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Global sociology and its discontents

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Abstract

Sociology emerged in the course of Western modernization; its major classical-era statements are preoccupied with modernity and its impact on national societies. After decolonization, 'Third World' modernization paved the way for the notion of globalization. The sociology of globalization is a current specialty within US and European sociological associations. The promise of global sociology has been on the agenda of the International Sociological Association since at least 1990. At a deeper level, global sociology requires un-thinking the role of core concepts such as modernity or religion or society vis-à-vis their Western origins. Global Studies and post-colonial sociology, two of the most widely known research fields claiming global intent, are examined with respect to whether they provide adequate conceptual resources for global sociology. While the research agendas of both offer promising insights, inquiry suggests that both suffer from important drawbacks. The sociological tradition is now facing an impasse; fragmentation may persist, but other possibilities also exist. No grand solution is perhaps possible. A truly global sociology may eventually emerge from the original interpretations that develop from non-Western historical paths.

Keywords: Global sociology; Global studies; Post-colonialism; globalization; sociology; glocalization

Following the International Sociological Association's (ISA) XIX Congress, Vandenberghe (2018) wrote in the Newsletter of the Association's Research Committee on Sociological Theory (RC16):

> We've changed epoch. Sociology is gone. … Not … as an academic operation or disciplinary organization. But the field has … been losing its substance, core, and identity, rendering it hollow and shallow … sociology has reached its end … I am not sure that our sociological theories of late modernity … are still valid … We need to grasp the ontology of the present and analyze the disjuncture that menaces the future … Societies are not sliding back [but] are moving fast forward

… It's time to … reorient our research, in the hope that we can once again grasp the ontology of the raging present in concepts.

Against this backdrop, the following inquiry will examine the extent to which globalization provides Sociology with the tools necessary to confront the challenges of the 21st century. In order to grasp the specifics, this discussion is structured as follows. It opens with a synopsis of the intellectual trajectory that led from the emergence of globalization to the invocation of global sociology. Next, the institutionalization of globalization within sociology is critically examined; while the sociology of globalization is a research area within specific academic constituencies, no discernible Global Sociology exists *per se.* The discussion then shifts to post-colonialism, which has emerged as an important challenge to academic sociology. The intertwining of post-colonial with global perspectives is also scrutinized. While offering insights that can renew sociological agendas, post-colonial approaches also suffer from contradictions that hinder the articulation of a coherent overarching vision for Sociology at large; the discipline's fragmentation may persist in the foreseeable future. Lastly, some promising efforts to unthink concepts and relationships are briefly reviewed, with a further suggestion that the current impasse may not be resolved through grand solutions but through decisive smaller-scale ones.

From globalization to global sociology

The word 'globalization' slowly emerged in academic debate and the press from the 1930s forward. According to James and Steger (2014: 419), the first references in international databases date to 1986, while the first instance of its use in magazines appears in 1984. In the ISI-Web of Science, the first reference to 'globalization' dates to 1968, and in the EBSCO Host Database the first reference appears in 1975. Scholte (2000:43) dates its first occurrence to 1944, while McGillivray (2006:10) reports that its earliest occurrence was in 1892, when *Harper's Magazine* referred to Monsieur de Vogüé, a Frenchman whose love of travel made him 'global'.

While an incipient awareness of globalization earlier in the 20th century is indisputable, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe contributed greatly to the term's popularization. Nearly all international databases confirm that its use increased sharply since 1989, and Google's *Ngram* viewer offers a graphic representation of this increase. Globalization gained popularity as a means of interpreting the trauma of communism's collapse (Alexander 2007; Rosenberg 2005). Since 1989 the quest for a global sociology has occupied internationally-oriented researchers and prominent members of the International Sociological Association – including past ISA presidents Margaret Archer (1991), Immanuel Wallerstein (1995), and Alberto Martinelli (2003).

