

BOOK REVIEWS

Remaking Modernity. Politics, History, and Sociology. Ed. by Julia Adams, Elisabeth S. Clemens, and Ann Shola Orloff. [Politics, History, and Culture.] Duke University Press, Durham, 2005. xii, 612 pp. £81.00. (Paper: £24.95.); DOI: 10.1017/S0020859007012862

“Let the structural determinists tremble at this revolution. The historical sociologists have nothing to lose but their structuralist chains. Historical sociologists of the world, unite!” Although these words are my own, they do reveal the intention of this provocative book. The editors (Julia Adams of Yale University, Elisabeth Clemens of the University of Chicago, and Ann Orloff of Northwestern University) aim at some sort of revolution in the academic field of historical sociology. Their main “enemy” is the so-called “second wave”, which stands for the dominant current among historical sociologists in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. During these decades Marxist influence was triumphant and explanation through (materialist) structures and causal linkages dominated. Much of history was looked upon in consecutive stages and binary categories were applied, such as feudalist vs capitalist, traditional vs modern, rational vs irrational, democratic vs autocratic, Western vs non-Western. Perry Anderson, Theda Skocpol, Robert Brenner, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Charles Tilly are some of the most well-known representatives of this period. The second wave itself had been inspired and preceded by the “first wave”, which refers to the “classics”, the founding fathers of historical sociology, with authors like Alexis de Tocqueville, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx.

According to Adams, Clemens, and Orloff, a “third wave” is now well on its way. Its main characteristics are a rejection of the inherent Eurocentrism in the first and second waves, the application of gendered analyses and cultural interpretations, and a strong emphasis on agents and institutions as crucial research strategies. To some degree, this revolution comes as no surprise, as the existence of this wave has been claimed for several years already in various publications by “third-wavers”. The book itself is the result of a conference staged in 2001. The lengthy introduction (73 pages) has circulated widely as a paper at several other conferences. The final draft has been commented upon, among others, by some formerly notorious “second-wavers”. Still, this book is a turning point as it is the first coherent attempt to present a paradigmatic shift. To mark this claim, the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* recently devoted an entire issue (October 2006) to a symposium concerning this volume.

The title, *Remaking Modernity*, indicates new ways to explain our modern society. That is, after all, what historical sociologists are after: to offer an analysis in order to understand why and how people and societies have become modern or not (p. 2). Although the book values and builds further upon the interpretations offered by the first and second waves of historical sociology, the editors stress the innovative characteristics of the third wave. They let a selection of “third-wavers” speak for themselves in fifteen individual contributions, dealing with conduct-analysis, globalization, sociological positivism, religion, welfare systems, bureaucratization, war, collective action, revolutions, economic sociology, transitions to capitalism, professions, nations, citizenship, and ethnic groups. Invariably, the contributions are of a high academic standing and reflect the current state of research in

these subject fields. Although together they still lack a common new theoretical framework, their criticism of the second wave joins well up with the editorial introduction.

In this review, I can only pick out some salient points. In Richard Biernacki's piece on "The Action Turn?", the author aims to reframe the traditional rational-choice model from goal-achieving to problem-solving. In trying to explain rational human conduct, goals have often been defined as too abstract from the actual setting. Instead of departing from the proposition that individuals strive after a specific goal, Biernacki proposes to look upon actors in the past as persons who were confronted with multiple problems. While trying to solve those problems, the actual goals may change; some goals may gain priority over others and vice versa. During the problem-solving process, actors can also try out different repertoires (rational and less rational) to cope with these problems. The study of the transfer of problem-solving procedures, then, can be more valuable than the study of the spread of cultural values or broader social imperatives in general.

The problems connected with rational-choice theory constituted and still constitute a major challenge for historical sociologists, as the contribution by George Steinmetz on the theoretical groundings of the postwar period shows. He points among others to the rise of Fordism in social sciences, connected to the positivist regime that radiated from the economy. That Fordist tradition shaped the second wave in historical sociology in furthering clear-cut categories and causal linkages.

