

SOCIOLOGY'S 'OTHER': THE DEBATES ON EUROPEAN UNIVERSALS

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Summary

This chapter explores the traditions of theories and practices that have organised non-European sociologies in the world. It discusses the trends within India, Africa and Latin America as these emerge as a result of decolonisation and the growth of nationalism. It also explores briefly the theories of multiple modernities that suggest that they transcend Eurocentric assumptions. It argues for a need to create a communicative dialogue between the two traditions.

1. Introduction

...words matter,....concepts and conceptualisations matter,our knowledge frameworks are a causal factor in the construction of unequal social and political institutions-a causal factor but not all the only casual factor...(We need not) reject grand narratives but quite the opposite, to return to them, for they are today only 'held in abeyance, deferred or circumvented'" (Immanuel Wallerstein).

In diverse and partial, though quite cohesive ways, the physical environment becomes a strategy for enforcing common values while maintaining difference within a conjoined modern world. (Gwendolyn Wright)

The theories and practices of the sociological discipline can be broadly divided into two parts. The first is visible and universal. It can be discovered in books; articles published by international publishing houses, in conferences and can be heard in lectures within classrooms. It is the official version of the discipline's self identity. For example,

Giddens inaugurates his book *The Consequences of Modernity* by stating that modernity refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe and that sociology, is a study of **that** modern social life. Similar statements can be drawn out from the works of other scholars. Oftentimes this version has a slight recognition of the 'other', that is, those that are not completely 'modern'; such societies are considered 'modernising societies' or those which are 'traditional societies becoming modern'. This position argues that the perspectives used to examine and assess Europe and now the North, may be also used to evaluate 'non-Western' societies. It argues that modernity's march outside Europe, first to North America and Australasia, and then to Latin America, Africa and the Asian continent makes it imperative to accept that we live in one world. Thus, social theory is by necessity universal.

There is a second tradition of sociology, often not recognised, most times invisible and framing itself to particular aspects of its physical location - the 'non-Western' life-worlds, now known as the 'South'. This tradition self-identifies itself as being traditional, underdeveloped and undeveloped and examines its lack of coevalness with modernity to its history - that of colonialism, the domination of the west and with global inequities of production, distribution and circulation of knowledge. Its ideas appear in articles and books written in 'native'/local/indigene languages, in publications restricted and circulated within that locality and region. This tradition remains fragmented, disaggregated, disjointed and fractured and is marginalised in terms of the first.

The key attribute that divides these two traditions relates to colonialism; specifically the recognition of its role in constituting dominant social knowledge. For example, Ashis Nandy states:

This colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalise the concept of modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within and outside West; in structures and in minds.

The first tradition does not recognise the role Europe has played as coloniser nor the way the latter has framed social theories. Though there are differences among authors regarding the impact of colonialism, for the second, this is a decisive and critical principle. This tradition creates its theoretical architecture on this principal foundation.

In this chapter, the ideas and theories and practices related to the second tradition (s) are discussed. Sources are restricted because of dependency on the English language. Yet, the chapter has been able to cover the ideas of this tradition across the entire South: in India, Malaysia-Singapore; Africa, and Latin America.

The fragments of this second tradition can be divided in terms of two time periods and two perspectives. The first self-identifies itself as being indigenous and framing endogenous knowledges and is generally culturist in its orientation. Its focus is on creating 'alternative' sociological theories and perspectives. It has emerged with the decolonisation process and draws its culturist frames for nationalist ideologies and movements as these grew in South East Asia, South Asia and Africa from the late-

nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

The second is a recent development and combines Marxist and neo-dependency positions with post-structuralist perspectives of subaltern and/or post colonial studies. These have emerged in tandem with the debates on the geopolitics of contemporary global integration and its implication on knowledge as these have developed within scholarly networks in South East Asia, Africa and Latin America. The ideas of this new generation of sociologists are explored as they carry forward the debates on indigeneity/ endogeneity and extend it to a methodological critique of European modernity. They examine the epistemic basis of social theory and argue that its location in the episteme of European modernity is the basis of European social theory's standardized and homogenous universalism. They contend that it is imperative that social theory assesses modernity's moorings in colonialism and reframe its episteme to make it inclusive, multifarious and diverse.

In the last section, these contentions are debated with the discussions recently initiated by a group of scholars mainly based in the North. They use the hypothesis of axial civilisations and multiple modernities to suggest that there are 'many' paths towards modernity and state that these paths reconfigure the European characteristics, in new ways and novel forms. The chapter ends by asking whether this new perspective is indeed breaking the episteme of European modernity (as argued by the earlier mentioned thinkers) and whether it has allowed genuine communication between the two traditions. If the first tradition still remains trapped in the epistemic contours of *eurocentrism*, how can we initiate the discussion to bridge these two traditions and start a communicative dialogue between them, given the imperative of globalisation?

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Biographical Sketch

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