This objective reflects the practical necessity of incorporating non-Western alterity into the sociological tradition and universalizing sociology as a discipline. Awareness of this issue has been particularly pronounced among the international sociological community. Until the 1950s, the sociological tradition operated mostly within specific national contexts, mainly in France and the US. The discipline has thus been marked by the prevalence of national sociologies and its institutionalization shaped by historical particularities such as, for example, the dominant role of Durkheim in French sociology or the mass emigration of German intellectuals fleeing the Nazi regime during the

interwar era. While Sociology focused on modern societies *par excellence*, Anthropology focused on pre-modern, 'primitive', or colonial societies. Post-World War II decolonization and the foundation of the International Sociological Association (1948) signified a turning point for the discipline.

Decolonization raised the question of Sociology's relevance for the former colonies. This issue was not solely academic, but also deeply political. During the Cold War era, modernization became part of the intellectual arsenal in the battle between East and West to sell their preferred sociopolitical systems to Third World countries. Modernity became in principle open to all – if the right choice was made. Communist regimes' suspicions about Sociology were not accidental or misguided. Global modernization was the intellectual antecedent to globalization, as Robertson's autobiographical reflections confirm: 'Modernization is not just about … the modernization of the world. So if it is clumsy to call it "modernization of the whole world", so what should I call it? So I called it "globalization"' (Robertson 2014: 447). Skeptics are advised to check out Google's *Ngram* viewer and note the spectacular rise in mentions of 'global modernity' during the post-World War II era. At that time, modernization and development were thriving research areas; they eventually transformed into globalization studies. The title of Timmons and Hite's (2000) edited collection of previously published material, *From Modernization to Globalization*, captures the trend.

The term 'global modernity' became fashionable in the 1990s (Featherstone 1990; Featherstone, Robertson and Turner 1995). The appearance of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2002) and that of a single world or global culture (Lechner and Boli 2005) are moreover indicative of an extensive preoccupation with the relationship between 'the rest' and 'the West' (Hall 1992). In this scholarly context, the rise of globalization studies has been ubiquitous; with Global Studies holding a preeminent position. This interdisciplinary field has in large part subsumed the field formerly known as Area Studies, which in the aftermath of communism's collapse lacked a policy-grounded foundation for continued financial support. With strong institutional support from major universities (such as the University of California at Santa Barbara) and the creation of associations and networks (the UK and US-based Global Studies Associations and the Global Studies Network, for instance) it has achieved enviable institutional legitimacy. Global Studies has attracted the support of numerous scholars, producing important scholarly achievements.[1]

But Global Studies does not have a monopoly over the study of globalization (survey in Roudometof 2012). Rather, it operates as a hybrid field that connects political scientists and scholars of international relations (IR) with a diverse group of other social scientists. Within political science, Global Studies appears as a rival to the institutional Goliath of International Studies,[2] which has been the major scholarly organization in IR. Such a relationship demotes Sociology to subordinate status, following approaches developed with different disciplinary considerations in mind. That globalization is also studied in the American Sociological Association's Section on Global and Transnational Sociology and the European Sociological Association's Research Network on Global, Cosmopolitan and Transnational Sociology thus comes as no surprise. While both

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[1]For overviews, see Juergensmeyer and Anhheier 2012; Juergensmeyer, Steger and Sassen 2018; for a recent synthesis, see Steger and James 2019.

[2]See https://www.isanet.org

groups center on globalization, the other adjectives in their official titles speak loudly of related foci that are sufficiently important to the participants to warrant inclusion in each group's name.

After the collapse of communism in 1989, Giddens's (1990) interpretation of globalization as involving the spread of European or more broadly Western modernity around the globe became conventional wisdom. For Giddens (1990: 64), globalization is essentially 'a stretching process, in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole'. This 'stretching' is what he (Giddens 1990: 63) means when he writes about modernity being 'inherently globalising'. Modernity in turn refers to 'modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the 17th century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence' (Giddens 1990: 1). This rather explicitly Eurocentric view is but the latest twist in what in past centuries was the Europeanization of the 'world' (in the first instance, of Europe's colonies) or what in the 20th century was called 'Westernization' or 'Americanization'. In the 1990s, as Rosenberg (2005: 7) notes, 'instead of acting as interpreters to the spirit of the age,' social theorists 'became its ideological amplifiers'. This use of globalization as a buzzword prompted criticism that this new term was nothing more than a revival of the modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s (Joas 2004).

