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Sociology for an 'Always-Already' Global Age

The view that modernity and sociology are co-constitutive is routine and common-place within the discipline. The historical narratives underpinning sociological conceptions of modernity have similarly been regarded as uncontested. To the extent that there have been disagreements over them, these have generally been normative, that is, whether modernity should be considered an unalloyed good, or about specific details such as the timing or duration of phases of modernity. Rarely have scholars addressing sociological debates on modernity also addressed the adequacy of the specific histories of modernity articulated within the discipline. In effect, European histories of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the industrial and French revolutions, have been considered 'world-historical' and, as such, have been utilized as substitutions for 'world history' in a modernity that is claimed to be universal. Any critique of the adequacy of those standard histories as referents for 'world history' has largely come from outside the discipline of sociology. Initially, this was from underdevelopment and dependency theorists and then from theorists of postcolonial and decolonial thought. The central argument of this book is that the neglect of these other histories, which also constitute world history, is an obstacle to a more adequate understanding of the processes that are otherwise seen as central to sociological concerns and that shape its orientations to the future.

In contrast to other approaches within sociology, I have examined the theoretical frameworks and historical narratives at play within

standard sociological accounts of the global. I have addressed the ways in which these frameworks and narratives establish the dominant disciplinary and conceptual contours of sociology and have highlighted their limitations. As such, *Connected Sociologies* continues the deconstruction of sociology's narratives of its past, that I began in *Rethinking Modernity*, in order to highlight broader, more extensive connections than are typically addressed and to argue for a reconstruction of sociology on this basis. Drawing upon postcolonial and decolonial arguments, I have suggested that modernity does not itself produce a connected world, but is itself a product of interconnections, or importantly, these interconnections are made up of different forms of domination, appropriation, possession and dispossession that cannot be seen as deriving from a simple logic of capitalist development or expanded market relations.

Sociology, I suggest, arises alongside a self-understanding of a world-historically significant modernity, but the institutions and practices of that modernity are neither self-contained nor adequately expressed within the self-understanding of sociology.

In arguing for an alternative understanding of the emergence of the global within sociology, I am also making an argument for an alternative way of understanding sociology. In this final chapter, I draw out the key themes from the preceding chapters, present the idea of 'connected sociologies' in contrast to the 'ideal type' methodology of comparative historical sociology, and discuss its critical purchase for sociology through an examination of ideas of citizenship associated with sociology's normative claims.

I

The first section of the book addressed a variety of ways in which ideas of the global were understood within different sociological perspectives. Despite their other differences, the one thing that unites the perspectives of modernization theory, underdevelopment and

dependency theories, and the approach of multiple modernities is a belief in the idea of the global as constituted through the subsequent interactions of previously separate and independent entities. That is, all three positions read the contemporary world of nation states, or civilizations, back through history and regard globalization (or modernization) as a recent process that brought these entities into meaningful interaction for the first time. Underdevelopment and dependency theories are somewhat different to the extent that they recognize that contemporary inequalities have a historical basis in capitalist relations, but they do not generally connect this to colonialism. The key dissenting voices here are of Fanon (1963) and Rodney (1972) who stipulate the necessity of colonialism as central to the processes of underdevelopment and development, but for the most part, their legacy is ignored in sociological discussions.

There are two common issues here which, I have suggested, require address. First, civilizations are presented as bounded and as having separate and distinct histories and cultures prior to European contact. There is no consideration of the problem of presenting an understanding of civilizations as hermetically sealed phenomena whose only relevant interaction with 'others' is subsequent to the onset of European modernity. The second problem is the way in which European 'interaction' itself is usually euphemized; the processes of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation are rendered as mere 'interaction', 'dissemination' or 'spread'. What is at issue here is the adequacy of the historical narratives upon which understandings of European modernity are based and the representation of European impact in terms that evade a proper reckoning. The elision of colonialism and its attendant processes was also a feature of those writers discussed in Chapter 2 – Braudel, Mann and Wallerstein – who had sought a direct address of the historical record in criticism of schematic, functionalist explanations. The historical record to which they had recourse was a selective one and a partial history was made to stand for a universal account. Goldthorpe's (1991) critique of historical sociology, that its practitioners frequently operate with the freedom of a child in

a sweetshop, 'picking and mixing' the versions of history that best suit their purposes, appears apt (if his conclusions about the impossibility of an alternative are rather different from my own). What is interesting to note, however, is how limited are the variations in the stories being told. While these scholars *could* choose any histories, they rarely choose those histories which contest the standard racialized narratives confirming the superiority of Europe to which they seem to be committed.

