



Social Theory and the History of Sociology

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Abstract

Instead of a mere chronological account of sociological ideas with biographical notes and ad hoc commentaries, the history of social theory aims to delineate how theory and theorizing have been profoundly shaped by changing historical contexts and social structures. Classical theorists such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are best understood as products of their times, while the definition of sociological classics is open to contestation and redefinition. Five major themes in the historical studies of sociological theory are discussed in this chapter, including thought and schools, science and tradition, history and the present, rethinking the canon, and decentering the West. In early studies, social theory was conceived as part of social thought, which consisted of a remarkable variety of theoretical schools and civilizational sources. Later on, a scientific approach to modern social theory and its development rose to prominence, against which the notion of a sociological tradition was set forth as a counterpoint. On the other hand, intellectual historians insisted on the importance of contextualizing social theory, and objected to the projection of contemporary theoretical debates onto classical works. In more recent studies, the idea of canon and its exclusivity has been

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questioned. Marginalized and neglected theorists, including in particular women and black thinkers, were reappraised and reincorporated into the sociological canon. The Eurocentric bias of social theory, as a manifestation of the imperial origin and episteme of sociology, was also criticized. Notable attempts were made to utilize postcolonial thoughts for revisiting and reinventing social theory.

Keywords

Canon · Classical theory · Eurocentrism · History of social theory · Modernity · Scientism · Social thought · Sociological tradition

Introduction

This chapter will introduce some of the major works standing at the intersection of two distinct but closely related fields, namely, social theory and the history of sociology. An easy and straightforward way to delineate the intersection and delimit the scope of discussion would be to focus on the “history of sociological theory.” This treatment is legitimate but deceptively simple, for it neglects the inherent tension between theoretical construction and historical interpretation. There is a kernel of truth in the common understanding that while theory consists of concepts and generalizations, history concerns primarily contexts and interpretations. As will be demonstrated, such a tension is not irreconcilable, but it does give rise to divergent approaches to the writing and rewriting of the history of sociological theory. Alongside this tension is the problem of defining “theory”: should one include scientific propositions, moral thoughts, literary expressions, and/or philosophical traditions? Should one focus exclusively on the “great social thinkers” in Europe and North America, or cover those outside the West and others excluded from the sociological canon?

Notwithstanding these issues, the history of sociological theory could be taken to encompass all interpretive accounts that seek to situate social theorists and their works in the historical, institutional, and intellectual development of the sociological discipline. In this definition, the history of sociological theory is a subfield of the history of sociology, as the latter also covers the history of sociological research and institutions, the changing relationship of sociology to the other social sciences, and the sociology of idea and knowledge. Nevertheless, this definition could serve to exclude pure works in theoretical construction (see for example Stinchcombe 1968), textual exposition (Bierstadt 1981), or the analytical treatment of social theorists (Elster 1985).

Instead of examining the validity of specific historical accounts, the purpose of this chapter is to discern the multiple and changing ways in which the history of social theory and sociology has been written and rewritten. In other words, it aims to write a “history of histories” and on that basis identify the successive themes and major issues in the historical representations of sociological theory. Specifically, the following discussion will be structured around five key themes: (i) thought and schools; (ii) science and tradition; (iii) history and present; (iv) rethinking the canon;

and (v) decentering the West. Instead of offering an exhaustive treatment of the subject, this chapter will focus on classical social theory, as it stands directly at the intersection of the theoretical and the historical.

Thought and Schools

A common tendency in early works of the history of sociology was to assimilate social theory to the ecumenical, time-honored corpus of social thought. This approach was epitomized by Howard P. Becker and Harry E. Barnes's (1938) *Social Thought from Lore to Science*, a three-volume treatise displaying an encyclopedic knowledge not only in modern sociological theory, but also social thought stemming from diverse historical and civilizational settings. For the authors, "social thought" covered not only sociology and social science, but also proverbial folklore and social philosophy insofar as these sought to address value-related questions such as "What is a good life? Why is it a good social life? Why is it good?" "How can it be safeguarded or attained?" (Becker and Barnes 1938: xxi). Judged by present-day standards, a remarkable feature of the treatise was its attempt to shed the positivistic and Eurocentric bias by situating pre-modern, non-Western social thought in its cultural and sociological context. For example, the entirety of the first volume was devoted to the social thought of preliterate peoples and ancient civilizations.

Nevertheless, the epistemological framework of the treatise was imbued with modernist assumptions. The authors introduced the ideal types of "sacred" and "secular" to contrast the isolated character of premodern and non-Western societies with the mobility and accessibility of modern Western society. These contrasts were reflected in the difference between modern sociology and its intellectual predecessors. However, this ideal-typical construction did not merely serve to celebrate European superiority. In the discussion of medieval social thought, a prime significance was assigned not to the Renaissance and Reformation, but rather to Europe's cultural contact with Islamic civilization, out of which the early modern theories of the nation-state and secular social thought were born. The immense contributions of Ibn Khaldun, an Islamic social thinker of the time, to the studies of history, geography, economy, the city, and the state were singled out for special attention (Becker and Barnes 1938: 266–79). While the development of modern sociology culminated in Comte, Marx and Spencer, the authors criticized the organic analogy and Social Darwinism in their works. A final point to note was the authors' worldwide survey of modern sociology, not only in the "social science centers" of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States, but also in Russia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Latin America, India, China, and Japan. National differences were articulated, and a great variety of sociological thinkers and "schools" in each of the national traditions was introduced.

The assimilation of social theory to social thought can be found in other early works. Emory Bogardus' *A History of Social Thought* was published in 1922 and saw four editions between 1940 and 1960. Interestingly, this introductory text was intended to shed light on contemporary social problems. Underlying the continuity

of social thought from past to present was the human aspiration to progress, specifically the efforts to promote the welfare of fellow social members (Bogardus 1922/1928: 16–8). On top of abstract thinking, a more important function of social thought and social theory was to inculcate moral values, such as tolerance (ibid.: 649). Noteworthy here was the inclusion of two new chapters in the 1960 edition, which covered Howard Odum as the first sociologist of the American South, and Radhakamal Mukerjee as an Indian sociologist. The reason for this inclusion lay in the “cycle in the history of social thought,” which flowed from the ancient East via Europe and America and back to the Orient. While in the 1928 edition only 18 pages were devoted to the social thought of China, India, and other ancient civilizations, it was later expanded to contain 54 pages and four separate chapters.

The common practice of mapping diverse “schools” of social thought and sociological theory was epitomized in *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, Pitrim Sorokin’s monumental text in 1928. Sorokin aimed to distinguish the principal types or schools of sociological theory from the 1850s, and to test their propositions with quantitative evidence. A total of nine major schools were identified, each with its fundamental assumptions, branches, predecessors, and representatives. Sorokin’s approach was deliberately anti-biographical, as the scientific worth of sociological theories was held to be independent of their authors. The treatment was also critical, as sociological theories were overcrowded with the “sterile flowers” of speculative theories and the “weeds” of prescriptive theories. Despite the existence of contradictory theoretical systems, there emerged a shared definition of sociology as the scientific study of the general characteristics of all classes of social phenomena, and their relationship with non-social phenomena (Sorokin 1928: 760–1). The number of sociological schools was trimmed in the companion volume *Sociological Theories of Today* (Sorokin 1966), as the early emphasis on geographical, biological, and psychological aspects of social phenomena gave way to integral theories of the social and cultural system. Sorokin’s typological approach was later adopted by Don Martindale in *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory*, with a more systematic classification of theories along various dimensions (Martindale 1960/1981: 622).