Global sociology and the end of grand narratives

At this point, the central issue preoccupying the international sociological community becomes easier to discern. As an academic discipline, Sociology emerged from the self-reflection of metropolitan modernity and Western civilization (Roudometof 1994) and as such is 'the science of modernity' *per se*; its object defined in terms of the historical trajectories of those European societies that were modernizing at the time the discipline's classics were written (1880-1920) as well as the post-Civil War modernization of the US (1870-1929).

The question of sociology's 'global' meaning is by no means settled, nor can it be interpreted naively as a simple issue of expanded geographical scope. A Sociology of Globalization[3] can be conceived of. It would preserve the basic premises and concepts of academic sociology, its structures of knowledge of the social world that have been historically developed and articulated within the West, and their universal validity simply applied to 'the world as a whole'. Post-World War II modernization theory took this route. World polity or society theory has emerged since the 1970s as the major successor to this intellectual tradition, continuing it to this day.[4] Usually referred to as 'the Stanford School', this group of researchers and students of the Stanford-based sociologist J.W. Meyer has explored global modernization as a process of institutional isomorphism whereby the cumulative success of available organizational models leads to their duplication across the globe. The process is largely unidimensional (from the West to the rest) but the resulting global culture is not seen as derivative of the West and the theory leaves ample room for processes of indigenization, diffusion, selective appropriation, and adaptation.

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[3]See Martell 2017; Sassen 2007.
[4]See Krücken and Drori 2010; Buhari-Gulmez 2010.

Similarly, in Global Studies, whether 'global' is acknowledged in terms of its episte-mological status is doubtful. The 'global' is instead understood as a geographical scale or 'multiple social scales', which leads to a 'multilevel approach' that views 'global rela-tions at multiple scales of interaction' (Pieterse 2012: 11). Sassen (2006) employs such scales of interaction to argue that globalization does not operate against the State but rather through the State. In such interpretations, space is understood as abstract or physical and can be divorced from 'global relations'. Such social relations can then be mapped onto different spatial scales, which can range from local to global.[5] In contrast, space can be understood from a constructivist point of view as primarily *social space*; hence, social relations are seen as articulated *through* (social) space, not merely *in* space.[6] When social relations are articulated in physical or absolute space, concepts and theories developed or derived from the Western historical experience can be deployed. These can and should be applied to non-Western contexts insofar as these consist of physical space. Inevitably, then, global modernity is not necessarily so very different from western modernity. In Global Studies, this *modus operandi* leads to privileging the global over the local and the glocal.[7] This criticism goes back to the institutional infrastructure of Global Studies, which remains concentrated mostly in the Global North.

But the most radical criticisms cannot be so easily appeased. From the perspective of the world's periphery, those who live in the South (a term popularized in the 1970s to refer to the less developed or 'underdeveloped' societies, as these were referred to at that time), the spectrum of a global sociology has a meaning different from what Giddens (1990) suggests: that sociological knowledge should confront social realities as seen from the perspective of the formerly colonized subjects, not from the per-spective of the former colonial powers. While the explicit objective of anti-colonial struggles has been the universal inclusion of all peoples into humankind, the issue is far from exhausted by official statements such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (cf. Rossi 2020). The term 'modernity' crystallizes the identification of the non-Western Other as part of a 'tradition' and a culture which are juxtaposed against the West. The movement from 'tradition' to 'modernity' becomes a linear pro-cess, oftentimes seen as inevitable under the lenses of evolutionism or the Marxist dialectic. The 'West' is identified with 'modernity' whereas the non-European Other is designated as 'pre-modern' or 'primitive' or 'non-human' (Roudometof 1994: 19).