The second section, encompassing Chapters 3 to 5, focused on scholars who sought to rethink sociology and the social sciences more generally in light of the trope of *globalization*. Within both standard perspectives and more critical ones there are a number of similarities. First, there is agreement on globalization as a recent phenomenon or, at the very least, on globalization only becoming significant in the contemporary period. This is associated with a sense that, *now* there is a need to rethink sociology, and the social sciences, for a newly global age. There is general agreement that what they see as the nation state centred sociology of the nineteenth century was both adequate in its time and adequately represented its time. Even though Wallerstein is more critical of the nineteenth-century liberal heritage of the social sciences than most other scholars discussed in this section, he, too, effectively accepts the historical patterns upon which it is based. In any event, the issue for most sociologists discussed here is the transformation of sociology for the future, not addressing its problematic relationship to the past. It is only in this context, in thinking about how sociology may need to develop or change to be more adequate for the future that significant differences among the various sociological positions emerge.

On the one hand, there are arguments that sociology contains within it the resources to be different for these different times that we face. Almost through an act of will, or at least through the reinterpretation of existing traditions, sociology, it is suggested by scholars such as Beck, can be transformed now to be responsive to the demands of the global age. An alternative position suggests that this transformation can only come about by taking into account the work of scholars who have previously

been excluded, that is, through expanding the canon and pluralizing it. These two modes of modest internal transformation and external pluralism leave intact the history of sociology and the histories central to sociological understandings of modernity. Any transformation is only subsequent to the present; it is not a transformed understanding of how we got to the present. Both modes accept the separatist histories that see globalization and the interconnections they associate with it as only being phenomena of the present and future. In misidentifying the past as unconnected, there is no way in which they can address the inequalities of the present as consequent of shared historical processes. Instead, inequalities are naturalized as the condition of the world, or worlds, within which we find ourselves. Counter-posing the First World to the Third World, for example, without reflecting on how the Third World has been produced by the very same processes that have created the First, is part of this process of naturalization.

Accounting for the contemporary configuration of the world, and addressing the inequalities that we find there, requires taking seriously the understandings of historical processes upon which disciplines are based. The most significant critique has emerged through the bodies of work known as postcolonial and decolonial thought, and discussed at length in Chapter 6. Both take the historical processes of dispossession and colonialism as fundamental to the shaping of the world and to the shaping of the possibilities of knowing the world. The very creation of what we understand the global to be, the interconnections that span the world that enable it to be known empirically as the world, are created in the context of dispossession and appropriation. Dispossession and appropriation are also, then, fundamental to the establishment of how we know the world, and yet in being displaced from our knowledge of the world, disappear from most considerations of it. The establishment of disciplinary knowledge relegates land (dispossession and appropriation) to the realm of anthropology (and geography and development studies) and thereby separates historical injustices from any consideration of justice in 'modern' societies (economics, sociology and political science).

As a consequence, understanding the contemporary configuration of the world requires the dismantling of the disciplinary divides and of the disciplinary edifices constructed upon those divides. This process involves undoing hierarchies and provincializing knowledges, but this is not enough if those knowledges are seen to have been separately constituted and, further, not themselves constituted through connections. Without reconstruction, the radical moment, or movement, of deconstruction will always remain illusory. As Dubois (1935) and Fanon (1963) had recognized previously, it is necessary to build up alternative histories and to establish connections across what has previously been presented as separate. In our present context, it is necessary to create conceptual frameworks that would enable us not just to think sociology (and other social sciences) differently, but also to do it (and them) differently. To think sociology differently is to take connections as the basis of the histories which we acknowledge; to do sociology differently is to act on the basis of having recognized those connections.

