

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

SOCIOLOGY FOR ONE WORLD:
UNITY AND DIVERSITY

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Abstract In this Address I want to advocate a single Sociology, whose ultimate unity rests on acknowledging the universality of human reasoning; to endorse a single World, whose oneness is based on adopting a realist ontology; and to predicate any services the Discipline can give to this World upon accepting the fundamental unicity of Humanity. Ironically, just when globalisation has been growing in the world, so too have doubts about sociology as an international enterprise. This divergent development between the world and the discipline appears to be the direct result of the demise of positivism. Subsequent theorists have polarised into advocates of 'false universalism', e.g. 'modernisation theory', 'dependency theory' and the post-modernist view of 'modernity', all of which assume unitary processes with uniform results – to which international sociology stands opposed. Alternatively they have become celebrants of incommensurable diversity, resting on the assumptions of relativism, which would outlaw international sociology altogether. Instead of endorsing either unity or diversity, the task of international sociology is to specify how global mechanisms combine with regional circumstances, in non-uniform fashion, to shape new trajectories and novel configurations. Globalisation is not merely the effect of the 'new' world on the 'old': the two together make for a radically different world, which it is the job of international sociology to capture – social theory is never intransitive.

'Sociology for One World', the theme of the Twelfth World Congress of the International Sociological Association, is not meant to be a verbal umbrella, capacious enough to cover any theoretical theme or research topic. Rather than giving nominal coherence to disparate contributions, the theme was devised to focus everyone's attention on its implications – which are the concern of all. 'Sociology for One World' implies: firstly, a single Discipline; secondly, a single World; and thirdly, that the former does something for the latter. I fully anticipate that under *any* description all three will be contentious and that *particular* descriptions of them will generate still hotter contention.

Nevertheless, the task I have set myself in this Address is to argue in favour of all three implications. Thus I want to advocate a single sociology, whose ultimate unity rests on acknowledging the universality of human reasoning; to endorse a single World, whose oneness is based on adopting a realistic ontology; and to predicate any services this Discipline can give to this World upon accepting the fundamental unicity of Humanity. These are all transcendental arguments. The last asks what Humankind must be like if Sociology can possibly serve all of it. The second asks what the World must be like for sociologists to address 'it' rather than Many Worlds. The first presents obedience to the laws of logic as necessary conditions for the very possibility of sociology. This is the level at which my advocacy is pitched. *If* 'Sociology for One World' is possible, then this depends upon the above statements about

reasoning, reality and humanity being truths. Many will and do reject them. Simultaneously they turn their backs on the whole enterprise of international sociology which I will defend here as the *raison d'être* of the International Sociological Association.

'Sociology for One World' (Albrow 1987) is a promise not an accomplishment. Ironically over the last three decades the developments of the World and the development of Sociology seem to have moved in opposite directions. On the one hand, there has been an intensified globalisation in all institutional domains (politics, economics, law, labour, culture, communications, social movements and, of course, science and technology). These at least call for an internationalised sociology to address such global phenomena. On the other hand, at precisely the time when internationalisation has been growing in the world, so too have doubts been germinating about social theory as an international enterprise. The growing critique of positivism, whose version of naturalism constituted a defective charter for one science in one world, is now uncritically applied to any alternative charters.

Thus divergent development between the world and the discipline appears to be the direct consequence of the demise of positivism. In the first instance, it was precisely *because* the universalist pretensions of positivism came face-to-face with globalisation, in the form of various theses about 'development' and 'modernisation', 'industrial' and 'post-industrial' society, that positivism was subjected to such a sustained critique. However, these valid criticisms then reinforced equally legitimate doubts about positivism as a philosophy of social science. Yet at this point, reservations about its premisses often turned into unreserved endorsement of their antitheses.

From questioning the adequacy of its ontology (restricted to observable reality) came bigger doubts about social realism; from disputing its epistemology (theory-neutral observations) came counter-claims advocating sociological relativism; from denying its methodological power (to derive predictions from covering laws) came strong aspersions on sociology's capacity to explain social tendencies at all.

Finally, then, the steady demise of positivism spread growing theoretical disarray throughout the discipline. Globalisation had prompted this demise, but it became the main victim of it. In the wake of positivism's funeral came a massive retreat from any kind of international endeavour within sociology and a re-celebration of diversity, difference, tradition, locality, context specificity and indigenisation. Hence the irony of an increasingly global society which is met by an increasingly localised sociology.