Beneath this labeling process lies an implicit claim about Western civilization's universality and a Eurocentric perspective that views alien societies as uncultivated versions of the West. Western social thought has been instrumental in producing 'nar-ratives' that view Western modernity as the only possible path towards 'civilization'. Weber's (1958) opening statement in the 'Author's Introduction' of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* offers a paradigmatic example of Eurocentrism:

A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of univer-sal history, is bound to ask himself to what circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural

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[5]See Darian-Smith 2017.
[6]For further discussion, see Roudometof 2019.
[7]See Roudometof 2015.

phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value. (Weber 1958:13)

Weber makes several implicit assumptions of the Western 'narrative of modernity' explicit: the fact that this kind of reflection is in itself a product of Western social thought; that a great division lies between 'the West' and 'the rest;' that universalism is a product of the West; and lastly, that a 'line of development' exists that renders the 'rise of the West' a phenomenon of universal value, thereby forestalling the articulation of post-World War II modernization theories.

At stake is the extent to which sociological knowledge *itself* is actually global, for if sociology represents only an imperfect knowledge of modern Western societies or is a discourse of knowledge from the West's perspective, it clearly lacks a comprehensive foundation as a discipline. As Giri (2018: 1-2) put it: 'So far, globalization of sociology has meant globalization of themes and methods of modernist sociology, which makes an easy equation between sociology and modernity'. Similarly, Bhambra (2016: 962) is quite explicit:

> Sociology's orientation to history has generally been based around an implicit consensus on the emergence of modernity and the related 'rise of the West', as well as around a stadial idea of progressive development and the privileging of Eurocentred histories in the construction of such an account. Social, political, and economic changes […] are argued to have brought a new world into being, one that was marked by two forms of 'rupture'. The first is a temporal rupture dividing a traditional rural past from a modern industrial present. The second is a spatial disjuncture that located change in Europe (later to be widened to the category of the West more generally) from the rest of the world. Taken together, key events associated with modernity are framed within a particular narrative of European history understood in narrowly bounded terms.

For Bhambra (2016), this narrative of modernity is faulty because it fails to take the connections between Europe or the West and the rest of the world into account – and these connections consist of colonialism and enslavement. Giri (2018) likewise calls for an interrogation of modernist sociology's foundations in order to make sociology partake in a planetary conversation about its objects (such as society or the individual). In such a manner, past biases can be undone and social ontologies that grasp humanity as such (and not solely the Western subject) be developed. For the sake of clarity and candor, I would add here that more than a quarter-century ago I similarly wrote about the necessity of developing an alternative global perspective capable of transcending the paradigm of modernity (Roudometof 1994) and the particular 'grand narrative' of the 'rise of the West'.

That this issue has greater gravity for the international sociological community is plain to see – in contrast to specific national communities such as the American Sociological Association, which is the largest single academic community and includes more than 30% of the world's professional sociologists. Throughout the post-World War II era, this genre of 'Western bias' in the formative narrative of European modernity has been exposed through the critique of Orientalism (Said 1978; Young 2016),

Balkanism (Todorova 1997), and racism (Gilroy 1993; Hall 1992). The rise of post-modernism since the 1980s brought forth the celebrated 'end of grand narratives' (Lyotard 1984), so that hitherto grand stories about global modernization lost their appeal and legitimacy. But the issue is not solely about abstract ideas, as institutional matters are deeply entangled with research programs.

Since the 1980s, the emergence of post-colonial and post-modernist discourses from within the humanities (one example is Mishra and Hodge 1991) increased academic sociology's hostility to perspectives that seemed to question disciplinary knowledge. The rise of 'the Studies', as Vandenberghe and Fuchs (2019) call them, operating from within polemical or partisan viewpoints is hence met by critics who consider them to be incongruent with the deeply cherished principle of research impartiality – a value central to the discipline since Weber's (1949) discussion. Many sociologists have felt that such discourses surrender to ideological preconceptions which foster intellectual sloppiness. Mizruchi (2017) argues that this is the reason that sociology has seen its reputation decline in the 'real world'. In autobiographical reflections spanning the post-World War II era, House (2019) considers the decline of Sociology's involvement in public policy as well as the post-1980 decline in funding availability intrinsically detrimental to the public prestige and visibility of the discipline. His view is that the academic and applied or policy-oriented parts of the discipline might be more comfortable in different disciplinary settings. This criticism has deep roots: at least since the 1980s, critics such as Horowitz (1993) have decried the disintegration of academic sociology in the US – in large part related to criminology and demography splitting off from the American Sociological Association. In other words, increasing preoccupation with theoretical trends and critical attitudes within the profession have clearly alienated the individuals and groups which work in policy-making and more bureaucratic applied areas.