II

The reconstruction of categories and understandings argued for here is in direct contrast to the standard methodology of ideal types that is the basis for comparative historical sociology, an approach which is enjoying a revival and whose influence is extensive. New conceptualizations are placed alongside existing ones in a multiplication – rather than reconstruction – of ideal type formulations and are presented as if they have no implications for previous formulations. While ideal types are always presented as, in principle, reformable in light of any new evidence – after all, Weber presents them as ‘heuristic’ – what appears to occur with much greater frequency, as Holmwood and Stewart (1991) argue, is an attempt to justify the initial selection rather than to account for the new material within revised conceptual

categories and explanatory frameworks. This is because ideal types are presented as interpretations that can be regarded as 'valid' despite the 'deviation' of empirical circumstances from the processes represented within the type. Since ideal types are necessarily selective, those other circumstances can be represented within another, different ideal type, which merely sits alongside other ideal types as part of the conceptual armoury of interpretations that are dependent on the purposes at hand. However, the extent to which an ideal type is distinguished from empirical reality, Holmwood and Stewart (1991) continue, further points to the significance of an evaluative and prescriptive element that is also embodied within it. The failure to reconstruct ideal types in light of new evidence suggests not only a commitment to the theoretical construct separate from its relation to the empirical, but also a commitment to the evaluative scheme associated with it.

The ideal type of European modernity, for example, is established on the basis of a selection of historical narratives that simultaneously presents a normative argument about European progress and superiority. This is the 'value-relevant' engagement from which its associated ideal types have been constructed. Any criticism of that selection, in terms of significant histories that may have been omitted in the construction of the type, or that may contradict the evaluative scheme, can be deflected by arguing that what is being proposed is a new set of 'value-relevant' concerns, together with their selective focus, but that the representations that ensue do not call into question those gathered under previous and different value-relevant concerns. To the extent that criticism has ostensibly been addressed, this has led to the development of new ideal types (multiple modernities), that sit alongside the existing type and evaluative scheme, rather than any reconstruction of the original understanding of (European) modernity.¹

¹ Of course, Weber presented his ideal types as heuristic in purpose and, in that context, they could be seen as proto-research programmes (see Papineau 1976). However, this is not how ideal types have been used, not even by Weber in claiming their heuristic purpose. As Brunn (2007) has observed, there are no instances of ideal types reconstructed in the light of their heuristic use.

A methodology of ideal types purports to separate the categories necessary for the construction of valid sociological theories from the value-relevant cultural concerns from which the theoretical gaze issues. In this way, the sociological categories that enter into ideal types are glossed as universal in their nature while being directed at particular (cultural) concerns. Thus, theorists of multiple modernities argue that the concepts to be used in understanding modernity can achieve a form of universalism while allowing different orientations to modernity deriving from different value-relevant interests, including the different value-relevant interests of sociologists located in other cultural settings. This separation establishes an in-principle possibility of agreement on 'facts' and 'consequences', while value-relevant interests need not be resolvable as they derive from factors specific to cultures. In this way, a form of cultural relativism is admitted, while denying its significance for explanatory undertakings. That is, problems that may arise within 'universal' explanations as identified by others, such as Eurocentrism, can be attributed to culturally specific concerns which may be relevant to those subscribing to particular cultural values, but need not concern others subscribing to other cultural values. This establishes a double form of protection for European explanations given the conflation of European cultural values with issues of universal relevance. These explanations cannot be challenged as they constitute the 'facts' and any challenge does not have to be admitted because it is held to derive from the value structures of other cultures.