Insightful as it was, the end was sealed for the history of social thought when Barnes, a coauthor of *Social Thought from Lore to Science*, proclaimed that a major change had taken place in sociological theorizing in the 1940s. While the theoretical systems in early sociology focused on thinkers and schools, it was displaced by more specialized works (Barnes 1948). Since that time, the scientific status of sociology has replaced the moral relevance of social thought as the prominent theme in most historical accounts of the discipline.

Science and Tradition

The reorientation in the studies of sociological theory and its history can be traced back to 1937, when Talcott Parsons published *The Structure of Social Action* (hereafter SOSA). For admirers and critics alike, Parsons’ *magnum opus* could be rightly regarded as a watershed in the history of modern social theory. From a

disciplinary standpoint, the major contribution of SOSA was to delineate the “action frame of reference” as the analytical foundation of scientific sociology. But the SOSA could also be read as a peculiar interpretation of modern European intellectual history. This was evident in its widely quoted opening sentence, “Who now reads Spencer?” By this, Parsons intended to indicate the general movement of late nineteenth-century European social thought away from the utilitarianism, positivism, and evolutionism represented by Herbert Spencer. In Parsons’ reading, modern social thinkers were engaged in a critical dialogue with utilitarianism and its problematic implications. Central to utilitarianism was the selection of means by individual actors in pursuit of subjective ends. While this “means-end schema” recognized the voluntaristic element of choice, it failed to address the problem of order that was pointedly formulated by Thomas Hobbes. To avoid the “war of all against all,” most social thinkers were led to reduce the selection of means and ends either to determination by biological factors or the emanation of normative values. According to Parsons, such a theoretical dilemma found its partial solution in four European social thinkers, namely, Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Despite the diversity of biographical, historical, and intellectual backgrounds, there was a *convergence* among these thinkers toward a relational, systemic understanding of the actor, means, ends, conditions, and normative orientation as the irreducible elements of action or the “unit act.” By setting forth the convergence thesis as a historical interpretation of modern social thought, Parsons’ aim was to legitimize sociology as the science of normative values and social integration.

A critical discussion of SOSA will be offered in the subsequent sections. Here the focus will be put on works bearing the influence of Parsons’ scientific approach to the history of sociological theory. In terms of its intent and scope, Ronald Fletcher’s (1971) *The Making of Sociology* could be taken as the British version of SOSA. The two-volume work sought to defend the scientific status of sociology by clarifying the core of theoretical ideas and its continuous development since the nineteenth century. Reminiscent of Parsons’ convergence thesis, Fletcher aimed to demonstrate that there was a fundamental “agreement” over the nature and basic tenets of sociology, and that a conceptual “conspectus” had been laid down by its nineteenth-century founders and elaborated by twentieth-century theorists. But Fletcher was even more ambitious than Parsons in denying the existence of theoretical schools in the first place. Instead of initial divergence and eventual convergence, the history of modern sociological theory had been following a pattern of cumulative development from the very beginning (Fletcher 1971: 17). Fletcher also set out to cover the underrated works of British theorists, including John Stuart Mill, Edvard Westermarck, Leonard Hobhouse, and Morris Ginsberg. With these British contributions duly recognized, one might see a closer link between sociology and philosophy, but also with epistemology, moral thought, and evolutionary theory.

Specifically, Fletcher argued that the foundations of sociology were laid down by a small number of thinkers in the nineteenth century, including Comte, Mill, Spencer, and Marx, along with American sociologists like Lester Ward, William Sumner, and Franklin Giddings (who were excluded in SOSA). These and other

thinkers agreed that sociology was a science composed of “social statics” and “social dynamics.” This basic agreement was developed as Tonnies, Westermarck, and Hobhouse revised the theories of evolution and social change. The analysis of the social system was extended to the objective study of social facts (Durkheim), the subjective understanding of social action (Weber), the psychological aspects of society (McDougall, Mead, Freud, Pareto, and Simmel), and the functional analysis of the cultural system (Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown). In effect, Fletcher contended that the core of sociology had always been the structural-functional and comparative-evolutionary analysis of the social system. Contrary to Parsons, Spencer was never dead, and neither was there a breakdown of evolutionism and positivism.

The scientific ethos was no less evident in John Madge’s widely acclaimed *The Origins of Scientific Sociology*. The aim of the historical essay was to demonstrate that “the discipline of sociology is at last growing up and is within reach of attaining the status of a science” (Madge 1962: 1). There was a shift from descriptive study and fragmented knowledge to a universalistic social science characterized by systematic theory and method. The history of sociology was represented in terms of landmark empirical studies and their methodological innovations. Durkheim’s *Suicide* was a sociological classic by virtue of its application of statistical techniques and use of administrative records, whereas Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant* was pathbreaking in its use of personal documents in the life history approach. European theorists such as Max Weber were conspicuously absent in this account, as they did not contribute much to systematic empirical analysis. Theoretical ideas such as anomie and the four wishes were discussed, but the primary emphasis was given to research techniques. The history of scientific sociology was first and foremost the history of method, and only secondarily the history of theory.

But scientism did not exhaust the historical discourse even at its apex. A different approach was articulated in Robert Nisbet’s *The Sociological Tradition*. In this celebrated work, Nisbet moved beyond the conventional emphasis on individual thinkers and sociological schools, focusing instead on the “unit-ideas” shared by different thinkers and schools and defining the scientific and humanistic concerns of classical sociology. According to Nisbet, five ideas were constitutive of the sociological tradition, namely, community, authority, status, the sacred, and alienation. These ideas were set forth in the nineteenth century in reaction to the notions of society, power, class, the secular, and progress, all of which embodied the Enlightenment vision of an individualistic, rationalistic, and anti-traditional social order. From the outset, sociological thought had been caught between modernism and conservatism. Sociology arose amidst the “Two Revolutions,” that is, the processes of industrialization and democratization that gave birth to the modern world. On the other hand, sociology assimilated the conservative critique of liberalism, radicalism, and modernism in its longing for traditional values and medieval institutions. In this vein, the affinity of Comte, Le Play, Tonnies, and Durkheim with conservatism and medievalism was highlighted (Nisbet 1966: 15–6).

In this light, the sociological tradition and its unit-ideas can be taken as the modern expressions of conservative social philosophy (Nisbet 1966: 17). Tocqueville and Marx represented the liberal and radical poles of the sociological tradition, against which Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, and other theorists struggled to resolve the conflict between traditionalism and modernism. Apart from putting sociology in historical and ideological contexts, another major contribution of Nisbet was to bring to the fore its moral and aesthetic dimensions. Instead of addressing scientific puzzles or social problems, sociological concepts originated as moral ideas and artistic imaginations. Contrary to Madge, the lasting value of sociological classics such as *Suicide* did not reside in research techniques, but rather in their innovative theoretical ideas that were rooted in moral, religious, and artistic sources. While the treatment of scientific and social issues can be outdated, the images conveyed by Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Weber's rationalization, Simmel's metropolis, and Durkheim's anomie continued to enliven our understanding of modern society (ibid.: 18–20).

