Comparative Historical Sociology and the State: Problems of Method
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Introduction

In this article, I take issue with the conceptual apparatus and methodological prescriptions of comparative historical sociology. I will suggest that its problematic features are longstanding. In consequence, a dominant tendency of the field – that of returning to the 'classics' as a means of overcoming deficiencies found in more recent contributions – has the effect of reinforcing what is problematic. From its inception, for example, the main concern of classical historical sociology, as Shmuel Eisenstadt suggests, was to understand 'the peculiar "qualitative" and "descriptive" characteristics of pre-modern European and non-European societies in relation to, and especially in contrast with, modern (initially European) societies' (1974: 225). Thus, for Max Weber, the starting point of what he regarded as 'European exceptionalism' led him to examine the specific circumstances associated with Europe, as well as social and economic processes in other parts of the world in terms of their differences from Europe and as obstacles to the development of capitalist modernity in other parts of the world. I have argued elsewhere that the situation is not substantially different in the case of Karl Marx and later Marxist approaches (Bhambra, 2011). In both Weber and Marx, there was little to no consideration of how the already existing historical connections between parts of the world might be implicated in developments that otherwise were perceived as endogenous and independent processes originating in Europe (though, of course, they differed in their accounts of the mechanisms involved). Insofar as each believed modernity to have world historical significance, the global world prior to the diffusion of modernity was argued to have no significance in determining its subsequent form.

The failure to recognize prior global connections, or to regard them as substantively significant for modernity, is bound up with an elision of colonialism and empire as constitutive aspects of modernity's development. I shall illustrate this elision substantively in the treatment of the modern state, which is one of the key concepts of the social sciences and has been central to comparative historical sociology from at least the work of Weber onwards. The 'state-centred' approaches of Barrington-Moore (1966) and Skocpol (1979), for example, derive from the Weberian tradition, as does the more recent work of Mann (1986, 1993), and modernization theory before them. While the concept of the 'state' obviously has a much longer and broader intellectual history (see Poggi, 1978), Weber's particular definition of it has, perhaps, been the most influential within contemporary scholarship. As Sheldon Wolin (1985), among many others, has suggested, Weber's definition of the state – as a form of political association that successfully claims the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within a geographical territory – is one of the most commonly accepted. Yet, in Weber and most writers since, this definition is associated with the emergence of the state in Europe,

notwithstanding that in all cases used for illustration the state in question was a *colonial* and *imperial* state. It did not simply lay claim to a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given (national) territory, but extended that violence into other territories and in support of non-state actors (such as trading companies and the appropriations of settlers). Indeed, the techniques of violence that were used 'externally' were then frequently applied to 'national' populations (see Cohn and Dirks, 1988; Elkins, 2005; Shilliam 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

What is at issue, however, is not simply a matter of substance, but how the configuration of that substance is intimately linked to the methodological underpinnings of comparative historical sociology. Postcolonial and decolonial arguments, as I have previously argued, have been most successful in challenging the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe, arguing instead for the centrality of the broader histories of colonialism, empire, dispossession, and enslavement (Bhambra, 2007, 2014). However, the problem with comparative historical sociology, as currently constituted, is not simply that of a failure to extend the range of analysis, but also how the analytical approach structures the 'inclusion' of any new, additional objects, such that they do not impinge upon the (re)construction of pre-existing objects of analysis. New conceptual frameworks within the standard historical-sociological accounts are frequently argued to 're-make' our understanding of modernity, but, at the same time, they co-exist alongside pre-existing frameworks and do not 'un-make' them. In this way, understandings of modernity and its associated concepts remain, at a fundamental level, untransformed. I shall argue that this 're-making' without 'un-making' – that is, the insulation of 'old objects of analysis' from reconstruction in the light of the implications of 'new objects' – is a product of the methodology of ideal types. This methodology has, in effect, come to define comparative historical sociology and to be an obstacle to its transformation. In contrast, I argue for 'connected sociologies' as one way of addressing the limitations of comparative historical sociology outlined in this article.