Interestingly, as I have argued, and revealing the dominance of ideal type methodology within a variety of sociological approaches, this is not only an issue within European historical sociology, but also informs much work on global sociology done from various locations around the world. The key issue for many global sociologists, unsurprisingly, appears to be an assertion of the histories and cultures neglected within the ideal type of (European) modernity. This is often done, however, without challenging the underlying historical narrative that maintains civilizations as distinct entities prior to European encounter and subordinates those civilizations to that encounter. While there may be

some critique of the airbrushed narratives of European 'impact', this is not taken as the basis of reconstructing understandings of modernity. Rather, new ideal types of the modernity of other civilizations are developed and placed alongside the existing one. This proliferation of ideal types enables the telling of other histories, but does little to challenge the hierarchies of the established order embodied in the grand ideal type of European modernity. It enables scholars working on and in parts of the world other than Europe and the West access to the privileges of a Eurocentred international academy where space is found for other thinkers and episodes of history that make no difference to the stories Europe otherwise tells of its past.

A critique of Eurocentrism requires also, as Walter Mignolo (2014) argues, a critique of the processes of knowledge production centred upon a European academy writ large. That is, it requires a commitment to the production of knowledge that is decolonial in intent and practice. This means deconstructing the standard narratives based upon the universalization of parochial European histories and reconstructing global narratives on the basis of the empirical connections forged through histories of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation.

Global sociology, however, for the most part, appears to display a sensibility that suggests that we have moved past the time when an accounting of such processes was necessary, or that there is no longer a wish to dwell on the past and a preference instead to focus on the construction of new futures. The turn away from grand narratives and towards forms of cultural sociology (or sociologies of culture) enables an ecumenical form of sociology that admits of diffuse and diverse particularities without having to account for how those particularities continue to be framed by the narratives that are now ignored but remain uncontested (see, for example, Adams *et al.* 2005). There is no consideration of how a proper address of these newly identified particularities may provoke a reconsideration of what we had previously thought. In this way, global sociology adds 'new' data to the corpus of our existing knowledge and understanding but does not

address the fact that this new data is not really new, just newly added to sociology. My argument here, building on the work of scholars such as Trouillot (1995) and Keita (2002), is that given this new data was not previously unknown or lost, but rather it was associated with peoples and experiences not regarded as significant within dominant accounts, then it cannot simply be brought into sociology without also re-examining the adequacy of those existing narratives. This re-examination should also lead to a reconstruction, on the basis of the new data, of narratives in common. It is this process of reshaping shared narratives in light of what is presented as new data and accounting for why it is understood as new that opens up the space for further insights about historical and social processes.

III

In this book, I have sought to show that the different ‘facts’ and ‘consequences’ of interest to sociologists in different social and cultural contexts are mutually implicated and the selections made from the perspective of different cultural contexts cannot be so easily insulated from their explanatory consequences. In this section, I want to consider the same issue from the perspective of the supposed relativism attributed to value-relevant selections of explanatory objects. On the one hand, it appears straightforward that approaches such as multiple modernities (and by implication, those other approaches within global sociology that utilize its formulations), by allowing different cultural inflections of modernity, must necessarily allow different sociologies reflecting those cultural differences (so long, of course, that ‘facts’ and ‘consequences’ are accepted). However, as I have already pointed out, the idea of an originary – factual – modernity associated with Europe is also associated with cultural values that claim universality.

This is most obviously the case in arguments about the significance of human rights within the European tradition and also of

cosmopolitanism as a defining feature of that tradition. Other cultures may, of course, be represented as offering different 'choices', which, in line with the separation of fact and value that is otherwise being promoted, cannot be 'rationally' resolved. Nonetheless, since these other 'choices' usually entail various forms of authoritarianism, the moral high ground is clear. Further, in this process, authoritarianism is separated from the European tradition, being, at worst, a pathological form reflecting an atavism that lies outside the practices and processes associated with the realization of cosmopolitan human rights. It is precisely here that connected sociologies and their alternative connected histories enable us to pose a challenge to this self-regarding view of the 'European' tradition.

The cosmopolitan commitment of European modernity is presented historically, as emerging from the European tradition of the Enlightenment (although having roots all the way back to ancient Greece), as well as contemporaneously, through the project of European unification in the post-war period. The separation between ideas and practice enables acknowledgement of the interregnum in cosmopolitan practice enforced by the two world wars, and, in particular, the Holocaust, as well as maintaining continuity to some idea of European civilization. The multiple modernities paradigm further presents fascism and Communism as two pathological varieties of modernity, as deviant forms, that may have emerged from a common culture, but whose political expression has no decisive consequence for that culture or for understandings of that culture. That is, these authoritarian forms are not seen to impinge upon the integrity of European modernity as understood in its originary form, or to have any implications for its subsequent development as the hoped for 'finished project' of European modernity (Bauman's (1989) critique in relation to the Holocaust notwithstanding).