Post-colonialism and globalization

As Connell (2018) writes, since the 1980s and mainly in the 1990s, post-colonialism has become the default academic label for the study of the Global South (defined as the former Third World, non-Western colonized regions of the globe). The label has been variously applied to (at least some of the areas within) sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, the Arab world, Latin America, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and even the USA. A rough consensus has it that postcolonial cultures are characterized by a set of binary oppositions: autonomy versus dependence, autochthony versus hybridity, resistance versus complicity, imitation versus originality. The proliferation of the label's use raises the issue whether post-colonial is a meta-theoretical gaze or the term should be reserved exclusively for those regions that were indeed subjected to colonialism. This is no trivial matter, as rhetoric can easily expand its application to socio-cultural contexts akin to but different from colonialism (compare the 'second serfdom' in Eastern Europe or the Ottoman Empire).

Post-colonial rhetoric is also currently used in 21st century global politics. Note the attack launched in August 2020 by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan against France's President Emmanuel Macron, charging him with 'colonial' intent in visiting earthquake-stricken Lebanon and seeking to deprive Turkey of the region's undersea energy resources. In Erdogan's words: 'Just as it rejected the Treaty of Sevres

100 years ago, Turkey will not bow down to the modern Sevres being pushed on it in the Eastern Mediterranean' (Sevencan 2020).

The project of a post-colonial sociology has emerged as a widely debated topic (Bhambra 2016; Go 2013; Munck 2016; Rosa 2014; Susen 2020). 'Decolonizing X' is a popular academic strategy to criticize mainstream perspectives and has been applied to European sociology (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Boatcă and Costa 2010), Jeffrey Alexander's theory of the civil sphere (Hammer 2020), and the sociological curriculum (Connell 2018), among other topics. Of particular relevance for understanding the relationship between the global and the post-colonial are Bhambra's (2013: 295) remarks. She emphasizes that, just as in other disciplines, 'perceptions about the globalized nature of the world in which we live are beginning to have an impact within sociology', and sociology consequently 'has to engage […] with recognition of the epistemological value and agency of the world beyond the West'. For her, 'it is only by acknowledging the significance of the "colonial global" in the constitution of sociology that it is possible to understand and address the necessarily postcolonial (and decolonial) present of "global sociology"' (Bhambra 2013: 295-96). Needless to say, even a fellow traveler like Susen (2020: 55) feels compelled to point out that it would 'be erroneous to portray 'the world beyond the West' as a homogeneous, monolithic, or unified entity'. That is certainly true. Hence, the question of balancing between the competing claims of universalism and difference emerges as the central challenge.

Beyond programmatic pronouncements it is best to examine how this program has been concretely applied to historical sociology. For Ascione and Chambers (2016: 303), 'global historical sociology' denotes 'the broad research programme aimed at making sociology not only an intellectual endeavour inevitably engaged with long-term and large-scale processes of social change, but also a critical perspective constantly concerned with the geopolitics of knowledge and the multiplex configurations of power behind the regimes of theoretical and empirical legitimation wherein sociological thinking takes place'.

Go (2013) regards prior research programs in historical sociology as inadequately global and state-centered (overview in Demetriou and Roudometof 2020). Go suggests 'rescaling' the research objects of study in an effort to uncover 'descriptive assemblages' of global or transnational dynamics and processes. In Go and Lawson (2017), this program is enacted, yet its approach appears at times self-contradictory. The editors set out a seemingly sound research program, but they divide their volume into three parts – (i) states, war and revolution; (ii) empire, race and sexuality; and (iii) capitalism and political economy – a set of topics that hardly represents a radical break with pre-existing tendencies. Despite making a significant effort to undo the tendency to privilege internal factors in theories of social change, the volume suffers from an internal contradiction, in that it uncritically deploys Western categories (for example, capitalism) as universal ones. The result reads more as an attempt to develop a revamped version of neo-Marxist political economy in order to decode the North-South binary opposition. But the use of Marxist accounts of capitalism or reformulated neo- or post-Marxist interpretations are still part and parcel of a central Western grand narrative (Marxism), not an oppositional form of knowledge. Such approaches appear insufficiently conscious of Epimenides' paradox.