The Problem of Ideal Types

The immediate problem of historical sociology, for the purposes of this article, is the presentation of the emergence of the modern state as a specifically European phenomenon. This is so, despite the extent of historical scholarship pointing to the global interconnections that were the context for the emergence and development of what is presented as modernity and, in turn, modern states. Critiques have been levelled at the standard explanations for their failure to account for the wider world in their presentation of events and emergent structures as 'world-historical' and their failure to include other phenomena that could also plausibly be considered as 'world-historical'. These critiques have been met, at best, with suggestions that the conceptual model be pluralized or multiplied to include these 'new' histories as parallel, and usually subordinate, stories about the emergence and diffusion of the modern world. They have rarely been the cause to rethink the earlier conceptual models or to develop more adequate explanations for the identified phenomena. Given that the deficiencies and inadequacies of the existing paradigm have been noted and articulated over a number of decades and there is still empirical contestation of the arguments being made, the question then arises – on what basis do practitioners, historical sociologists, continue to act as if the critique had not been made? Or, even if they acknowledge the existence of the critique, on what basis do they choose to ignore it? The explanation, I suggest, rests, in part at least, in the

specific characteristics of ideal-types methodology, which motivates their understanding of theory construction (and reconstruction).

Ideal types are presented by Weber 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 pre-existing ideal types as part of the conceptual armoury of interpretations. Which might be chosen for use in a particular case is understood to be dependent on the different purposes at hand, that is, the different value perspectives providing the puzzles that have initiated the study. As Kalberg highlights, 'ideal types accentuate those aspects of the empirical case of particular interest to the researcher' and, as such, 'diverging viewpoints demand different ideal types' (1994: 85). This, in turn, precludes the possibility of establishing a general understanding based upon consideration of the different perspectives and inoculates each perspective from any criticism that taking another perspective seriously might engender. Further, the extent to which an ideal type is distinguished from empirical reality, as Holmwood and Stewart (1991) argue, 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 present 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 (as, for example, arises in the idea of 'multiple modernities', see Eisenstadt, 2000), that sit alongside the existing type and its evaluative scheme. There is, thereby, argued to be no need for any reconstruction of the original understanding of (European) modernity (see Bhambra, 2007).

One of the main ways in which advocates of comparative historical sociology have addressed the criticisms of postcolonial and decolonial theorists, then, is to suggest that, while they may point to the necessity of studying additional objects, histories and peoples, this does not require the reconstruction of core concepts, nor revisions of previously accepted histories, but merely additions to them. This is also true of some who are more sympathetic to postcolonial critiques, indicating how embedded these methodological assumptions are. Saïd Arjomand, for example, argues that what is needed is simply 'to retrieve, modify, and extend basic concepts of Eurocentric social theory in the light of distinctive historical experiences of other world regions' (2014: 3). This follows the work of sociologists, such as Syed Farid Alatas (2010), who similarly argue for historical sociology and sociological theory to be informed by studies of historical phenomena believed to be unique to previously neglected areas or societies, but with little discussion of the consequences of these 'new' histories for the standard conceptualization.

Arjomand's response to the postcolonial and decolonial critique, for example, is to introduce 'varieties of modernity lite' (2014: 16) that could de-centre and modify the place of European modernity within social theory, but without challenging its foundational status or conceptual integrity in its own terms. The implications of such a position is to proliferate descriptions of phenomena claimed to be related to our understandings of 'modernity', but without consideration of how such new understandings might have an impact upon our previous thinking on the subject except to pluralize it. In contrast, the key question that I have been concerned with in earlier work is precisely what difference taking these alternative histories seriously would make to our existing conceptualizations of modernity; that is, not to pluralize the standard approach but to transform it (see Bhambra, 2007, 2014).

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 suggest 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 which are beyond adjudication. In this way, a form of cultural relativism is admitted, while denying its direct significance for explanatory undertakings. That is, problems that may arise within 'universal' explanations as identified by others, such as the problem of 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.

While ideal types are frequently 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 Bruun (2007) and 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.[i] That is, any matter at hand is rendered as an issue of value relevance, rather than conceptual coherence. At one and the same time, the position depends on a universalism of concepts, while allowing a relativism of values. By that token, it renders both concepts and values immune to rational reconstruction. The former because concepts are held to transcend particular contexts of application including 'deviations' from them, the latter because processes of value change are regarded as essentially arbitrary. 'The light of the great cultural problems moves on,' as Weber himself writes (1949 [1904]: 112).