Unity or diversity?

My advocacy of One Discipline might be seen as an automatic endorsement of unity; perhaps even as promoting a new uniformity in the name of international sociology. In fact I see the dichotomy between Unity or Diversity as a *false polarity* which has done inestimable damage to the discipline by polarising social theory itself. Certainly positivism engendered this antithesis by staking the strongest claim for Unity (unity of method,

universality of laws, uniformity of practice), but its opponents never challenged the polarity itself – they went along with it or went against it. Thus there have been counter-claimants seeking to transpose their version of unity, mainly a succession of Marxist and neo-Marxist polar expeditions, and growing counter-movements to the other pole where they camp under the flag of Diversity.

The effect of polarisation has been to foster increasing extremism, precisely because antithesis is the unquestioned name of the game. Thus the relativists who have always been with us shifted to a new radicalism, which successively uprooted precepts, concepts, truth, reason and logic from any grounding in common humanity inhabiting the same universe, to regroup all as the socio-centric products of ‘different worlds’. Diversity became impregnable on those terms, for insistence upon incommensurability and untranslatability meant that diverse ‘forms of life’ could only be understood on their own terms. That all understanding was ‘contextual’ induced a deference to the context-specificity which turned any ‘purging of the indexicality’ of expression into the original sin of universalisation. Post-modernism is the climacteric of this extremism since the celebration of *difference* is based on a restatement of the old polarity, this time in terms of Locality versus Totality. Diversity is both privileged and protected by what is effectively the syllogism of Post-modernism: totalising efforts are terroristic / Rationality is totalising / therefore Rationality is terrorism. (Not that any Post-modernist would go in for syllogisms but they need their rhetorical equivalent to get from the Enlightenment to Auschwitz.) Thus the antithesis between Unity and Diversity now becomes morally and emotively entrenched as universalism is anathematised. The consequence of such extremism is impotence to engage in international discourse.

Yet one major reason why this polarity between Unity *versus* Diversity constitutes a *false* dichotomy in social theorising is because of changes in the social world itself. The quintessential defining property of society, its capacity for morphogenesis or transformation, for being restructured through social interaction, has two implications. Firstly, it is obviously this core property which makes positivism inappropriate to it, but secondly, as our subject matter changes because of its human constitution, this needs to be matched by theoretical reformulations which explain these unpredictable re-patterning. The sociological production of a new variety of theory is always entailed by the social production of new variety in the real world.

The key change over the last few decades has been Globalisation – a multi-faceted process entailing a growing worldwide interconnectedness of structure, culture and agency, and a parallel de-differentiation of traditional boundaries. The globalisation of *society* means that *societies* are no longer the prime units of sociology. In short, as we begin to live in One World, this new social reality supplies us with good reasons for overhauling our theoretical assumptions and frameworks (Sztompka 1988).

The primacy of diversity has disappeared with the vanishing of the ‘anthropological order’. Traditional (non-positivistic) approaches to cross-cultural study basically had to deal with traditional societies. The problem was

fundamentally ontological and consisted in the fact that geographical separation meant different social contexts indeed had minimal overlap. Consequently, the generic model behind the anthropological exercise was how to understand 'alien' beliefs and practices. Conceptual mapping was difficult because epistemologically the knowledge maps of the two parties marked few shared features. Difficult but not impossible, given both co-inhabited the same self-subsistent natural world and talk and practice within it could serve as the bridgehead for getting translation off the ground and spinning the thread of cross-cultural intelligibility.

Nevertheless, intelligibility was a triumph in the face of *diversity*. For it consisted in the understanding of difference and divergence: given the anthropological order things could not be otherwise. But it was not a celebration of difference: only the relativists elevated this to the status of incommensurability and then fêted it. All the same, achieving intelligibility was not the same as initiating dialogue. It could not be precisely because societal discourses were about such different matters given such different settings. (Only the positivists were undeterred by the paucity of trans-societal circumstances and meanings and imposed their unitary indicators, despite their quite different denotations in different societies). In short, diversity could be understood, but not integrated conceptually or theoretically: the anthropological order lacked sufficient common ground.