The turn to political cosmopolitanism in the post-war period, for example, is presented, for the most part, as a 'return' by Europeans and not as an address of the problems identified through recognition of fascism as a constitutive part of European culture. By identifying fascism as a

(uniquely) deviant form, it can simply be bracketed off from the more general histories of Europe that are seen to establish its civilizational qualities. A more adequate reckoning of European fascism, for example, would connect its particular manifestation in Europe with earlier and long-standing forms outwith Europe, namely with the colonial relationships of European states with other parts of the world.

While there may be some belated acknowledgement of authoritarian practice in Europe, by not connecting this to the long-standing and wider practices of authoritarianism enacted by Europe upon much of the rest of the world, the lie of European modernity as based upon a commitment to cosmopolitan values remains firmly in place. It allows partial acknowledgement within European history of a deviant and exceptional period which, in its very uniqueness, means that the condition of European authoritarianism cannot be generalized and made sense of in its generality. European modernity, it seems, is only to be defined in terms of its cultural ideas about itself and in terms of the histories it chooses to acknowledge as significant and not in terms of those it does not.

So, historically, the French and industrial revolutions make the cut, but not the processes of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation that constitute the conditions of their very possibility. And, contemporaneously, the peaceable character of European cosmopolitan civilization is established on the basis of refraining from killing other white Europeans, but does not take into account the millions of people killed in the execution of the European project who were not white – the Algerians, the Mau Mau, the Congolese, among countless others (for discussion, see Hansen 2002, 2004; Bhabra 2009). What enables this severe form of disjunctive recognition, whereby a cosmopolitan commitment is lauded despite the countless historical and contemporary arguments against its very plausibility, is, in part, the Weberian model of historical sociology. This model, based on ideal types as discussed above, actively discourages address of problems identified by others concerning the legitimacy and adequacy of the ‘facts’ and ‘consequences’ of European modernity. In the following

section, I discuss how taking such challenges seriously could enable the development of a sociology more adequate to the address of contemporary problems.

IV

The idea of the political community as a *national* political order has been central to European self-understanding and to European historical sociology. Yet many European states were imperial states as much as they were national states – and often prior to or alongside becoming national states – and so the political community of the state was always much broader and more stratified than is usually acknowledged. The history of the British nation state, for example, usually starts with the Act of Union in 1707, which brought together the kingdoms of England and Scotland, and its political development is predominantly seen in terms of events and processes that took place within the territorial bounds of the new nation. However, both England and Scotland had acquired colonies prior to Union, and continued their colonial conquests after Union, and so they were already imperial states prior to becoming a nation state – and alongside this process (Colley 1992, 2002). Empire, however, is not deemed to be significant for understanding the history or contemporary society of the nation state, as we have seen in the discussion of the work of historical-sociologists such as Wallerstein or Mann in an earlier chapter. One consequence of this is that, while the political community of the British Empire was a multicultural community historically, this understanding rarely enters contemporary political discourse where the boundaries of political community are imagined as congruent with the territorial boundaries of the state as understood in national terms.

The failure to acknowledge these multicultural histories of colonialism and empire as pertinent to our understandings of the contemporary political state can be seen to have political repercussions

in the debates on immigration that disfigure most national elections in Europe. Elections mark a period of time when the terms of the political contracts that bind people together are up for negotiation. What is important to note is, that while these contracts are about the negotiation of *present* conditions, these negotiations occur in the context of particular *historical* narratives of belonging. These narratives are usually structured in terms of presumed originary members of the contract or political community and *their* rights in contrast to those of 'newcomers' or migrants. Migrants are, by definition, excluded from the history of the state understood in national terms and thus from the history of belonging to the political community. By being excluded from the *history* of political community, these 'newcomers' or migrants are also excluded from rights within the polity and excluded from the right to renegotiate the terms of that polity. That is, while they may have rights to be *included* (though these are often also denied), they are not presumed to have rights to *redraw the terms or limits* of the political community as currently instituted.