The issue, then, is not simply one of substance – that is, of 'new', or at least, newly understood, histories – but also one of historical sociological method – that is, can these 'new' histories be made

to make a difference to our previous understandings and how might they change more fundamentally as a consequence of taking these histories seriously. The connection of substance and method, needs to be addressed via the doctrine of value-relevance, since it is this which determines both the selection of topics for study and the appropriate methodology of conducting any study. Empire and colonialism, for example, were not 'value-relevant' concerns for Europeans while the use of 'ideal types', as I will go on to suggest, insulates theoretical constructions from the intrusion of such 'external' considerations. These considerations are rendered 'external' to the ideal type, to be addressed separately, if at all, within a distinct ideal type and not bearing on the validity of the constructs developed independently of them. Within such approaches, new conceptualizations are placed alongside existing ones in a multiplication – rather than reconstruction – of theoretical constructs and are presented as if they have no implications for previous formulations.

The question is posed, however, of whether an ideal type can be insulated from critique by reference to the (different) value relevant concerns from which it derives. After all, the promulgation of the type precedes the critique and the idea that it can be insulated would seem to suggest that it emerges fully formed without the need for learning. Let me illustrate the weakness of this conceit by addressing the circumstances of the conceptualization of the modern state.

"**Nation" and "State"**

The standard conceptualization of the modern state sees it as emerging through a process of institutional differentiation whereby, as Poggi outlines, 'the major functional problems of a society give rise in the course of time to various increasingly elaborated and distinctive sets of structural arrangements' (1978: 13). While he thinks that such an account, based on a general theory of social change, cannot adequately identify and delineate the origins and nature of the state, it is nonetheless able to trace 'the diffusion of the state as an existing entity from its European heartland to outlying areas' (1978: 15). At the very outset of his analysis of the modern state, then, Poggi's call for a more complex historical understanding to inform such conceptualizations is already, itself, predicated on the ahistorical assumption of a qualitative difference between Europe and the rest of the world. The period that is seen to give rise to the emergence of the modern state is precisely that period of expansion that saw these states consolidate their domination over other parts of the world. Yet, this 'external' domination is not theorized as a constitutive aspect of the state which, instead of being understood as an imperial state, is presented in 'national' terms. This problematic, or 'mistake', which Poggi derives from Weber, does not necessarily begin with Weber, but is most powerfully illustrated in his work.

The establishment of the German state in 1871, under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck and Prussia, was followed by the intensification of processes of 'de-Polonization' and 'Germanification' at the borderlands of the new state. The formerly Polish areas that had been annexed by Prussia and then settled by German colonists in the eighteenth century, Zimmerman argues (2006: 59), suffered further waves of 'internal colonization' into the twentieth century. After German unification, he continues, these settlements were increasingly conceived of in explicitly anti-Polish terms. The political project of the German state, then, was to be built through its conceptualization *as a nation*, that is, as an ethnically German state. It is this context, as Zimmerman (2006, 2010) has forcefully

argued, that has been most significant for Weber's writings on the state (see also Mommsen 1984 [1959]). Indeed, in his inaugural lecture in Freiburg in 1895, for example, Weber outlined an economic policy that would prevent the displacement of German peasants by Polish labourers and thus would strengthen the power of the newly established German state. 'Our state is a *national state*,' he asserted, 'and it is this circumstance which makes us feel we have a right to make this demand' (1980 [1895]: 436, italics in original). Note how the claim for legitimacy is undertaken in terms of the incorporation of territory beyond that associated with the German *ethnie while at the same time asserting that ethnic identification over Poles (and Jews)*.