What has changed is that global processes are now partly constitutive of social reality everywhere *and* constitute that part which cannot be understood in strictly local terms, for its origins and impact stem from outside localised 'forms of life'. This in today's world is what supplies international sociology with its new brief.

I want to build my case for accepting this brief on three points, and to rest it on rejecting the antinomy between diversity and unity. *Firstly*, that the emergence of globalisation has nullified many of the good reasons for emphasising *diversity* which obtained prior to it. *Secondly*, that the unfinished process of becoming global does not warrant the theoretical proclamation of a new *unity* nor underwrite facile universalistic propositions about a supposedly homogeneous entity. *Thirdly*, that the real task of what I call international sociology is to theorise the progressive 'integration of diversity' (which determines the contours and contents of emerging globality) and to generate a new 'theoretical variety', which can explain the heterogeneous impact of this holistic process upon the constituent parts of One New World (Teune and Mlinar 1978). As such, international sociology neither seeks universal laws nor settles for incommensurable pluralism.

International sociology: respecting realism

International sociology is at variance both with the enduring and exclusive emphasis upon diversity and with the facile announcement of a new universalism stressing ineluctable trends and their undifferentiated reception. It thus rejects continued attachment to diversity by the pretence that the 'anthropological order' has somehow survived the emergence of the global

context and that sociological business can ever again be exclusively culture specific. Equally it opposes the race to project a new universalism from the effects of globalisation by pretending that similar causes have similar consequences, regardless of local contextual variation. Instead it is concerned with new sources of unity stemming from the emergence of global structures and agents *and* their *interplay* with the diversity of regional structure and agency. The 'integration of diversity' is about examining this interface between them.

The 'generation of variety' means advancing new propositions to capture these novel outcomes by explaining the mechanisms of change. Ultimately such mechanisms are found in the complex interplay between newly emergent structures (global) and old established structures (regional). Since their interplay only takes place through the medium of social interaction, it has to address *pre-groupings* of local agents, promoting the maintenance or change of local structures, and their *re-grouping* in the face of the new globally induced transformation of structure and culture (Archer 1990). Because of the complexity of combinations, none of these outcomes can be expected, let alone presumed, to be *uniform*. At best we will detect configurations and not uniformities. Because the configurations themselves depend upon interaction between agents (with different interests, power, ideas and intentionality) we can *explain* them but not extrapolate from them to other times, places and circumstances in a bid to extract universal predictive laws. Since both structure and agency will undergo transformation as part and parcel of the global-regional interplay, then of necessity international sociology is dealing with new social variety and will itself need a new variety of concepts to theorise these processes.

This search for explanatory mechanisms in the interplay between structures and agents sets international sociology apart from the positivistic quest for Humean constant conjunctions, then expressed as universal laws. For the ramifications of globalisation cannot be explained by confining international sociology to its phenomenal manifestations or committing it to an ontology of experience – the *empirical* realism endorsed by positivism. Yet the very process of globalisation has been further grist to the mill of neo-positivism. The premature announcement of this new source of *unity* in the world has resulted in the hasty formulation of excessively *uniform* theories. This has been the case not only among latter-day positivists but also for some of their most virulent critics. Therefore three versions of such false universalism will briefly be reviewed in order to distance international sociology from any such heralding of uniformity.

(a) This 'false universalism' is particularly evident in current theories of modernity itself. The three waves of 'modernisation' theory represent unifactoral, ahistorical and contextless parades of the successive stages through which the transfer of capital, technology and information from the First World will ineluctably generate worldwide uniformity. However, the projection of such constant conjunctures makes the unwarranted assumption that sociology is dealing with closed systems. Qualitatively different circumstances

throughout the Third World are illicitly reduced to local perturbations, to be disposed of by a portmanteau *ceteris paribus* clause – a clause so large that it packs away the reality of half the world.

Despite heavy criticism of the early ‘industrial society’ thesis (Kerr, Rostow), and especially its assumptions about the concomitant standardisation of other social institutions, it has merely been superseded by other theories of development which make identical suppositions – those of Post-Industrial and now of Information Society (Archer 1989). Thus we are told ‘the present moment represents nothing less than the second great divide in human history’ for the universal implications of informatics are ‘bigger, deeper and more important than the industrial revolution’ (Toffler 1975 : 21). On the other side of this great divide lies a new universal social framework, presented as the autonomous effect of information technology with deterministic consequences for structure, culture and agency alike.