While the political contract is usually understood in terms of national state boundaries, as I have argued, European states did not bind themselves in this way, but were active in colonial projects with more extensive boundaries. If, then, we understand the histories of the nation state as broader than the accounts of activities of its supposedly 'indigenous' inhabitants, then the arbitrary reduction of history to contemporary national boundaries can be seen to misidentify those associated with more expansive histories as migrants, instead of seeing them more properly as citizens. That is, those identified as 'migrant' or 'other' within national states were not necessarily 'other' at the point of arrival. They often came as citizens, or at the very least as subjects, of these broader political configurations, namely empires.

The occlusions at national level across Europe are curiously inverted at the common European level where all unbounded histories are assigned to the histories of individual states, and not to the history of 'Europe'. For example, a Europe 'free of war' as a consequence of the post-war European project is not a Europe whose member states were

not at war – for example, a civil war in France, involving ‘departments’ (Algeria) claiming (rightful) independence, is not mentioned nor does it negate the identification of Europe as peaceable (Hansen 2002). Colonialism becomes the past property of individual nation states to be displaced by a new narrative of European integration free from the stain of colonialism (for a discussion of the centrality of colonialism to the European project, however, see Hansen and Jonsson (2014)). By erasing the colonial past, the postcolonial present of Europe and European states is also disavowed.

Following Said (1995), then, I am arguing for recognition of intertwined histories and overlapping territories as a more adequate basis for the development of our conceptual categories than purified national histories. One consequence of this would be to understand migration to Europe as integral to the narrative of national, and European, identity; that is, to understand migration as central and as constitutive of the histories of the state as otherwise told – and to understand migrants also as citizens historically, not just as potential citizens-in-waiting. As I have already noted, in the British context, a significant part of the cement that bound its component countries together was that a professional and middle class from peripheral areas could find occupation in the colonies – a migratory history that is acknowledged in national accounts, while that of those they governed or administered is not. Standard presentations of European cosmopolitanism rarely take account of the diversity *within* Europe as constituted by (migrant) minorities within states. My argument is that taking account of this diversity enables us to tell different histories of Europe which then open up the possibility of different political solutions to the urgent questions of the time.

V

In sum, global sociology, I argue, is best served by a sociology of connections that takes seriously the histories of interconnection that have enabled the world to emerge as a global space. Global

sociology acknowledges the masquerade of European histories as world-historical upon which sociology has largely been constructed and seeks to reconstruct sociology on the basis of more adequate historical understandings. It is more than a history of (long-standing) globalization, however. It points to a sociology that starts from the perspective of the world by locating itself within the processes that facilitated the emergence of that world. By starting from a location in the world, necessarily means starting from a history that enabled that location to be part of the world; identifying and explicating the connections that enable understandings always to be more expansive than the identities or events they are seeking to explain. As Holmwood and Stewart argue in a different context, but applicable here all the same, 'the important point is not to *reify* the new explanation, but to indicate how it was produced by turning towards explanatory problems, rather than away from them, and creating new understandings and resources in their solution' (1991: 61). If the key problem identified through this book has been the particular, parochial configurations of the global within sociology, any new understanding of the global cannot simply be asserted, but has to be argued for in terms of how it addresses the deficiencies and limitations of previous understandings and how it enables more productive insights in the future.

This book is a critique of sociology, but it also expresses a commitment to an expanded sociological imagination. As I mentioned in the Introduction, critique often engenders resistance and a perception by those who see themselves as subject to criticism that they are faced with a potential loss of meaning. But what is being criticized are structures of meaning and their limitations. The promise of constructive criticism is expanded meaning. These aspects are well captured in Fanon's conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he exhorts: 'Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different' (1968 [1961]: 252). A particular way of doing things is potentially over, but its recognition is inclusive and comradely. It is not a puncturing of meaning, but of hierarchy, and a call to reconstruct meaning and to engage in new collective endeavours.