That postcolonial perspectives have a 'geography problem' is undeniable. The invocation of the 'South' as a *topos* (and not as a physical locale) at times allows the inclusion

of countries such as Australia that are by no means 'developing' economies. For Santos (2014), the 'global South' is no longer defined in terms of socio-economic disadvantage (as in the original North-South distinction popular in the 20th century). He writes:

> The global South is not a geographical concept, even though the great majority of its populations live in countries of the Southern hemisphere. The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering. It is, therefore, an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the geographic North (Europe and North America), in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, racism and islamophobia. (Santos 2016: 18-19)

Postcolonial literature suggests that the understanding of sociology be revamped in light of its complicity with colonialism.[8] While the nature and extent of such complicity are valid concerns, efforts to construct an 'alternative paradigm' often conflate issues relating to different classifications and critiques. In particular, the East-West dichotomy progressively metamorphoses into a North-South dichotomy (Go 2016).

But these binary oppositions are quite different. In the East-West binary opposition, the issue concerns the construction of knowledge as a means for understanding the non-western Other (Said 1978). The critique leveled in *Orientalism* suggests skepticism about the modes of knowledge derived from the West, inclusive of utilitarian, Marxist, and individualistic interpretations of human life. Its association with postmodern perspectives is appropriate and relevant: Najla Said (2004) recalls her father declaring 'I invented the field!' in reference to postmodernism.

In contrast to the issues that are legitimately raised in the context of critiquing the narrative of modernity, the fundamental fault lines in the North-South binary relationship originate from critiques of global inequality and of the imperial or semi-colonial exploitation and dependency that has contributed to the South's multiple deficits. In the post-World War II era, the emergence of this binary was intimately related to institutional and international attempts to publicize this gap and call for international public policy solutions. Southern theory explicitly conflates the fault lines between East/West and North/South, as evidenced by Santos' (2014) effort to offer epistemological coherence. Furthermore, as Rosa (2014) has insightfully noted, the use of the label 'South' appears circumstantial, with different notions of theory locked in a dispute over their legitimacy, in a geopolitical context where the South can and does 'talk back' through active participation in international debates.

In post-colonial rhetoric, much is made of the effort to articulate 'indigenous' sociologies set up in juxtaposition to Western sociology. For example, Omobowale and Akanle (2017) describe the Asuwada theory of sociation as a contextual episteme that accounts for African social experience. Based on African and, in particular, Yoruba social interaction, it postulates that among Africans the need to internalize and exhibit

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[8]For some notable examples of such studies, see Connell 1997; Magubane 2016.

the socially approved values of 'community survival and development' is integral to local social structure. The authors rightly contrast this theory to Western theories of structural functionalism and classical modernization, arguing that Western social science ethnocentrically depicts African communal living as primitive and antithetical to development. That may be a sound thesis, but their argument seems to be against Western ethnocentrism and its African proponents, not against sociological knowledge *as such*. After all, the critique of such ethnocentric ideas *within* sociology has a history of over half a century, and the example of Japan has time and again been noted specifically for refuting the faulty association between individualism and economic development. Yet such a turn toward a positive association with local knowledge is presented in opposition to *all* of sociology.