The notion of a humanistic tradition of sociological thought received further treatment in later works. A central issue here was the unity and diversity of the sociological tradition. Randall Collins, for instance, proposed that there was a multiple but finite number of sociological traditions. While his original list had three traditions, namely, conflict theory, Durkheimianism, and micro-interactionism, the rational-utilitarian tradition was subsequently added (Collins 1994). A more sophisticated treatment was offered by Donald Levine's (1995) *Visions of the Sociological Tradition*. Unlike most conventional accounts of the history of sociology, Levine constructed a "dialogical" narrative that recognized the diversity of sociological traditions while engaging them in a common, ongoing dialogue. Seven national (along with ancient and international) traditions were identified, including Hellenic, British, French, German, Marxian, Italian, and American. Each tradition was defined by a distinctive moral vision centering upon the following questions: How can secular thought ground moral judgment? What was the source of human dispositions to act morally? And how were the facts of human experience and history to be explained? (Levine 1995: 100). Altogether, these traditions constituted a single, continuous line of moral and sociological thought, as they successively advanced competing visions of human nature and good society. Despite the impressive scope of his analysis, Levine's theoretical lineage remained Western.

Nisbet's emphasis on the ideological and aesthetic dimension was also taken up by other studies of sociological thought. An early example was from Irving Zeitlin (1968), who traced the origin of sociological theory to Enlightenment social thought in the eighteenth century. While Zeitlin recognized the conservative and romantic influences on Saint-Simon and Comte, a special place was reserved for Marx. As the "true heir" to the *philosophes*, Marx contributed to both the scientific study of human society and the critique of social institutions standing in the way of progress and reason. The debate with Marx's revolutionary-scientific sociology defined the overall direction of *fin-de-siècle* social theories, particularly Weber and Durkheim. Along the same line, Steven Seidman (1983) challenged the widespread conception that Durkheim and Weber were bourgeois sociologists at odds with Marxism. Rather,

classical social theory represented a creative synthesis of European liberalism and revolutionary tradition. Seidman's reading was based on a reinterpretation of Enlightenment social thought. The "science of man" inaugurated by Montesquieu, Hume, and others represented an alternative strand of modern social thought, which served to counter the individualism and rationalism of social contract theory with an analysis of social institutions, moral values, and historical processes. This synthetic approach to the study of society was inherited by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, who shared a commitment to individual freedom and democracy while resolving the crisis of European liberalism by incorporating the critical insights of the counter-Enlightenment and the egalitarian revolutionary tradition (Seidman 1983: 70).

On the aesthetic side, the definitive work was Wolf Lepenies' (1988) *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*. Lepenies brought to light the contention between classical sociologists and men of letters for spiritual and moral leadership in the new culture of industrial society. In the nineteenth century, sociology struggled to keep a distance from literature. To legitimize itself as science, the discipline had to suppress the literary orientation in its early works. On the other hand, sociologists encountered a grave challenge from novelists such as Balzac and Zola, who claimed to practice sociology in a literary form adequate to the description (rather than explanation) of social life. While in France and Britain the strong presence of a literary tradition had provoked sociologists to build a grand system of positive science, in Germany the antithesis between literature and poetry had bred an asocial and anti-sociological propensity. The tension between feeling and reason found distorted expressions in the sociologists' zeal for the religion of humanity, Soviet communism, and Nazism. It was also manifested in the problematic role of women in the history of sociology, including the ambivalent relationships between Auguste Comte and Clotilde de Vaux, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

Taken together, Parsons and Nisbet signified two divergent approaches to the history of sociological theory. But the boundary between the scientific and humanistic conceptions of theoretical development was not watertight. It was reflected in a compendium coedited by Nisbet himself and the Marxian sociologist Tom Bottomore. *A History of Sociological Analysis* (Bottomore and Nisbet 1979) was modeled upon Joseph Schumpeter's *History of Economic Analysis*, with a focus on the history of theoretical analysis rather than empirical research. It covered mainly the historical development of theoretical schools such as conservatism, Marxism, functionalism, and interactionism, with some discussion of methodological problems, conceptual issues, and historical trends. The contributors set out to chart the emergence and development of sociology as a theoretical and empirical science as distinct from prior social thought. Scientific progress had been achieved by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, as they produced cumulative knowledge about the various aspects of the social structure and the social system. But while Nisbet seemed to follow the scientific conception, he regarded the multiple paradigms in contemporary sociological theory as a step back from classical achievements. This view was consistent with his stress on the lasting value of the sociological tradition, a scientific and humanistic enterprise that had been abandoned but could be revived.

Another major work exemplifying the dual foci of scientific analysis and humanist value was Robert Friedrichs' (1970) *A Sociology of Sociology*. As an exercise in the history of sociology and the sociology of knowledge, Friedrichs's award-winning book aimed to examine whether sociology could become a unified scientific paradigm despite the persistent division of its theoretical schools. While sociologists failed to arrive at any substantive agreement over theoretical approaches, they shared certain self-images that had been prevalent during successive stages of disciplinary history. Instead of what Thomas Kuhn called the "normal" and "revolutionary" science, sociology had been oscillating between the "prophetic" and "priestly" modes of inquiry. Sociology in a prophetic mode was oriented toward the critique of social conditions from the standpoint of moral values. It found expression in the prominent themes of anomie, conformity, manipulation, contradiction, and alienation in sociological works prior to the 1950s. Sociology in a priestly mode, by contrast, was obsessed with the prediction and control of social phenomena with the application of research techniques. In embracing the doctrine of value neutrality, priestly sociologists like George Lundberg and Talcott Parsons gave up the role of social critic in favor of professional advisor. But a return to the prophetic mode began in the 1960s, as C. Wright Mills, Howard Becker, and Peter Berger, among others, called for a critical and humanistic sociology.

At another level, scientism and humanism shared the propensity to offer a schematic interpretation of disciplinary history. The development of sociological theory was conceived as following a single thread, be it a convergence toward analytical science or a crystallization of unit-ideas. This orientation stood in contrast to the approach of intellectual history, which aimed to provide in-depth case studies of specific thinkers in historical and social contexts.

History and Present

Among numerous attempts to write the intellectual history of sociological thinkers and their works, Lewis Coser's (1971) *Masters of Sociological Thought* was one of the founding texts. Coser began his work with an anecdote: an American student could not make sense of Weber's notion of value neutrality, owing to his ignorance of the political and intellectual context of Wilhelmine Germany. From this Coser stressed the importance of placing sociological theory in its sociohistorical and intellectual milieu: "...to understand the history of sociological theory more is required than a knowledge of formal propositions and theoretical structures... [That presupposes] some familiarity with the social and intellectual milieu in which these theories emerged" (Coser 1971: xvii). Specifically, Coser examined how theorists and their works were shaped by social origins (e.g., class background and generational experience); social positions (being central or marginal inside the intellectual circle); social networks (of friends and enemies); and audiences (academic or extra-academic, actual or imaginary). Simmel, for example, was an academic outsider, a gifted lecturer, and an essayist addressing the literary circle in Berlin. All the 12 thinkers covered in the text were male Europeans or Americans.