For Weber, the 'national' interest trumped all other considerations, including economic ones. As he opined, '[t]he economic policy of a German state, and the standard of value adopted by a German economic theorist, can … be nothing other than a German policy and a German standard' (1980 [1895]: 437). This is in the context of his understanding of the 'world-wide economic community' as one in which nations struggle against each other for their very future. As such, he goes to argue that a 'nation is favoured by destiny if the naive identification of the interests of one's own class with the general interest also corresponds to the interests of national power' (1980 [1895]: 442). That is, he is critical of the German bourgeoisie's failure to make common cause with the German proletariat in the interests of the German nation as a whole. Weber further extends this critique to the inability of the contemporary political leadership, the Junkers, to understand the importance of overseas expansion to Germany's national (economic) interests. Is it too late, he asks, 'for it to catch up on its political education?' (1980 [1895]: 445). If unification of the nation, rather than becoming a world power, was the end point of the political development of the state, then, Weber suggests bitterly, it should 'have been avoided on grounds of excessive cost' (1980 [1895]: 446). The implication is for Germany not to be 'left behind' in the European game for domination and to become a colonial or imperial power in its own right. In this way, we see that Weber's *economic nationalism* was to be executed through *imperial political ambitions* and, more precisely, expansion (see Joas and Knöbl, 2013: 118-21). The 'national interest' is not the construction of a 'national state', but an imperial one. This focus on expansion and concomitant domination, however, is never explicitly theorized in the development of his understanding of the sociology of the state.

The nation, for Weber, is defined in ethnic terms. It is defined against the Polish people who may have lived within the borders of the Prussian and then the German state for centuries and it is defined against all other nations. This understanding of the nation is simply naturalized – there is no recognition of historical complexity or contemporary contradiction – and it is established as the fundamental value within which social science should operate (despite the call for social science, otherwise, to be value-free). Mommsen suggests that the 'nature of Max Weber's concept of the nation is central to his political value system' (1984 [1959]: 48); I want to argue that it is perhaps better to reverse this formulation and, instead, see Weber's political value system as central to his conceptualization of the nation. It is only this reversal that enables us to account for his concept of the nation-state failing to take into consideration his commitment, otherwise, to Germany being a world power, that is, an imperial state. What we commonly understand as the nation – and as the concept of the nation bequeathed to us by Weber – was actually an imperial state. While Weber elides the concept of the nation with imperial power, what enables the concept to gain traction in its own terms is the omission of German imperialism from what are presented as 'national' histories.

James Sheehan, in an influential article among historians, but not historical sociologists, reflecting on the role of the nation in German history and historiography, argues that historians of Germany have 'too often allowed the political sovereignty of the nation state to become the basis of the conceptual sovereignty of the nation' (1981: 4); that is, the creation of the German state through unification in 1871 has provided the model both for thinking about German history prior to this date and for building a dominant conceptual category of the nation state. However, German history is broader and more complicated than most understandings – predicated on the centrality of Prussia – usually allow. As Sheehan suggests – in response to the question 'What is German history from 1866 to 1945?' – it is the history of the unified nation, but it 'is also the history of experiences which do not fit within the boundaries of the nation' (1981: 22; see also Penny 2008). He goes on to point to a number of events, experiences, and processes which have traditionally not been included in discussions of the German state during this period, but the one that even he manages to ignore is that of the German overseas empire.[ii]

Within 13 years of unification, the German state had begun the process of acquiring 'the fourth largest colonial empire at the time' (Conrad, 2013: 544). The 1885 Berlin Conference not only inaugurated the process of European, including German, colonization of Africa, but, according to Conrad (2013), also formalised the idea of the 'internal' colonization – or 'Germanification' – of the eastern provinces as discussed earlier. At the same time as establishing itself in Europe, the incipient German state was consolidating its hold over external territories through a variety of violent colonial expeditions, including in South-West Africa (where the Herero and Nama people were effectively exterminated), Samoa, and Qingdao in China (see Steinmetz, 2005, 2007). There is little consideration, however, of this colonial activity in most discussions of the formation and development of the German state. Similarly, apart from the work of Mommsen (1974, 1984 [1959]), there are real lacunae in Weberian scholarship in examining the relationship between Germany's colonial activities and Weber's conceptualization of the modern state.[iii] And even with Mommsen, while there is a theoretical recognition of the significance of imperialism for Weber, the actual overseas colonial expansion of the German state is not discussed.[iv]