Contemporary debates show no shortage of such rhetorical hyperbole. For example, Susen (2020: 55) interprets the 'key premise underlying the plea for a global sociology' as living 'in a global society – that is, in a society that is characterized by an increasing degree of interconnectedness at multiple levels'. It is perhaps relevant to add here that Sussen's argument is in line with the conventional reading in terms of multiple levels of interconnectivity or of actions undertaken with a global 'intent' as opposed to a purely geographical understanding, whereby global equals planetary. In contrast to Sussen though, Robertson (2016) regards focusing on global interconnectivity when addressing the topic of global culture as a mistake – plainly an argument against post-colonial critics. For Susen (2020) interconnectivity becomes almost a synonym for incorporating post-colonial and anti-colonial approaches to sociology. This fusion between interconnectivity and colonial experience is empirically unsubstantiated; humans have lived connected lives for millennia, whereas colonialism pertains to the last five centuries. To put it differently, post-colonial sociology's appropriation of 'global interconnectivity' is problematic. While the colonial experience is a facet or subset or an instance or a particular expression of global interconnectivity, the opposite is not the case.

No way out?

As regards the epistemological foundations of post-colonial sociology, Go (2016) makes the suggestion to accept standpoint epistemology, originally developed within feminist sociological perspectives (Smith 1989). In its generalized extension, this epistemology suggests that the different experiences of diverse groups are all equally valid and offer interpretations of the social world that are all acceptable. The resulting fragmentation (epistemological 'tribalism') of intellectual viewpoints then becomes accepted as legitimate. Although it accurately reflects the current *status quo*, this interpretation implicitly accepts that there is no way out of academic Sociology's intellectual predicament. Vandenberghe's (2018) melancholic reflection about the coming end of sociology[9] becomes the reasonable conclusion of such a view.

There are, however, some fresh ideas that offer different points of departure for the future. Since the dawn of the 21st century, the *avant-garde* of theorizing has gradually acknowledged the substance of post-modern critiques, some of them was leveled by sociologists like the late Jean Baudrillard (1983). Echoing his long-standing thesis

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[9]See also Vandenberghe and Fuchs 2019.

about 'the death of the social', we have been told to think of 'sociology without societies' or 'sociology beyond societies' (Urry 2000; Touraine 2007, 2020) or to re-envision 'society' at a level broader or higher than that of the nation-state (Robertson 2016). In this context, the critique of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) has drawn renewed attention to translocal, global, and transnational processes. While sociological theorists from Karl Marx to Jeffrey Alexander have produced a wealth of theories of 'societalization' (association, *Vergesellschaftung*) (Schmidt 2019), it is entirely plausible to postulate that cosmopolitical approaches (Stengers 2010) can also achieve that for the global level.

Wagner (2016) proposes another major alternative interpretation: the construction of a 'one-world sociology' in a manner that entirely bypasses the *problematique* of Western modernity. In his framework, modernity has not been exclusively European, and Europe has not been exclusively modern. Featured in Stråth and Wagner (2017), this thesis is, however, undermined by the mere fact that the authors have selected Europe as their subject. Including the North American, Japanese, and Russian/Soviet ones, 'other modernities' can be envisioned and spoken of whose historical trajectories diverge from the European path; these world regions are not necessarily less modern than Europe. Inversely, an historical survey of the meanings of 'Europe' (Delanty 1995) clearly shows the historical ruptures that separate 21st century Europe from the 'Europe' of past centuries. Such approaches aim precisely at recovering modernity as a concept and preserving its centrality as Sociology's master concept.

Though the quest for such *grand solutions* is likely to persist in the foreseeable future, that no such solutions may come to fruition is entirely conceivable – a situation that fuels Vandenberghe and Fuchs' (2019) pessimism. But it might perhaps be possible to suggest decisive *small solutions*: in other words, effectively adopting and applying key ideas that come out of this dialogue onto the practice of sociological research. As an author engaged with 'historically-informed' sociology (Inglis 2014) I have employed such small solutions in my own work. In my sociological history of the emergence of nations in SE Europe (Roudometof 2001) I sought to theorize the historical path of these nations based on their *own* historical trajectories, which, while deeply entangled with those of Western Europe, are certainly different. My explicit strategy has been to flesh out an interpretation on the basis of their trajectories, and to make their specific historical experience the basis for theorizing. What I did *not* do was to adopt a pre-existing perspective or theory developed in the West (and based on the theorization of Western historical trajectories), then apply it to a socio-cultural context that took a different historical path.

