there are many

varied instances of connected-ness across world regions, including what I characterize

as intercivilizational engagement.

At first blush, it might look like regional zones and civilizations might easily be conflated in this approach. Regionalization and intercivilizational engagement are associated processes but the relationships between the two can vary significantly. Two contrasting seventeenth century examples serve to illustrate the point. East Asia in early modernity had a thick regional nexus. Japan's level of intercivilizational engagement with Sinic influences was at a low at that time and it actively exercised a strategy of withdrawal from the region. By contrast, the colonization of Mesoamerican worlds incorporated the Central Americas into a newly emergent transcontinental sphere of trade, slavery and exchange. In the context of a hemisphere of intercivilizational engagement with a genocidal impact the colonized Mesoamericas related to multilayered regions – sub-regions, intra-hemispheric connections and long chains of inter-continental dependence. In these two examples one can recognize very different patterns of regionalism and varying interactive environments. One involved voluntary reconstruction of regionality; the other a forced and violent insertion into the world nexus of empires.

It in on this point of interconnection and regionalisms that the interface between contemporary civilizational analysis and connected histories should be at its broadest. Perspectives associated with the civilizational paradigm can rightly claim a pluralistic turn as a result of the critique of area studies that problematized regionality. The resulting expansion of research conducted into world regions has had a decentring effect (Arjomand, 2014a; Katzenstein, 2005; Roniger, 2011b). There have been suggestions of such directions in contemporary civilizations analysis for some time, particularly in the interest in early modern transformations (see Arnason, 1998, 2003;

Arnason, Salvatore and Stauth, 2006; Hodgson, 1993; Huff, 2012). Though these are also not mainly researches into the era of High Imperialism the dynamics and cultures of colonialism do receive attention. Periodization matters, of course, and it is a choice not to concentrate on the nineteenth and twentieth century conjuncture highlighted by Conrad and Sachsensmaier. However periodization goes the other way also. The stress in histories by scholars reconstructing early connected and relational histories is also a choice made by comparativists keen to disprove accepted but misleading wisdoms about the past before 1500: "it is certainly important to distinguish between 'colonial modernity' and that which existed both before and elsewhere, but we cannot simply assume from this that what was there before was not itself a form of modernity" (Subrahmanyam, 2005: 3-4).

The connectedness of different societies, empires and regions is thrown into relief more emphatically in connected and relational histories on early modernity than it is in the paradigm of multiple modernities and contemporary civilizational analysis could gain more from this, including revealing further patterns of inter-civilizational engagement. As things stands, the common ground of 'connected histories' and those figures in civilizational analysis engaged with this question of dating Modernity earlier is unmistakable. Ample room remains for more research in this vein.

Conclusion

In this essay I have sought to outline the gap between postcolonial sociology and contemporary civilizational analysis and provide counterpoise with three points of

productive intersection of the two fields. There is a common ground on which postcolonial sociologists and comparativists aligned with contemporary civilizations analysis could engage. Suspending use of methodologies dependent on ideal types would allow civilizationalists to complete the move to a study of societal pluralities more adequately. Extending and applying the notion of dense intercivilizational engagement to case studies of historical and contemporary forms of civilization and postcoloniality would powerfully link the benefits of connected and relational histories without sacrificing comparison while maintaining a macroregional socio-theoretical orientation. The kinds of engagement would be more extensive than those of world-historical significance that can be designated encounters. The current surge in regional studies is an invitation to historians and sociologists alike to exercise deeper regional sensibilities that could leverage more potent and complex critiques of Eurocentrism, without abandoning the strength of the social sciences. Both fields of critique draw creatively on sociology to varying degrees but have stood at an impasse in relation to one another. Working *in media res*, it is possible to elucidate from the dissensus the contours of an interstitial space, starting with clarification of the grounds of disagreement. General trends of current comparative and historical sociology provide impetus to such a development and the promising critical results it could deliver.

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