As Mommsen highlights, for Weber, the national idea became 'an ultimate norm that justified the exercise of political power' (1984 [1959]: 64), but the power that was exercised was also imperial and there is little reflection back on what this means for the concept of the nation-state otherwise in use. The German empire may have only lasted 30 years, from 1884 to 1915, but I would suggest that 'imperialism' was a constitutive aspect of the project of nation-state formation as identified by Weber himself. Nations, he argued, were not defined merely in terms of ethnic or cultural homogeneity, but through the welding into a group of a people defined by their shared political destinies and struggles for power. These struggles were not only against minorities 'at home' but also struggles to become a world power through overseas expansion. As Mommsen lays out, in Weber's terms, nations were increasingly associated with imperialism and sought not only independence 'but a powerful political position in the world' (1984 [1959]: 52). If, as mentioned earlier, the world was constituted as an international community, then seeking 'a powerful political position in the world' meant the domination of others beyond the state within which domination was supposed to be defined in terms of the claim to a legitimate monopoly of the means of violence within a given territory. Weber's conceptualization of the modern state was based upon the contemporary German state as defined by its national boundaries, but with little direct reflection on

its concurrent imperial activities. Imperialism and colonial conquest were simply seen as component aspects of 'strong' national states. The failure to address the history of the German state directly and to theorize imperialism explicitly as an aspect of what is otherwise presented as the nation-state has formatively shaped contemporary comparative historical sociology.

Colonialism and the State

Weber's definition of the modern state, as that entity which secures the legitimate exercise of coercive power within a given territory, is central to most historical sociological analyses of state formation. From the early collaborative projects associated with comparative politics and modernization theory to later iterations of cultural historical sociology, the focus has primarily been on the emergence, in Europe, of what were seen to be sovereign, territorial states organized along national lines (see Almond and Coleman, 1960; Tilly, 1975, 1994; Steinmetz, 1999). In the introduction to his influential edited volume, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, for example, Tilly outlined the conditions seen to be significant in this process. He pointed to a variety of necessary 'preconditions' that shaped the development of states in Western Europe – 'the relatively standard culture, the peasant base, the pre-existing, decentralized political structure' (1975a: 31) – as well as to features of state-building processes and their associated circumstances. In its simplest version, according to Tilly, this latter has three main aspects. The first is the population that carries on some form of collective political life; the second, is the governmental organization that exercises control over the means of coercion within the population; and third, the routinized relations between the two, that is, between the population and the government (Tilly, 1975a: 32). Such an understanding associates a particular population with a given territory and makes the state responsible for and responsible to that population. This, however, fails to take into account the actions of the state upon populations outside its self-defined parameters and towards whom there is no relationship of responsibility (only of domination; though, of course, domination also defined the relationship to some subjects of rule, such as Poles and Jews in Germany).

The preconditions and subsequent processes are discussed from 1600 forward and yet the fact that the majority of states under consideration were also involved in processes of colonization during this period is not regarded as significant. This is so despite the fact that one of the key points of organization of the volume is 'the extractive and repressive activities of states' (Tilly 1975a: 6). In a similar fashion to Weber, then, Tilly and his collaborators devolve the processes of colonization to the 'normal' activities of the state and focus primarily on its 'internal' as opposed to 'external' actions. The standard strategy seems to be to identify local preconditions in the medieval period – such as extraction of resources from the peasantry and the creation of a standing army – and then to focus on internal state-building processes in the early modern period. In the process, they avoid the implications of the extension of the earlier 'preconditions' to territories beyond the state as it is being defined – that is, the implications of imperial extraction and the creation of colonial armies, for instance, to the development and subsequent shape of the state that is presented in national terms. Interestingly, Tilly gives credit to Europeans (and their 'offspring' – one imagines he means the United States and other settler colonies, although this is not stated) for 'creating the international system within which all states of the contemporary world are now operating' (1975b: 601), but with no discussion of how contemporary decolonized states had previously been

subordinated parts of the imperial states which are otherwise presented and analysed as national states that somehow create an international system into which others entered.

This model of the emergence of the national state became the basis of comparison for studies examining nation-state formation in other parts of the world (see, Skocpol, 1979; Mann, 1986, 1993; Wimmer and Feinstein, 2010). It has also provided the baseline definition for subsequent historical sociological studies seeking to develop more expansive understandings of state-formation, such as Steinmetz's (1999) edited collection examining the significance of culture to state-formation. This volume addresses what is understood as the 'cultural and historical decontextualization' of many earlier studies and seeks 'to demonstrate how taking culture seriously can change the way we understand states that have *not* been stereotyped as "traditional"' (Steinmetz, 1999a: 27, 28). That is, part of the intention of this volume is to examine the emergence of state forms in the non-West and to account for broader cultural processes in terms of examining the state in Europe and the West. In maintaining an idea of the 'traditional' state form, however, Steinmetz and his contributors fail to re-conceptualize the idea of the nation-state by taking into account those broader processes of colonization and imperialism that are at least recognized as having happened. The chapters on non-Western states simply examine the consequences of colonization on their subsequent development; or, as Steinmetz puts it, they 'explore the effect of Western political ideologies and state forms in non-Western, colonial and postcolonial settings' (Steinmetz, 1999a: 32). There is no consideration of how the colonial relations of domination and subordination connected dispersed territories and populations within an imperial polity, nor of how a specific *nation*-state form only emerged (on both sides) as a consequence of decolonization. It did not exist prior to then. The nation state in the comparative historical sociology of nation state-building is always already a colonial and imperial state.