My historical sociology of Orthodox Christianity (Roudometof 2014) followed a different approach. Building on Christianity's historical record over the *longue durée*, I developed a framework of different blueprints or models which were then used to analyze church-state-society relationships in the Orthodox part of Europe. In this case, history provided both the archive for the development of these blueprints as well as the terrain where they occurred in different contexts. These models are conceived as *glocal*, in other words, a combination or fusion of indigenous or local input with globalized ideas about religiosity and its relationship to culture, society, and the state. Intercultural or cross-civilizational encounters modified and shaped the historical path of these models' adoption onto different social formations (for example, the Roman, Romanov, and Ottoman Empires, as well as the nation-states that

emerged in the region after the 19ᵗʰ century and the transnational communities of Orthodox immigrants in the New World). These elements are critically important, for they have methodological implications. They show that historically constitutive and evolving models are not the result of internal parthenogenesis or externally imposed imperialism but the outcome of cross-cultural encounters *and* internal social processes.[10]

This decisively different conceptual strategy aspires to no grand solution. Instead, small solutions are developed with reference to specific socio-cultural contexts under investigation. Such a method may not deliver breakthroughs overnight, but does offer the possibility of cumulative knowledge emerging from diverse regions. To a considerable extent, its success is contingent upon the citation practices and circulation of ideas among the scholarly community. Although considerable globalization has taken place in scholarly production, scientific core and periphery relations continue to shape the reception of ideas in the social sciences (Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras 2014; Blagojević and Yair 2010). On this point, some of the biases rightfully critiqued by post-colonial scholarship are extremely prominent in the social sciences, yet the post-colonial agenda's success at the center of the academic world system, ironically, might lead merely to a changing of the guard, not a shift in academic practices.

Conclusions

Global Sociology should *not* be a Sociology of Globalization. Were that the case, the structures of knowledge would remain confined to the Western-centered paradigm of European or transatlantic modernity, typically identified with the classical era (1880-1920) of sociological thought. This issue is widely understood among the international sociological community. But it is difficult to resolve, because successful resolution requires Sociology to go beyond Western modernity in terms not just of sheer empirical content but also of constructing theories and developing epistemology.

In this discussion, I have briefly surveyed two main alternatives to this conundrum. The first alternative comes from the relatively mainstream perspectives of Global Studies and the 'Stanford School' of sociological neo-institutionalism. These research agendas mostly accept the universality of sociological knowledge and attempt to incorporate other regions and contexts, yet these 'other spaces' are basically understood as absolute or geographical spaces, not as social spaces that shape meaning, epistemologies, and characteristic forms of knowledge. The extension of the paradigm of Western modernity onto 'the world' is a strategy typical of 'normal science', but also demonstrates the inability to escape modernity's grasp on Sociology.

Post-colonial sociology, in contrast, sheds light on the dark side of Western modernity. Highly critical of the complicity of the classical sociological tradition in racism, colonialism, and other forms of subordination, it calls for making these processes central to the understanding of inter-societal interconnectivity. But its reading of interconnectedness as nearly synonymous with colonialism reduces complexity to a major yet singular historical formation. The invocation of 'the South' as a *topos* of the underprivileged or subaltern 'Other' is a strategy that allows the fusion of

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[10]For a similar thesis, see Conrad 2012 on the Enlightenment, and Gluck and Tsing 2009 for the broader idea.

different problematics (East/West, North/South) into a single program – albeit without necessarily resolving internal contradictions. These resurface in the context of global historical sociology when categories that are clearly Western in origin are used uncritically in a research program that aims to overturn the dominance of Western epistemology and its modes of knowledge.

Global Sociology remains a promise or, better, a project that focuses scholarly attention on an important objective – making Sociology relevant to humanity *as such*. But, as these final paragraphs suggest, it is entirely plausible that a grand solution delivering a sociological revelation might not realize such an objective. Instead, while pursuing their own topics, the various communities of social scientists might develop small solutions; that is, elements of this broader problematic might be incrementally incorporated onto the practice of sociological research.

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