It would be impossible to introduce all major works in the intellectual history of sociological theory, but three can be singled out to illustrate the *biographical*, *institutional*, and *ideological* levels of analysis in this genre. Arthur Mitzman's (1969) *The Iron Cage* was a psychoanalytic reading of Weber's life and work. The key theme was Weber's generational revolt against his father and with it the "cultural superego" of his time. Instead of a cool advocate of value neutrality or a sober theorist of bureaucratization and rationalization; Weber was portrayed as a liberal bourgeoisie caught in a heroic struggle. Before 1897, Weber was resisting his authoritarian father. Such a sentiment was projected into Weber's study of the Junkers in East Germany and his support for the imperialist policy of Germany. After Weber's recovery from mental illness in 1902, there was a shift from ascetic rationalism to erotic mysticism and from religious to aristocratic charisma, as reflected in his comparative sociology of world religions and political sociology of legitimate domination. But Weber's ambivalence in facing the dilemma of freedom and modernity was never resolved. That was symptomatic of his contemporaries like Sombart and Michels, who saw themselves as the "epigones" of a reified world of bureaucratic and capitalist institutions created and imposed by their fathers.

Clark (1973) adopted an institutional perspective in explaining the success of Durkheim and his followers in inaugurating their program for sociology. The reason lay in the French university system, which was conducive to patronage networks among a small number of chair professors and students. This informal structure was favorable to the Durkheimians but not their intellectual competitors. While the social statisticians were anchored in governmental ministries, they constituted an isolated status group failing to promote quantitative techniques outside their circle. In contrast, the Institute of International Sociology founded by Rene Worms gathered a sizeable group of students and distinguished scholars. Yet it was too diverse to develop an integrated program of sociological theory and research. In further contrast to these two groups, Durkheim's career was boosted at crucial points by university administrators and government officials in the Third Republic. Instead of professional organizations, Durkheim's strategy of patronage building was to recruit followers from various disciplines to serve as collaborators in *Annee Sociologique*. Complementary to this strategy was Durkheim's definition of sociology, which was broad enough to cover a wide range of "social facts" in specialized fields such as law, education, linguistics, and religion. Ideological factors, such as the Dreyfus Affair, also played a role in enhancing the reputation and dominance of the Durkheimians.

Finally, Ross (1991) probed the ideological origins and features of the American social sciences, including economics, political science, and sociology. Above all, the American social sciences were marked by a peculiar tendency to reduce history to nature, that is, to conceive the social world as an unchanging, idealized liberal order governed by the laws of nature and amenable to technocratic control. Such ahistoricism was rooted in the national ideology of "American exceptionalism," the idea that America occupied an exceptional place in history and was exempted from poverty, class conflict, and the other problems of economic and political modernity (Ross 1991: 26). A reluctance to face historical uncertainty and change was embodied in the naturalistic and scientific approach that came to be established in the

American social sciences between 1870 and 1929. During the Gilded Age, there was a need to respond to the crisis brought by rapid industrialization and growing class conflict. But sociologists like Sumner and Ward either denied class warfare or resorted to “social forces” as the quasi-natural basis of social order. In the Progressive Era, a revised liberalism was proposed to justify social reform. Ross and Cooley set forth the notions of “social control” and “socialization” as the social-psychological means of containing social change. These notions fitted into a pluralist, behaviorist, and statistical model of the social world, whose “processes” and “cycles” were susceptible to “adjustment” and intervention.

While the intellectual history of sociological theory could be written in a variety of ways, some methodological issues were central to this approach. These issues were articulated by Charles Camic following his studies of Talcott Parsons’ early works. Revisiting the SOSA at its 50th anniversary, Camic sought to put the text in its socio-intellectual context. This entailed an interdisciplinary struggle following the expansion of American higher education in the late nineteenth century. The struggle for recognition and autonomy between departments and disciplines, particularly between the established and emerging social sciences, defined Parsons’ formative experience at Harvard in the 1920s and 1930s. Camic’s argument was that Parsons intended SOSA to be a *charter*, that is, a quasi-official and public document spelling out the purposes and propositions of sociology, and defending its legitimate status against dominant players such as behavioral psychology and neo-classical economics. To this aim, SOSA served “at once as a treatise on scientific method, a defense of human voluntarism, a historical account of trends in Western social theory over three centuries, a statement of the analytical foundations of social theory, a study of the causes and solutions for the problem of social order – and, through it all, an attempt to classify the various sciences and specify their interrelations” (Camic 1989: 48). Parsons endeavored to accomplish all these tasks by resorting to the “great dichotomy” of conditional factors (heredity and environment) and normative factors (common values). All theoretical options were reduced to this binary framework. Instead of a disinterested inquiry in general theory, the insights, ambiguities, and limitations of SOSA could be understood only in light of the nature of its charter. The tendency to lift the SOSA from its original context not only led to a distortion of its meaning but also misled one to seek solutions for contemporary theoretical issues from a historically specific project.

From this and other studies, Camic was able to draw an important methodological lesson. In his introduction to an edited volume, Camic (1997) distinguished between two approaches to the studies of classical sociological theory. While *presentism* read a classical text by lifting it out of context and extracting its insights for present debates, *historicism* proceeded by reconstructing the biographical, institutional, and intellectual contexts in which the text was embedded (Camic 1997: 1–3). Like most contributors to the edited volume, Camic’s perceived himself to be a historicist whose interest was not so much to arrive at authoritative interpretations than to recover theorists and works that have been marginalized, misremembered, or forgotten in the history of sociology. Methodologically put, for historicism, the use of studying sociological classics was to highlight the contingency of paradigm choices,

and hence to explore alternative theoretical conceptions once available but eventually repressed (ibid.: 6). From a historicist perspective, presentism was best exemplified by ambitious attempts at theoretical synthesis, including Jeffrey Alexander's (1982) *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* and Jurgen Habermas' (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action*. While differing from Parsons in their post-positivist and neo-Kantian orientations, these works adopted the grand vision and strategy of SOSA by assimilating and redeploing past ideas to address contemporary concerns.

But one should not readily conclude that presentism did not possess any intellectual worth. In the methodological reflections on his study of the liberal origin of European social theory, Seidman took to task the historicist assumption of a context-bound and discontinuous model of theoretical development. The problem with this assumption was its failure to differentiate the particular intentions of a classical author (e.g., Marx's critique of political economy), and the general problems addressed by a theoretical text (e.g., history, society, and human nature) that were relatively autonomous from specific contexts (Seidman 1983: 291). Seidman's proposal was to move beyond the dichotomy between historicism and presentism by underscoring the continuity of tradition in linking past and present. While Marx and Weber were bounded by their respective contexts, there was a continuous line of dialogue and argumentation running between them and through the sociological tradition.

More concrete examples can illustrate how historical contexts and contemporary concerns can be reconciled in the study of sociological theory. These can be found in interpretive works tackling the theme of *modernity*. Raymond Aron's masterpiece *Main Currents of Sociological Thought* was one such example. While introducing classical theorists, Aron could identify a common motif in their works, which was the comparative-historical analysis of the structure of modern society and its transformation. This was evident in Montesquieu's classification of laws, Comte's distinction between military and industrial societies, Tocqueville's contrast between aristocracy and democracy, and Marx's theory of capitalist and pre-capitalist formations. On the other hand, the responses of Comte, Tocqueville, and Marx to the 1848 Revolution were compared. Epitomizing the conservative, liberal, and socialist stances toward political modernity, these theorists advanced three general conceptions of the social and its relationship with the economic and the political (Aron 1965: 258–60). The mutual implication of history, modernity, and theory can also be found in Aron's treatment of Durkheim, Pareto, and Weber. Following their predecessors, these theorists adopted the approach of comparative-historical sociology to problematize the relationship between science and religion in modern society. At the same time, their theoretical formulations (social fact and morality, residues and deviations, rationalization and world religions) bore the stamp of their personalities, national traditions, and historical contexts.