Both in the studies focusing explicitly on the emergence of the state form in Europe and later studies examining state forms in other parts of the world, the presumption is of the emergence of the nation-state as a 'pure-type' in Europe to be understood in modified, deficient, culturally inflected terms elsewhere. There is little consideration of the fact that the majority of these 'pure' nation-states were actually imperial states with more expansive boundaries and polities. This elision is also present within Weber's foundational analysis of the state, as argued in the previous section, from which these subsequent studies ensue. This elision matters because of its consequences for how we go on to understand the normative definition of the state and the related concepts of legitimacy and domination with which it is strongly associated. Across the variety of historical sociological accounts of the modern state, as Chris Thornhill argues, legitimacy is seen to be 'integrally connected to the territorial sovereignty of states' (2008: 164). Further, to the extent that state building and political formation are seen as 'elements of *societal self-construction*' (Thornhill, 2008: 169, italics in original), then questions regarding modes of legitimacy within modern states are strongly associated with the societies recognized by those states. Societies outside of those associated with the state, upon whom the state acts in a mode of domination – such as those who are colonized – fall out of consideration. These issues will be picked up and developed in the following section.

Whose History?

Weber's claim that 'a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' – where 'territory' is highlighted as one of the key characteristics of the state – evades consideration of the use of force by the use of a state's apparatuses outside of its given territory and for the purposes of including that territory within its borders against the wishes of those inhabitants for such incorporation. Indeed, 'incorporation' is often the euphemism used by historical sociologists in their scant considerations of violent conquest and genocide as factors in the emergence of European and pan-American polities. Immanuel Wallerstein, for example, writes, 'the Europeans first seized Inca gold, then mined Potosi and Mexican silver ... They sent settlers to control the area of the Americas politically and to supervise the economic operations, and they imported labor as well. In short, they incorporated the Americas into their world-economy' (1980: 109). This rather glosses over the violence and force necessary in seizing Inca gold, the coerced and enslaved labour required to mine the silver, the forced transportation of human beings from one part of the world to work for Europeans in another part of the world. Similarly, when discussing the colonial heritage of Spanish America, Knöbl suggests that the differences in outcome rest in part on whether 'the indigenous population was originally weak in numbers or quickly extinguished as a consequence of colonialism' (2014: 316). There is no comment on the euphemism of 'quickly extinguished' or how acknowledging such violence may change the ways in which we otherwise understand issues of 'development' and 'progress'.

Rather than consider the systematic (and, usually, genocidal) violence necessary in the establishment of settler societies many historical sociologists simply gloss over such facts, preferring instead to focus on how settler societies should be understood as '*self-interpreting societies* par excellence' (Wagner, 2014: 297, italics in original). Such rhetoric is based on the Tocquevillian idea that the United States was a unique project of self-creation, able to forge its own destiny free of the encumbrances of feudal history and tradition that continued to inflect European versions. Weber himself suggests that never before in history had it been 'so easy for any nation to become a great civilized power' and, further, that this would likely be the last such instance given that 'the areas of *free soil* are now vanishing everywhere in the world' (quoted in Mommsen, 1984 [1959]: 83, fn 56, italics in original). The issue of the incorporation of 'free soil' – even if one were to disregard the initial presumption of it being free and the violent processes required to possess it – actually points to the US as the continuation of European traditions rather than signifying a radical break from them. One of the reasons for migration to the lands that came to be known as the Americas was the enclosure movement in Britain – the fencing off of common land to turn it into private property. The incorporation of 'free soil' in what was to become the Americas, I suggest, was the continuation of that movement, not a break from it (see Greer 2012). With enslavement similarly replacing serfdom, it is not clear how new the 'new' society of the United States really was – it seems remarkably similar once you take these factors into consideration.