Although *structural* objections have wreaked havoc with simplistic notions of an international forced ‘march through the sectors’ of the economy, with the vanguard populations already clustered in the ‘information sector’ (Mies and Gershuny 1986), *cultural* critiques have been glaringly absent. Yet if the whole cultural realm is becoming subordinate to information technology, then the dawning ‘imperialism of instrumental rationality’ (Weisenbaum 1976) leaves no other evaluative basis on which to criticise, re-deploy or restrict informatics. The announcement of this new cultural axial principle (the late flowering of Comte’s Third Stage of Positivism) assumes the emergence of cultural monism and the demise of *Wertrationalität*.

It depends *inter alia* on the threadbare secularisation thesis, epitomised in Peter Berger’s assertion that ‘the secularising potency of capitalistic-industrial rationalisation is not only self-perpetuating but self-aggrandizing’ (1969 : 126). However, over the last 15 years, trends in the Second and Third World show a politicisation of religion and a religious invasion of politics, highlighted but by no means restricted to the upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism or the buoyancy of Liberation Theology (Robertson 1989). In turn this invites reinspection of the thesis within the First World, where Beckford and Luckmann conclude that ‘no support is given to the triumphalist scenario of secularization, according to which the declining significance of religion is a necessary feature of modernizing and modern societies’ (1989 : 2).

Only the ideological positivist will display repugnant resistance to the evidence that in one world, it is religion rather than science which seeks to renew the face of the earth.

(b) More sadly still, the victims of the bundle of changes, which are lumped together under the label of ‘modernisation’, have not fared any better at unpacking it. Instead they too have precipitated themselves into another form of ‘false universalism’, again driven uni-factorally and materialistically. Thus, as frequently noted, Gunder Frank’s early work on ‘underdevelopment’ was the mirror image of the ‘modernisation theses’ he censored. For once assimilated into the world market, the status of such countries was *automatic, unproblematic and homogeneous*.

Hence, 'dependency' became the reverse face of 'modernisation' but, as part of the same coin, it traded in the same currency of false universalism. Neo-Marxian dependency theory began promisingly by insisting that capitalist diffusion could only be understood by introducing the domination/subordination relations which explained the qualitative difference between capitalism at the centre and periphery. However, the tendency to lump the Third World together, riding roughshod over contextual diversity in these countries, fails to explain the variety of developmental trajectories within the Third World (i.e. rapid advance, on the one hand, in the Republic of Korea and Taiwan versus stagnation if not deterioration in parts of Central America or Africa).

The quest for easy universalism leads at best to true but trite generalisations, such that the subordinate position of most Third World countries in the world economy means they face greater constraints than did those First World first-comers whose process of industrialisation was relatively autonomous. However, to gain explanatory purchase on the variety of Third World development trajectories, more specific mechanisms have to be adduced to capture the interplay *between* global factors (patterns of multinational investment, degree of unequal exchange, type of technology transfers etc.) *and* local ones (nature of the state and indigenous stratification system). Otherwise, as Mouzelis argues, 'dependency theory, in so far as it tries to create a *general* theory about the Third World without taking variations seriously and systematically into account, cannot escape the fate of all contextless, universal theorising in the social sciences. Such theorising results in statements that are either true but trivial, or inconclusive in the sense that they hold true only under certain conditions not specifiable by the theory. It is this that has, partly at least, brought today's general sense of impasse and disillusionment' (1988 : 28).

(c) Ironically, post-modernism which might through its virulent anti-positivism have furnished a critique of structural homogeneity and cultural monism in fact buttresses this false universalism by its sweeping repudiation of 'modernity'. By homogenising 'modernity' in order to condemn it, post-modernists subscribe to an even more extreme, undated, unplaced, undifferentiated, under-analysed and over-thematised picture of the modern world.

Again an epochal Great Break is announced, between the 'modern' and the 'post-modern' which calls for a definition of the two orders and an account of the break between them. Yet requests for periodisation and mechanism are evaded in real terms in favour of an idealist emphasis on the *sense* of the *relational* move away. 'Periodising' is rejected as a classical or modern idea: instead "Postmodern" simply indicates a mood, or better a state of mind' (Lyotard 1986-7 : 209). Characterisation of the 'modern' is relational to post-modernist discourse, which generates its own concept of modernity and thus swings free from historical reality and its variations.