An appropriate balance between historical contextualization and theoretical generalization can also be found in Anthony Giddens' (1971) *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*. This landmark study was pivotal for establishing Marx's place in the *canon* of classical social theory alongside Durkheim and Weber. Based on a historical reading of their texts, Giddens demonstrated that there were significant parallels

(but not convergence) between the three thinkers. Following Nisbet and Aron, Giddens regarded the birth of modern society in the Two Revolutions as the central problem of classical sociology. But a contextual understanding of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim would also consider the changing social and political structures of Britain, France, and Germany. Marx formulated his theory of class, capitalism, and revolution with cross-reference to the Industrial Revolution in Britain, the social and political upheaval in post-revolutionary France, and the economic and political backwardness of Germany. Weber set forth his political sociology of state bureaucracy and charismatic leadership at a time when Wilhelmine Germany became an industrial power and a unified nation-state. Durkheim envisioned sociology as the science of moral and social reconstruction, when the Third Republic in France was torn between liberal and reactionary forces. While Weber and Durkheim argued against historical materialism by highlighting the interplay of ideas and material interests as well as the relationship between collective representation and social structure, Marx in fact stood closer to them in upholding a dialectical (rather than mechanical) conception of consciousness and material conditions. Finally, all three theorists were concerned with division of labor and social change, though it was variously conceptualized in terms of class relation and alienation, social integration and anomie, and bureaucratic rationalization and the iron cage.

Rethinking the Canon

Yet the identification of modernity as the central problem of classical sociology and the corresponding canonization of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as the core theorists of modernity were eventually put to challenge. The issue was raised by Raewyn Connell in her important essay “Why Is Classical Theory Classical?” Connell questioned not the inclusion or exclusion of particular theorists in the sociological canon, but rather the very idea of a founding moment and a classical era in sociology. This foundational myth served to legitimize the canon by defining sociology as the science of modern society, with a small number of theorists laying down its conceptual foundation in response to the great transformation of Europe in the late nineteenth century. But a survey of sociology textbooks and major studies in the history of sociology revealed that the canonical conception of theoretical development was in fact a late invention. Up to the First World War, the predominant theme of sociological studies and teaching had not been modernity but rather *global difference*, that is, the difference between the “civilized” West and its “primitive” others (Connell 1997: 1516–7).

According to Connell, the rise of sociology and the social sciences in the metropolitan centers, including in France, Britain, Germany, and the United States, was coterminous with the global expansion of European imperial powers. The connection between sociology and imperialism was revealed in the theories of evolution and progress, which were built on ethnographic data from the colonies. In terms of subject matter, nineteenth-century sociology was preoccupied with race, gender, and sexuality rather than class, alienation, and industrialization. Not all

sociologists were racists, but the existence of racial difference and hierarchy was taken for granted. Contentious issues such as women's status and sexual mores occupied a central place in Comte's and Spencer's sociological treatises. The sociologists' use of comparative method embodied an "imperial gaze" that subsumed all social types under an evolutionary scheme. Finally, early sociologists were part of the political culture of empires, as they sought to shape public opinion by addressing the conflict between liberal bourgeois values and the violence of imperial expansion.

World War I signified the crisis of European imperialism and with it that of sociology. As "progress" became problematic, sociology lost its appeal in interwar Europe. The United States became the new center of sociology, with a shift of focus from global difference to social problems inside the metropole. It was reflected in the growth of urban sociology, the advance of statistical techniques, and the funded projects of social engineering in the 1920s and 1930s. The process of canonization took place in this context, as Parsons set out in *SOSA* to define a core of European thinkers as the founders of sociology. While Parsons' interpretation was subject to severe criticism, the existence and legitimacy of a sociological canon went undisputed. Rather, the discontent with Parsons lent force to canonization as it provided the impetus for the translations, commentaries, and applications of Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, and Marx, among others, since the 1960s. The canonical point of view was institutionalized through the pedagogy of the classics, as selected readings of sociological theory were adopted not only in America but disseminated throughout the world.

The next section will elaborate Connell's position against Eurocentrism. Here we will stay in the confines of Western sociology and consider some theoretical implications of debunking the canon. Camic, it can be recalled, problematized the contingency of theoretical choices by applying the historicist approach. One important choice was "predecessor selection," the process by which social theorists selected certain figures as the precursors of their own theoretical positions (Camic 1992: 422). In the case of Parsons, Camic sought to explain his identification of four European thinkers as the predecessors of sociology, and the *exclusion* of American institutionalists as a viable alternative. Parsons was familiar with the ideas of the institutionalists, in particular his Amherst teachers, Walton Hamilton and Clarence Ayres. In fact, the institutionalist critique of utilitarianism in terms of values and institutions should fit well with Parsons' theoretical position. That Parsons did not even mention the American institutionalists in *SOSA* was due to the negative reputation of institutional economics and the growing interest in the four European thinkers at Harvard in the 1920s and 1930s. In this context, Parsons was converted from his early exposure to the institutionalists toward the making of a more "credible" theoretical argument for his intellectual peers.

Baehr (2016) offered a different answer to the question of what makes classical theory classical. He would agree with Connell and Camic that there were no fixed or intrinsic criteria of classicality. But instead of reputation, Baehr focused on *reception*, the process through which a theoretical text was accorded with classical status. He spelt out four conditions of textual reception and classic formation. The first was

“cultural resonance”: the text must possess sufficient appeal to be considered significant or controversial. Examples were the reception of Simmel as a German source to legitimize American sociology, and of Durkheim’s *The Rules of Sociological Method* as a widely cited but heavily criticized work. The second condition was “textual suppleness,” in which the ambiguity and openness of a theorist’s oeuvre provided the space for new and alternative readings. “Reader appropriation” referred to the selective adaptation of a text, idea or theorist to specific contexts, for instance the Americanization of Weber and his notion of the “iron cage.” Finally, “social transmission and diffusion” referred to the promotion of a text, idea, or theorist via institutional platforms (as for Durkheim and Parsons) or individual agencies (as for Weber and Simmel) (Baehr 2016: 120–134). While the reception/formation of “classics” can be analyzed sociologically, Baehr contended that “founders” and “canons” were mythic notions. A discipline could not really be “founded,” as it entailed the collective effort of an intellectual network (e.g., Durkheim and his circle in *Annie Sociologique*) and shadow group (e.g., the women behind Comte, Mill, and Weber). Sociological classics were also qualitatively different from religious canons, as they did not enjoy the definitive, integral, unalterable, and undisputable status of the latter (ibid.: 161–6).