Joas and Knobl's *War and Social Thought* explicitly seeks to address the failure of social theory to take into consideration issues of violence and war. However, in turn, it fails to account for colonial violence and genocide as central aspects of any historical sociology of the modern state. Again, this is, in part, a consequence of the representation of the state as national instead of recognizing it as already imperial. In the Introduction, for example, they point to the recent violent past of the twentieth century as exemplified by the two 'world wars and state organized mass murder that ended in 1945', as well as to the Cold War tensions of the latter half of that century (2013: 1). They

fail to mention, however, the violence associated with colonization or then decolonization that marked this century at least as much as these other events (see Hansen 2002, Anderson 2005, Elkins 2005, Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). Where mention is made, it is primarily of colonies as established facts devoid of much discussion of the violence required to 'incorporate' these other territories and peoples into the states under consideration. For example, they discuss Bentham's concern that having colonies would intensify the risk of war among European powers and that colonies were an unnecessary expense (2013: 39-40), or Mills' idea that empire could be the basis of establishing peace (2013: 68), but do not engage with the forms of domination necessary in acquiring colonies or then keeping hold of them. When the violence of the colonizers is addressed directly it is presented as 'a constitutive component of colonial rule' (2013: 250) and with little movement back to examine its place also in establishing the legitimacy of the state understood in national terms.

Conclusion

What I have set out so far is a double response to postcolonial critique within historical sociology. On the one hand, the 'absences' of standard accounts are acknowledged, in order to recommend the importance of plural experiences, while at the same time maintaining that the conceptual apparatus of historical sociology can accommodate these 'additions' without requiring reconstruction. On the other hand, new accounts of old cases – European nation states – grow apace, without reference to the global forms of domination that are an integral part of those histories. The key methodological question for the purposes of this article has been to explore the ways in which the methodology of ideal types works against the possibility of the reconstruction of conceptual categories within comparative historical sociology. The substantive focus has been on the concept of the modern state and the ways in which this has been erroneously delineated from Weber onwards as the *national* state, instead of, more appropriately, as the *imperial* state. This mistake is not simply conceptual, but comes about as a consequence of the value relevant concerns of historical sociologists themselves. Addressing these conceptual errors would enable us also to open up the possibilities for thinking differently about the state, and its associated problems, for our present times.

For example, 'postcolonial' states – as they are commonly defined within the standard literature – are frequently seen as 'failed' states. This is usually presumed to be as a consequence of two, related, things. First, these new states came into being as a result of movements for national self-determination against colonial domination and, as such, were not thought to conform to the standard definitions of the nation (based on a common language, culture, *ethnie*). Second, given their dependent status as colonial territories, they were not capable of self-government. However, those making such arguments rarely address another possibility. That is, that supposedly successful *nation*-states were actually *imperial* states. Subsequent states seeking nationhood are unable to reproduce the (problematic) conditions of that earlier 'success', but, at the same time many former imperial states seem to have difficulties when required to reproduce themselves as 'mere' nation states. In this way, re-thinking the state conceptually bears upon problems of 'new' and 'old' states alike; their problems are mutually constituted.

A different methodological perspective, that of 'connected sociologies', is required that eschews the 'conservative' methodology of ideal types. Instead, it starts from a recognition that events are

constituted by processes that are always broader than the selections that bound events as particular and specific to their theoretical constructs. It is inspired by the call, by historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997), for 'connected histories' which, he argues, do not derive from a singular standpoint, whether that be a putatively universal standpoint – which postcolonial theorists have demonstrated as being in fact a particular standpoint linked to colonialism – or a standpoint of the generalized subaltern. Indeed, both a particular standpoint and a universal standpoint in historical sociology tend to be strongly associated with a methodology of ideal types whose constructions are derived from particular value-relevant selections. Their disagreement is over the values deemed relevant, not over the form of the theoretical constructs to which they give rise. To understand events in terms of ideal types is to argue that they are knowable in terms of processes represented as internal to the type. Connected sociologies, in contrast, seek to reconstruct theoretical categories – their relations and objects – to create new understandings that incorporate and transform previous ones.