Rational-choice theory is also applied in the "analytical Weberian" study by Edgar Kiser and Justin Baer on the bureaucratization of states. They build further upon the tradition of methodological individualism that was strongly influenced by economic theory. Bruce Carruthers stresses another economic historical connection: the recent emphasis on institutions. This brought about an "institutionalist turn" in which institutions are more broadly defined as the "rules of the game", which help to explain the actions of historical actors. These "rules" (written and unwritten) are constructed and maintained by agents operating in networks. Instead of the sudden ruptures that had been the focus of study during the second wave, this new institutionalism emphasizes continuity and path-dependency.

Continuity and path-dependency is also particularly strong in Rebecca Jean Emigh's approach on the "Transitions to Capitalisms". Note the plurals: instead of just one path towards modernity, multiple paths existed. There is no such thing as one "modern" and "efficient" system of capitalism; capitalism comes in several sorts. In that regard Emigh is thoroughly anti-Eurocentric, like Zine Magubane, who stresses the need to look at societies as transnational phenomena. Ming-cheng Lo pushes that same argument further by taking race seriously, and attacking the former divide between modernity/tradition in her analysis of professions. She also applies a thorough gender approach, like Ann Shola Orloff, whose piece on welfare systems is a strong plea to include more often the neglected categories of both race and gender. Another neglected field is religion, as Philip Gorski argues in his overview of the connection between religion and sociology in the past decades.

More Eurocentric again is Meyer Kestnbaum, yet his contribution on war is quite innovative in another sense. Unlike most of the second wave who dealt with warfare, war is for Kestnbaum not just a single causal factor only, bringing about bureaucratization and state-formation. The author brings back war on to center stage, to be studied as a process, also stressing war as an event with the capacity to transform existing structures. Nader Sohrabi is more anti-Eurocentric again. In his study on revolutions in Iran and the

Ottoman Empire he singles out the subjectivities in revolutionary action, in particular the role of agents translating global ideologies into local action.

In collective-action studies, Roger Gould emphasizes, the second wave all too easily attributed certain interests to certain categories. Grievances, however, always have to be translated and formulated. In a similar vein, Lyn Spillman and Russel Faeges stress the need to study nations as a political collective identity that has to be constructed and maintained. In this regard the rather recent notion of “civil society” is crucial, as is shown by Margaret Somers in her contribution on citizenship. Much of the debates concerning citizen rights have been instigated by new immigrant arrivals and the rediscovery of national minority groups. As to ethnic groups, Rogers Brubaker points to the need to study the “framing” thereof (a term from social-movement literature). Why and how certain ethnic groups regard themselves as groups (the process towards “groupness”) should be the study of historical sociology rather than groups being taken as given.

The afterword by Elisabeth Clemens draws the various essays together in the piece, “Logics of History? Agency, Multiplicity and Incoherence in the Explanation of Change”. The title itself shows that the third wave is still rather loosely structured, but a couple of common traits can be discerned. There is a move in general away from treating societal types as coherent. Also, what joins the authors in this volume is their merit to combine “unusual combinations in methodology”, for example tackling state formation and war with notions of gender and race, market behaviour by looking at kinship structures, and “turning the lens of culture or discourse on almost every imaginable topic” (p. 500). “Relational” approaches are particularly salient and agency is inserted as an explanatory category.

In some respects this volume is perhaps too harsh on the second wave and several authors oversimplify its aims and methods (e.g. p. 72). Still, most continue to value the former structuralists’ interpretations. Just like social movements in general, this kind of simplification constitutes part of the “framing” of the protest; it does serve to get important viewpoints to the forefront. As regards criticism, the third wave is not so different from the second wave. In the 1970s and 1980s, debates among historical sociologists entailed severe criticism and adaptations of the first wave too. Yet the relevance of the “relative autonomy of the state” did not signify that Marx was sent to the dustbin of history, nor was Weber degraded by the debate concerning the protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism. Criticism constitutes part of academic life and former work should be debated over and again. Furthermore, several of the strongest representatives of the second wave (Tilly, Skocpol, Calhoun) published new works in the 1990s that served as major sources of inspiration for the third wave (e.g. pp. 7, 210–211, 322, 426). In fact, the term “second wave” should not be applied to persons, but to a time period in which a certain tendency was dominant in US historical sociology.