Inasmuch as canonization was conceived as a social, contingent, and exclusionary process, the history of sociological thought was open to a reappraisal of forgotten and neglected theorists. Law and Lybeck (2015) noted the tendency of sociological theory to focus on “winners” such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim at the expense of those “losers” in the struggle for intellectual recognition. It amounted to a “sociological amnesia” that impeded the creation of historically reflexive knowledge. To counteract this tendency, sociological theory should not only bring back the “failed” and “forgotten” sociologists in its history but also explain when, where, and why they came to be excluded. Some examples of sociological amnesia included Raymond Aron’s circumscribed status as an interpreter of classical social theory rather than an original theorist, and the warm reception of Robert Bellah’s *The Interpretation of Cultures* in contrast to Clifford Geertz’s *Beyond Belief*. A hypothesis was set forth to explain these cases: the institutionalization of sociology as an academic discipline was at once conducive to the success of some theorists and the failure of others (Law and Lybeck 2015: 7–10). In this vein, a pioneering effort to reconsider neglected theorists, such as Karl Mannheim, Susanne Langer, and Alfred Schultz, can be found in a special issue in *Sociological Theory* (1994–95). Most recently, Conner et al. (2021) set out to revive another cluster of neglected theorists, including more obscure names such as John Stuart-Glennie, Annie Marion Maclean, and Gregory P. Stone. One may note that despite their variety, most of the forgotten and neglected theorists being discussed were Western thinkers.

Apart from individual thinkers, the critique of canonization and disciplinary exclusion was extended to specific fields. Collyer’s (2010) discussion of health and medicine in the history of sociological theory is instructive here. Collyer in effect advanced Connell’s critique of the “foundational myth” of sociology, by challenging the common assumption that its founders were preoccupied with modern industrial society but uninterested in matters of life, death, and illness. Instead of

viewing medical sociology as the late development of a specialized field, Collyer showed that the problem of health, mortality, and disease figured prominently in nineteenth century sociological and public discourses. Founders such as Saint-Simon, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim treated health and related issues as social phenomena that could not be reduced to an individual problem of physical health. Collyer moved on to explain how sociology's early concern with health issues and call for public interventions were written out of disciplinary history. It had to do with the interrelated processes of medicalization and canonization. As the biomedical model attained professional dominance, sociology redefined health and illness primarily as a medical problem. This was evident in Parsons' theory of the medical profession and sick role in the 1950s, which reserved authority for biological science and medical treatment while limiting the sociological domain to the analysis of patient-doctor interaction.

If sociology has sought to canonize theorists pioneering the scientific study of modern society, a *postmodern* perspective has reinforced a critical and reflexive attitude toward the canon. Steven Seidman's (1994) *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era* was a continuation of his study in the Enlightenment heritage of modern social theory. Instead of focusing on liberalism and the science of man, Seidman broadened his argument by underscoring the nature of social theory as scientific and *moral* inquiry. In their own historical periods, classical sociologists regarded themselves as public educators and moral advocates, holding out the promise "to help deliver humanity from oppression to freedom" (Seidman 1994: 1). Science not only served to establish the public authority of sociological knowledge but also furnished the means to public enlightenment. But there arose a tension between moral and scientific visions, when the founders formulated their social critiques while emphasizing the non-ideological nature of their scientific works. Contemporary theorists since Parsons have largely retreated from the role of public intellectual in their preoccupation with abstract conceptual and methodological issues. As sociological theory was scientized and canonized, it did not only exclude certain contributors but also became irrelevant to public debates. But the moral vision was being rearticulated with the dislodgment of the scientific canon. This was evident in the critical social science of C. Wright Mills, Jurgen Habermas, and Stuart Hall, followed by the deconstruction of science in post-structuralism, feminism, queer theory, and Afrocentrism. A postmodern canon of social theory should embrace moral perspectives such as the public philosophy of Robert Bellah, the interpretive sociology of Zygmunt Bauman, the standpoint theory of Dorothy Smith, and the historical social science of Immanuel Wallerstein.

Another laudable effort to revisit sociological theory from a postmodern perspective was Charles Lemert's short but insightful volume on classical social thinkers. For Lemert, the core of classical theory was not reason but rather *riddle*. Its primary task was to "think the unthinkable," that is, to make sense of the surprising and alien social experiences of modernity by revealing its uncertainties, contradictions, and dark side. A common problem of classical social theory was "Why, indeed, was the modern world neither as rational nor as progressive as its culture had promised?" (Lemert 2007: 120). From this, the classical theorists articulated five riddles of

modernity: (i) why had the modern revolution not led to a better life for the masses; (ii) why did modernity's rational rules result in an unreasonable double-bind?; (iii) how, without religion, could industrial society overcome social conflict?; (iv) what if reason was unable to account for the unreasonable unconscious?; and (v) what would become of universal reason if social differences are real and intractable? (ibid.: 35–6). One way or another, these riddles centered on the *unreasonableness* of reason in modern society. While Marx, Weber, and Durkheim tackled the mysteries of modern economic, political, and social life, the psychoanalytic thought of Freud and the feminist thought of Gilman shed light on modernity's unthinkable dimensions. Without definitive solutions, the five riddles were open to reformulations, as could be found in the works of W.E.B. Dubois, Anna Julia Cooper, Georg Simmel, and Ferdinand de Saussure.

This section began with a discussion of Connell's view that the subject matter of early sociology was gender and racial differences rather than classes and cities. In more recent works in the history of sociological theory, the problematics of gender and race received its long-overdue scholarly attention. Aldon Morris's (2015) study of W.E.B. Dubois was a welcome addition to this scholarship. For Morris, Dubois was not only another neglected theorist but rather the true founder of scientific sociology in America. The conventional narrative, according to Morris, upheld the racist view that Black social scientists did not contribute much to the discipline, and canonical status was rightly reserved for White sociologists. But historical records show that Dubois and his "Atlanta School" had embarked upon systematic empirical research way ahead of the Chicago School. Growing up in a Black-hostile environment, Dubois bore the moral mission to refute racist prejudices and White privileges based on a meticulous collection and analysis of empirical data. With his students and colleagues, Dubois formulated and tested the hypothesis that sociological and economic factors were the root causes of racial inequalities. This position stood in contrast to Robert Park, whose theory of race-relation cycle was premised on an evolutionary conception of the Black people and their culture. In this vein, Morris disputed Park's founder status and intellectual integrity by documenting his unholy alliance with the conservative Black leader Booker T. Washington to suppress the mounting influence of Dubois and his Atlanta School. Dubois' scientific exchange and moral inspirations for Weber on the issue of race was another largely forgotten chapter in the history of sociology.

In line with Morris' treatment of Dubois, efforts were made to open the sociological canon to the "women founders." In their feminist reader in social theory and the history of sociology, Lengermann and Niebrugge (1998) identified 15 women who played an active role in the formation of sociology. Instead of being invisible, there was a significant presence of women social thinkers from 1830 to 1930. Harriet Martineau was the contemporary of Comte and Spencer, while Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Anna Julia Cooper, Marianne Weber, Beatrice Webb, and the "Chicago Women's School" were of the same generation as Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Mead, Thomas, and Park. These women thinkers maintained intellectual ties with each other and with their male counterparts. They produced representative works in sociology and published in professional journals. Despite

their preeminence, the women founders were excluded from the sociological canon and erased from its historical record. Martineau, Cooper, Webb, and Marianne Weber were conceived by their male contemporaries as “others” lacking intellectual autonomy and authority. The exclusion of women was sealed as pure academic research was institutionalized and elevated above social reformism. With the change of the sociologists’ work sites from social service agencies to state-funded universities, the women founders’ concern with poverty, race, community, and voluntary group gave way to scientism and the doctrine of value neutrality.