While knowledge can never be total, the selections we make have consequences for its ordering. That ordering is always open to challenge in the light of different selections and re-orderings. In the standard accounts of ideal types, the consequence is a plurality of processes that are disconnected precisely because the function of ideal types is to separate some events and 'entities' from others and to represent their internal relationships, thereby making other entities and events mere contingencies from the perspective of those relations. The approach of connected sociologies is different. It recognizes a plurality of possible interpretations and selections, not as a 'description', but as an opportunity for reconsidering what we previously thought we had known. Mere contingencies from one perspective become central features in another. This is not an argument for relativism (that is already implicit in standard ideal type methodology), but an argument for the reconstruction of concepts and the reinterpretation of histories in the light of that reconstruction. The consequence of different perspectives must be to open up examination of events and processes such that they are understood differently in light of that engagement. Put another way, engaging with different voices must move us beyond simple pluralism to make a difference to what was initially thought; not so that we come to think the same, but that we think differently from how we had previously thought.

This is the push to reconstruction central to my conception of 'connected sociologies', whereby understandings are reconstructed as a consequence of the significant new connections identified. To put it most strongly, there is no connection where there is no reconstruction; and no understanding remains unchanged by connection. To understand events through their connections is to acknowledge from the outset that addressing particular sets of connections leads to particular understandings which are put in question through choosing other sets of connections. This is not a choice guided by whim, but through an argument for why certain connections were initially chosen and why choosing others could lead to more adequate explanations.

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[i] Some might argue that all theoretical constructions – even those in the natural sciences – represent 'abstractions' and this is all Weber (and others) are suggesting. For this to be the case, then it would be necessary to address issues of 'falsification' associated with ideal types, where falsification involves the construction of new theory and revised concepts and observations. There is no 'falsification' in the Weberian approach to theory construction, precisely because there is no reconstruction of concepts and observations in the light of new knowledge. For further discussion, see Holmwood and Stewart, 1991.

[ii] There has been a considerable amount of scholarship, since Sheehan's (1981) article, on rethinking Germany in the context of its overseas colonial empire, as well as reinterpreting its actions 'internally' as colonial (see, for example, Steinmetz, 2007; Dickinson, 2008; Penny, 2008; Zimmerman, 2010; Conrad, 2013). Interestingly, while much of this literature seeks to place Germany in a global context – that is, to examine the history of German imperialism alongside histories of other European colonial powers or then examine the ways in which German consciousness may have been shaped in relation to its colonies – there is still little consideration of how the idea of the German nation state might itself be rethought as a consequence of taking seriously its imperial activities. The issue in terms of this article is less about the changes to consciousness, culture, or attitudes, but rather, how we might need to reformulate our understandings of the state once we accept that what we have been calling the 'national' state was, in fact, an imperial state. This is not a simple call to replace the 'nation' with the 'empire' but to work through the implications, conceptually, of doing so.

[iii] It should be noted that there is exemplary new historical and historical-sociological scholarship on Germany and its colonial role, but this scholarship rarely re-examines the notion of the nation-state which is the focus of this article. See, for example, Zimmerman (2010) and Steinmetz (2007).

[iv] Mommsen has written extensively on Weber's understanding of the modern state and the ways in which, for him, imperialism was a necessary aspect of it. Imperialism, in this context, is presented in terms of economic imperialism; that is, Mommsen suggests that, for Weber, what was important was to secure overseas territories 'before the world was divided up into closed zones of economic control' (1974: 42). There is little to no discussion of the fact that the European division of the world for its own purposes was a politically contested matter, not least by those who were colonized. Instead, it is presented throughout as a natural phenomenon that requires no reflection. 'Max Weber was convinced that in an age of imperialism and unrestricted international economic competition, the German nation state simply had to embark upon expansionist policies overseas' (Mommsen, 1974: 31); 'Once the present period of international competition had come to an end, the dynamics of the economic system, the well-being of the masses of the population and, in the last resort, the degree of individual freedom as well, would all depend to a large degree on the size of the nation's colonial dependencies' (Mommsen, 1974: 42); 'Max Weber … hoped to see the other great powers concede to Germany its fair share of the still free regions of the globe by means of a policy of increased armament' (1984 [1959]: 79).