Turning to mechanism, what has changed so radically to induce such a transformed 'state of mind'? Since post-modernists are highly conventional post-industrial theorists (stressing information technology, emancipation of

capital from labour and the shift from production to consumption, all occurring within the confines of capitalism), it is not surprising that the answer comes in terms of cultural idealism. That 'everything in our social life . . . can be said to have become cultural' (Jameson 1984 : 85–7) is highly disputable: yet even if this were the case, can it be expressed in terms of anti-realist ontology (Archer 1988)? This is precisely what Baudrillard does in arguing that conceptions replace reality, reality is transformed into images, simulacra constitute and count as the real, so that 'T.V. is the World' (1983). Post-modernists thus make problematic all notions of reference, representation and reality itself, and yet here is the snag. For their theories presuppose access to 'the real' and some ground of reference to social reality, precisely because their writings purport to tell us something new about society. Either the project is serious, in which case an anti-realist ontology will not do, or post-modernist sociology is about making 'art', not about making sense of social change.

For this cannot be done in terms of idealism: there are stringent material conditions which determine who can experience the post-modern experience. Life as an aesthetic game conducted in the ironic mode is only an option for some in the First World. This is why the Great Break is often criticised as undertheorised, and so it must remain for an idealist ontology cannot accommodate the material differences and dependencies upon which the very possibility of cultural playfulness depends. For the so-called Information society, which gives priority to cultural production, is itself predicated upon shifting the production of material goods to the Third World.

The state of mind possible in the West is a luxury dependent upon the state of affairs in the rest. The post-modern experience is simply not an option to the hungry who want bread and not circuses, or to the unfree who want freedom of expression and not expressive freedom. Real global conditions mean that most of humanity would echo St. Augustine, that life is not a spectacle but a predicament.

International sociology stands opposed to these three versions of 'false universalism': to 'modernisation theory', 'dependency theory', and to post-modernism, all of which in their different ways assume a unitary process which has uniform results.

In contradistinction, an international sociology concerned with the integration of diversity has to take the realist rather than the idealist critique of positivism very seriously indeed. For the generative global mechanisms with which it deals never operate within closed systems and hardly ever can be read off as uniformities at the empirical level (as similar observable experiences) or at the actual level (as the common occurrence of like events). It is positivism which conflates the three separate domains of the real, the actual and the empirical, which are only contingently related because other factors intervene and intertwine in any open system. Since open systems are the rule, positivism either comes to grief on the Scylla of universalism (the uni-factoral assumption that industrialism, modernisation or secularism will override countervailing tendencies, universally if the long-run is long enough) or the Charybdis of experiential diversity (the multi-factoral assumption that

adding enough additional observable variables will eventually mop up the observed variance). Talk of accounting for variance is simultaneously to talk away variety. It reduces local and regional varieties of response to variations on a theme rather than a combination of tendencies representing different trajectories. Far from being ironed out as 'cultural laggards' catch up, international sociology would view such trajectories as real emergent properties, which in their turn will interact with others, producing yet further variety rather than reducing it over time.

Basically because we now have a global context, the generative mechanisms embedded in the structure, culture and agency of globality constitute the tendencies which are the starting point of international sociology, but not its finishing point. In between is the task of specifying how global mechanisms combine with regional circumstances, in non-uniform fashion, to shape different new trajectories.

Any global tendency can be met by various local responses, which can be summarised as the 4 Rs – reflection, refraction, resistance or rejection. It is the task of international sociology to explain which of these varied trajectories emerges where and how. Amongst them is a process through which globalisation can actually stimulate local culture and cultural identities, as we see within the European Community. Complementary work from outside the developed world is needed here; not an increased flow of national case studies, but rather regional analyses which show how global tendencies impact and articulate with localised institutional arrangements, group alliances and antagonisms, to produce trends which are not confined to the boundaries of nation-states.

Finally, it is how these emergent trajectories themselves interact with one another which represents the new source of social variety – in turn calling for a new variety of social theory. For globalisation is not merely the effect of the 'new' world on the 'old': the two together make for a radically different world which it is the job of sociology to capture – social theory is never intransitive.