Decentering the West

When Connell highlighted the theme of *global* difference in early sociology, she had in mind not only the substantive treatment of gender and race but also the Eurocentric bias in the works of classical theorists. This idea was elaborated in her subsequent work on “Southern theory.” As Connell (2007) saw it, the ultimate purpose of opening the canon was to democratize social knowledge, which could not be accomplished without building a truly global sociology. This project entailed an extension of Connell’s critique of the foundational myth and imperial origin of classical sociology. Contemporary social theorists in the North, including James Coleman, Anthony Giddens, and Pierre Bourdieu, tended to treat European experiences as universal while disregarding colonial experiences and perspectives. Instead of focusing exclusively on Western (including women and Black) thinkers, and perpetuating the hegemony of the social sciences in the metropolises, a proper task of social theory was to introduce and incorporate the subaltern perspectives of the global South.

To repudiate the assumptions of universalism and Eurocentrism in sociological theory, Connell proceeded to examine the life and work of neglected theorists from the South. A common theme of these theorists was the critique of European colonialism and the structural and intellectual dependence of former colonies. This included the search for an indigenous sociological and philosophical tradition among African theorists such as Akinsola Akiwowo and Paulin Hountondji; the defense of Islam as a modern, rational, and revolutionary tradition by Middle Eastern thinkers such as Al-Afghani and Ali Shariati; the dependency theory in Latin America, as formulated by Raul Prebisch and Fernando Cardoso among others; and the post-colonial studies in India, which were inaugurated by Ranajit Guha’s subaltern studies and Ashis Nandy’s theory of the colonial state of mind. In subsuming these works under the rubric of “Southern theory,” Connell did not intend to impose a geopolitically bounded category, but rather initiate a critical reflection on the *relations* of power and exclusion between the metropolises and peripheries. The notion also served to obliterate the conventional division of labor between theory construction in the North and data collection in the South. As Connell (2007: viii) put it, Southern theory consisted of modern sociological texts for us to learn *from*, not just *about*.

Connell's efforts in criticizing Eurocentric social theory were not isolated. In the same year as Connell's *Southern Theory*, Gurminder Bhambra published her work on the same subject. According to Bhambra (2007), there were two paradigmatic assumptions about modernity, namely its rupture with the traditional past, as well as the difference between Europe and the rest of the world. Against this temporal-spatial framework, theories of modernity (and postmodernity, multiple modernities, global modernity, etc.) regarded Europe as the marker and leader of change, presuming that social structures originating from Europe would become universal. In this way, Eurocentrism was built into the epistemic framework of modern social science. In order to transcend this framework, Bhambra proposed to rewrite the history of sociology from a postcolonial perspective. Drawing upon Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, Bhambra aimed to show that the colonial encounter, the construction of the colonial gaze, and the silencing of the colonial other were constitutive of modern sociology and its politics of knowledge. Following the attempts of Scottish and French Enlightenment thinkers to distinguish stages of European cum universal history, classical social theorists viewed Western civilization and its relationship with other cultures in terms of rupture and difference, and conceptualized the "social" as the locus of historical progress and transformation. Instead of the modernist ethos, the history of sociology should attend to the changing relations between the colonizers and the colonized. By focusing on the interconnectedness of events and contexts in the metropolises and the peripheries, these "connected histories" could serve as a postcolonial approach pertinent to a critical understanding of the discipline.

A more recent initiative to learn from postcolonial studies is Julian Go's (2016) reflection and reconstruction of social theory. Go's project was to engage social theory and postcolonial thought in a mutual dialogue. Sociology originated from the "high imperialism" of the nineteenth century, when European empires were expanding and partitioning the non-Western world. For Go, social theory was not only born *in* empires; it was born *for* them. Sociology did not only have an imperial origin but also an imperial episteme (Go 2016: 4–5). Evolutionary schemes, racist remarks and an affirmative stance toward imperial expansion can be found in the works of the classical theorists. By contrast, postcolonial thought was born of anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It began in an era of high imperialism, and culminated in the wave of decolonization in the 1960s and the institutionalization of postcolonial studies in higher education in the 1980s. The foundation of postcolonial thought was laid by Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and W.E.B. Dubois, among others, who analyzed the economic, political, and cultural aspects of empire while envisioning a postcolonial world free of imperial power and domination. Despite its indifference to the colonial question, social theory needed to engage with postcolonial thought in order to address the problem of modernity in light of its entanglements with empire. The parochial concern with European and American modernity could be transcended by incorporating the postcolonial critique of the imperial episteme. In fact, the emphasis on power and social relations in postcolonial thought was not foreign to social theory; it could be found in Wallerstein's world-system theory, Bourdieu's field theory and Latour's

actor-network theory. Insights from postcolonial thought could thus serve to reinforce the movement of social theory away from its implicit “metrocentrism.”

The call for a postcolonial social science opened up new directions in the historical studies of sociology and social theory. The first concerned the *sociology of empire*. In his introduction to an edited volume, Steinmetz (2013) pointed out that sociologists have been studying empires ever since its inception. Four periods of theorizing and research on empire could be distinguished, which corresponded to successive phases in the global expansion of Western imperialism. The first phase was 1830–1890, when Africa was being partitioned by European powers. Founders of sociology like Comte, Tocqueville, and Marx gave their support and critiques of imperial expansion. The second phase, 1890–1918, witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman, Russian, and Austrian empires. Sociology was institutionalized in Europe and America, where sociologists theorized the empire, researched the colonies, and advised on colonial governance. While British sociologists advanced economic interpretations of imperialism, German sociologists favored political and military explanations. The third phase was 1918–1945, when European imperialism led to destructive warfare and anticolonial resistance. The period witnessed the proliferation of sociological theories, including the cyclical theories of empires/civilizations, non-economic theories of imperialism, theories of cultural contact and colonial transculturation, the interpretation of Nazism as a modern form of empire, and the idea of a *nomos* or “great space” for Europe. Finally, from 1945 onwards, the Cold War, national independence, and American new imperialism found expression in the hegemony of modernization theory, the countercurrent of Marxism, and the historical sociology of colonialism and empire. This hidden genealogy not only cast a new light on the history of sociology, but contained rich thoughts on the forms, developmental trajectories, determinants, and effects of empire (Steinmetz 2013: 43–6).

The second line of development was to write a *transnational history of sociology*. In various works, Sujata Patel has criticized the “methodological nationalism” of sociology, that is, the tendency to designate “society” or the nation-state as the object of sociological theory and research. Patel’s position can be best illustrated with her historical account of sociology in India. In a recent paper, Patel (2021) distinguished three stages of development in Indian sociology. The first stage was the early 1930s, when Indian sociologists sought to indigenize the discipline by adopting a culturalist and Indological perspective. The second stage covered the 1960s and 1970s, when M.N. Srinivas’ works became the dominant paradigm. While it represented a significant advance from the interpretation of ancient texts to the field investigation of rural society; Patel argued that the Srinivasian paradigm fails to transcend the epistemic framework of colonial modernity. In formulating the theory of Sanskritization and Westernization, Srinivas attributed the transformation of Indian social structure to the functional exigencies of modernization, and systematically neglected the transnational forces of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. His notion of dominant caste also served to exclude non-caste groups from the social and political projects of the modern Indian nation-state. These issues only became apparent in the third and current stage of Indian sociology, when colonial modernity was subject to critical reflection in subaltern and postcolonial studies.