Also, the third wavers in this volume apply criticism to the first wave. Apart from the frequent references to Weber, Marx, and Durkheim in the introduction and the afterword, Durkheim serves in seven of the fifteen contributions, Marx (and Marxists) in eleven, and Weber in twelve. Most “positive” influence is derived from Weber, whereas most criticism goes to Marx (or rather the “Marxists”). But that varies too: Magubane is highly critical of Weber (p. 94), whereas Sohrabi still uses Marxist interpretations schemes (p. 308).

What, then, are the gains and what are the losses of this revolution? Let us look at what Steinmetz called the characteristic features of the second wave (p. 144): more attention to temporal processes (history), causal explanation, and comparison. Whereas the first element is undoubtedly strengthened in the third wave, causal explanation is generally

replaced now by contingency and/or by a multitude of possible contributing factors, among whom the former studied structural ones still count as valid. The under-determination of outcomes is emphasized, next to the complex constitution of human agency. Comparisons are rendered more difficult as we are not allowed to look upon groups, societies, nations etc. as coherent entities any more. Of course, it is still possible to compare. Clemens points to the fact that comparisons can to focus more on processes than on “entities” (p. 513), yet the whole analysis will have to be embedded in an extensive historical narrative. This is fine for historians in general, but more difficult for those social scientists that aim at some sort of model-building.

Finally, it should be stressed that this manifesto regards mainly the US historical sociologists. The situation in France, Great Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands (among others) is different. For example, Norbert Elias, Fernand Braudel, and E.P. Thompson figure only in a marginal way in the debates between the third and the second waves. Nevertheless, the contributions are valid too for non-US scholars, if only because they provide such an excellent overview of the state of the art within US historical sociology. But perhaps the largest accomplishment is the provocative introduction by Adams, Clemens and Orloff. After all, the social sciences and history only thrive through debates. In stirring up the discussion in a provocative way they stimulated the “rethinking” of this wonderful discipline: historical sociology. Let us accept the challenge and join the debate!

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LAWSON, GEORGE. *Negotiated Revolutions. The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile*. Ashgate, Aldershot 2005. xi, 272 pp. £47.50; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859007022869

George Lawson cannot get over it! He can't believe that the era of large-scale social revolutions has passed. It's hard to tell if this lament for the past stems from his own ideological blinders or those of such intellectual mentors as Eric Hobsbawm or Fred Holliday. Whatever the answer to this question, Lawson has produced a book that might have been interesting and innovative but instead is badly flawed.

It is not just that Lawson rejects what he calls Francis Fukuyama's “infamous” end of history thesis. Rather, the author has reinvented the definition of revolution to encompass just about any change of regimes or transition process. In doing so he has drained away any recognizable meaning from the term revolution itself. Most of us think of revolution as encompassing the American, French, Russian, Mexican, Chinese, Cuban, Iranian, and maybe a few other cases. But Lawson has now redefined the term to include the three case studies in this book: the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia at the time), South Africa, and Chile. Chile? Yes, Chile in 1988–1990 as it replaced the dictator Augusto Pinochet with a more open and democratic regime. But whatever we think of the other two cases, Chile in this period can best be described as undertaking a pacted transition to democracy or perhaps a democratic restoration. It was definitely not a revolution by any acceptable definition of that term.

This is a very curious book. One does not know what to do with it. Is this one of the last gasps (yet another) of European academic Marxism or “structuralism”, of ideological pleading disguised as serious scholarship? Why do so many European academics find the