International sociology: respecting reason

The enterprise of international sociology, which has just been sketched, is quintessentially dependent upon cross-cultural communication. Yet even amongst those who accept a self-subsisting natural reality and who do not flinch at according ontological status to social reality are many who would see the enterprise floundering on epistemological grounds.

Two immediate victims of the breakdown of positivism were the 'hard fact' and the 'pure visitor' who could survey it from a culturally decontaminated vantage point. Once they had rightly been disposed of, we were left with theory-dependent knowledge and no means of returning to the doctrine of immaculate perception. Not that this was such a bad place to be, providing we recognised that any theoretical statement was double-barrelled, containing an explanatory theory and an observational theory, *both* of which could be challenged (Lakatos 1970) by those who were on speaking terms. It did, however, become an unhealthily parochial place with the suggestion (coming

in varying strengths) that the only people who could properly speak to one another were members of the same culture or tradition, employing the same language and reasoning. The environment became positively hostile to *any* comparative or historical sociology with the further insistence by some on the impossibility of translation and the cultural relativism of reason. Certainly international sociology would be a non-starter under such conditions.

Here I will not burden you with a defence of translatability, since this is contained in the Congress publication *Globalization, Knowledge and Society* (Archer 1990), but I do want to revert to the key point that any linguistic communication whatsoever is predicated upon obedience to the laws of logic. Without the law of contradiction being observed nothing can be communicated, within a language or between languages, publicly or privately. If others cannot see that the truth of *p* excludes the truth of its denial, how could they ever communicate truths to one another and reason from them to other truths? (Lukes 1979 : 209–10). The invariance of the law of contradiction, which is the touchstone of intelligibility itself is *a prioristic* to language, and not optional, and therefore universal and not conventional. The most bitter irony of the demise of positivism is that transcultural ‘reasoning’ has been elided with Enlightenment Rationality, and beaten with the same stick.

Yet what distinguished the Enlightenment was not ‘reasoning’ (for if this were an eighteenth century invention, on what did the scholastics, patristics and classical thinkers get by?), but atheism – Comte’s vision and our nightmare of Positivistic Rationality as the summit of human progress – the Goddess of Supreme Reason with the Sociologist as High Priest.

On the contrary, *reasoning* is never a target, but a necessary condition of social life (past, present and future), always a tool and never an end-state. And for those who accept that they have reasons for their commitments (that we do not hold our beliefs irrationally), then reasoning is indispensable to contesting Enlightened apostasy and Positivistic sociology alike.

Yet there are strident voices in the First World which would jettison ‘democratic’ reasoning along with ‘repressive’ Rationality as part of the positivistic parcel that is dubbed ‘modernity’. And a counterpoint is supplied from the Third World whose flight from positivistic ethnocentrism is often voiced as a call back to ‘indigenous reasoning’. Carried to their logical conclusion such views carry us back to the intransigence of social diversity. The integration of diversity is outlawed as a quest for unity which could only be ‘terroristic’ to some and ‘imperialistic’ to others. This is the epistemological cul-de-sac into which post-modernism directs us all; encouragingly many Third World thinkers have taken a hard look at this dead-end and, I believe, have found a way out.

For the post-modernist ‘there is no reason, only reasons’ (Lyotard 1988), reasons which are not transculturally undergirded by common reasoning, something which such theorists wrongly conflate with totalising Rationality, which reduces indeterminacy, contingency and contextuality for purposes of efficiency, domination and power. The post-modernist sociological enterprise is thus the reinstatement of diversity through the celebration of incommensurability. Hence the assertion that ‘all we can do is to gaze in wonderment

at the diversity of discursive species' (Lyotard 1984), respecting the permanent and irreducible cultural diversity manifested in different forms of life, communal traditions or language games. In gazing at such diversity, post-modernism supposedly 'refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (Lyotard 1984 : xxv) – a formula for aesthetic tolerance but also for sociological impotence.

It proscribes what we cannot do when confronting cultural pluralism (integrate this diversity, since this entails illicit totalisation), and prescribes what should be done (incorporate other experiences to enrich one's own tradition). I want to argue that neither can be sustained: proscribing the integration of diversity flies in the face of reasoned social practice, while prescribing the incorporation of the incommensurable makes the practice of sociology irrational. Only by assuming human reasoning to be universal (the Principle of Humanity) can we understand cross-cultural encounters and ourselves encounter other cultures.