By highlighting the necessity to transcend methodological nationalism and colonial modernity, Patel paved the ground for a transnational approach to the history of sociology and social theory. A notable attempt here was Stephane Dufoix's (2021) paper on the dialectics of the transnational and the local in the post-war development of sociology in Asia. While there was a proliferation of indigenization discourses in Asia during the 1960s and 1970s, the meaning of indigeneity should not be taken at face value. Despite its nationalist connotation, the "indigenous" was constructed in and through transnational academic networks. To illustrate this, Dufoix meticulously documented the history of three sociological associations, namely, the Division of Social Sciences of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Sociological Association (ISA), and the International Social Science Council (ISSC). In addition to India, China, and Japan, sociologists from Philippines, Pakistan, and other Asian countries have utilized these institutional platforms to strengthen regional collaboration. Central to these inter-Asian and South-South initiatives was the urge to end the academic dependency of Asian social science, and to transcend the misplaced dichotomy between Western universalism and non-Western particularism. Instead of mutually isolated national traditions, alternative discourses such as indigenization, endogenous development, and decolonization should be conceived as interconnected efforts in the "world social science archipelago."

The third possibility for rethinking sociology and social theory entails the quest for a *new universalism*. In his groundbreaking work, Alatas (2006) purported to examine the historical past and current state of Asian social science, and on that basis proposes some possible ways to reclaim its autonomy and relevance vis-à-vis the "world social science powers" of Europe and America. By bringing together theoretical discourses from India, China, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, and Indonesia, Alatas compensated for the inadequate treatment of Asia in Connell's *Southern Theory*. These peripheries shared the experience of implanting Western social science into their local contexts. While Asian social science suffered similar problems (such as Eurocentrism and a lack of originality), there were notable contributions to the critique of Western hegemony and the construction of alternative discourses. The latter included attempts to indigenize and decolonize social science, along with sociological perspectives that were rooted in religious and national traditions. A common purpose of these alternative discourses was to decenter rather than denounce the West, as local experiences and intellectual resources were invoked along with the critical appropriation of Western ideas to build a global and universal social science (Alatas 2006: 82–3).

Following the lead of these alternative discourses, Alatas and Sinha (2017) set out to write a textbook on classical sociological theory without the conventional biases of Eurocentrism and Androcentrism. To reorient the teaching of classical theory, the authors sought to broaden and universalize the sociological canon. First, the historical contexts of classical sociology were broadened from European modernity to the colonial history of non-Western societies. It was followed by a critical re-reading (rather than cancellation) of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, with a discussion of the Eurocentrism implicit in concepts such as the Asiatic mode of production. An

introduction to non-Western thinkers was in order, covering Ibn Khaldun's historical sociology of state formation; Jose Rizal's theory of colonial society and subjectivity; Said Nursi's social theology; and Benoy Kumar Sarkar's materialist interpretation of the Hindu tradition. There was also a treatment of female thinkers, including Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, and Pandita Ramabai. By juxtaposing Western and non-Western, male and female theorists, one could discern the universal themes of freedom and enslavement that defined the core of a global classical sociology.

The quest for a non-Eurocentric universalism was pursued along a different line by Xie Lizhong, a leading Chinese social theorist. For years, Xie had been adapting post-positivist and postmodern (though not postcolonial) social theory to the Chinese intellectual context. For Xie, the common target of these critical currents was the "given realism" of classical and modern social theory, that is, the presumption that social reality was objectively given and hence independent of social construction. In this vein, Xie (2021: 4–9) argued that indigenization discourses inadvertently upheld this modernist assumption, as privileged access to social reality was reserved for non-Western sociological traditions in much the same manner as Eurocentric social science. By contrast, postmodernism upheld a "discursive realism" for which social reality was constructed by social agents following discursive rules. These discursive rules and systems were plural in the sense that none could claim to represent the sole truth of social life. The proper task of sociology and social theory was to reconstruct the discursive systems against which multiple representations of social reality were constructed. As the expressions of peculiar social experiences, theories of capitalism, rationalism, and folk and urban societies were some discursive systems that could lay equal claim to universal validity.

While Xie recommended that sociologists should embrace pluralism, this should not be narrowly construed in geographical terms. Instead of pitting the distinctiveness of non-Western societies and cultures against the Western model, Xie suggested that the particular and universal features of *both* Western and non-Western societies should be incorporated in a given discursive and theoretical system. The critique of Western hegemony needed not give up the legitimate quest for universal social science, for otherwise one would be entrapped in untenable anti-epistemological projects. Xie's significance thus lies in the question he raises: how is it possible to counter Western hegemony and decenter social science, without leading to the relativization and fragmentation of knowledge? This concern was reflected in Xie's approach to "post-Western sociologies," a collaborative project of French and Chinese sociologists since 2010. In Xie's interpretation, "post-Western" should not be misconstrued as non-Western, de-Western or anti-Western. Inasmuch as pluralism was embraced, one must be careful not to relapse to the monist and realist perspective often implicit in the quests for intellectual hegemony *and* counter-hegemony. It could be achieved through the co-production of knowledge by Western and non-Western sociologists, who bring together their discursive systems for mutual illumination (Xie 2021: 3). Such a project should duly recognize the multiple forms of universalizable social knowledge, for which both Western and non-Western traditions could furnish useful insights and perspectives.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed some major works and approaches to the history of sociological theory. In the early studies, social theory was assimilated within the broader corpus of social and moral thought. While modern sociology has made scientific progress, a prominent theme is the variety of theoretical schools and civilizational sources. A major reorientation took place with the publication of Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action*, which inaugurated a scientific interpretation of modern social theory. Yet far from monopolizing disciplinary discourses, scientific sociology soon provoked the reaction of humanistic scholars. For the latter, sociology embodied an intellectual, moral and aesthetic tradition with an unbroken continuity from the classical era to the present. Alongside these schematic interpretations, intellectual history aimed to examine particular theorists and works with reference to their biographical, institutional and ideological contexts. While historicism and presentism were posited as incompatible methodological options, modernity constituted the middle ground between theoretical generalization and historical contextualization.

More recent works in the history of sociology have re-thought the canon and decentered the West. The very idea of a canon has been questioned, as this served to exclude theorists, ideas, and paradigms on extra-intellectual grounds. Postmodern perspectives as well as women and Black thinkers have been reappraised to broaden the sociological imagination. A closely related target has been Eurocentrism, which was rooted in the historical linkage of sociology with European imperialism and colonialism. Postcolonial thought has been appropriated not only for the critique of Western hegemony, but also for opening new directions of theoretical development. These entail a historical understanding of the imperial entanglements of sociology, and the building of a global, transnational, and universalistic social science. At this point we have come full circle, as an inclusive treatment of Western and non-Western sociological thought is once again put on the agenda, this time with a keen awareness of the lingering effects of Eurocentrism.

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