The proscription is based on standard relativist arguments. Different language games are governed by different criteria and rules; all such knowledge is contextual and there is no external vantage point from which to reduce this variety; consequently diverse practices cannot be assessed as solutions to common problems. Therefore no particular language game is to be privileged. Still Lyotard wants to privilege precisely this plurality of language games which is to assume *a priori* that all validity claims are on a par, that there are no better or worse solutions to common problems. Yet the practice of cross-cultural encounter makes no such *a prioristic* commitment, or the West would have no good reason for learning acupuncture or the South none for wanting unpolluted water.

The prescribed practice for sociologists of enriching their own 'game' through incorporating other experiences from other cultures, assumes that the former can interpret the latter. But if cultural beliefs are fundamentally contextual and radically incommensurable then all the arguments against radical relativism surface in full force. Interpretation depends upon *identification* of the beliefs of others and understanding upon *intercommunication* about them: both are predicated upon us all reasoning in much the same way even though we reason about different things on the basis of different information. If the post-modernists deny this, then their enrichment programme is not about interpretation but sensation; not about understanding 'otherness' but about expressive reactions to the aesthetic form of what is *not* understood.

In all consistency the post-modernists should rest their case at the end of the cul-de-sac and set up a shrine to intransigent diversity, but of course having jettisoned reason they are not bound by consistency. Thus they want to jump over the wall and tell us how the world is going and where it went wrong – telling of paradise lost with modernity and of the impish nihilism which is the non-foundationist way of life. Epistemological rectitude prevents this from being told as a 'grand narrative' of social transformation for this would be repeating the sin of reasoned totalisation. But if reason is outlawed, then the privilege accorded to rhetoric by Lyotard, Derrida and Kristeva can provide a substitute.

Explanatory ‘myths’ are out, but rhetorical story-telling is very much in – the biggest story of all time being the rise and fall of that homogeneous entity called ‘modernity’. Hence the rhetorical montage of Foucauldian aspect, whose selective perception, verificatory collation, and artistic extrapolation, works by persuasion without any context of justification. The rhetorical ‘grand narrative’ is supremely authoritarian: immune from counterfactuals and insulated from reasoned critique. Trying to argue that society is not fully ‘carceral’ merely invites another verifying collage. Try to go for the authoritarian jugular by suggesting alternative accounts, and rhetoric beats a quick epistemic retreat – it is *merely* rhetorical, one image in a land which lets a thousand images bloom. Yet theirs has, and hopes to have persuaded before declaring itself *only* imagery. Safely back at their epistemological base, the post-modernist wags an admonitory finger at any generalising ambition in sociology – such as international sociology would represent. In their post-exilic world, unbonded by reality or reason, the integration of diversity reduces to a devious rhetorical device or a pointless aesthetic playfulness.

By rejecting the universality of reasoning, thrown out with the bathwater of Enlightenment Rationality, the post-modernist simultaneously repudiates the Principle of Humanity, namely ‘the condition that the imputed pattern of relations amongst beliefs, desires and the world be as similar to our own as possible’ (Grandy 1973 : 445). Based as this is on endorsing the unicity of humankind, it has two indispensable implications for sociology. It serves to maintain the thread of cross-cultural intelligibility (whether the beliefs held are true or false), but it eschews that over-benevolence which always deems it better to consider that others hold mysterious truths rather than entertaining explicable falsehoods. Post-modernism dispenses with both, substituting aesthetic appreciation for intelligibility and pronouncing its permissive blessing on the whole pluralistic array of truth contenders.

Hence post-modernists promulgate an easy-going Concordat in which anything goes providing Modernity and Rationality are expunged. And at first glance it seems as if many advocates of ‘indigenising’ sociology in the Third World are willing signatories – ready to make common cause against ‘Western reason’ in order to valorise endogenous African, Asian or Latin American ways of thought.

Thus it often appears as though an intrinsic part of the indigenisation programme implies a break with rational thought and, by corollary, that ‘home grown’ theory-building will be on non-rational foundations. This is the impression conveyed by the following telegrammatic programmes from three continents. Thus Mazrui insists that the African ‘domestication’ of foreign theories entails their ‘derationalization’ (1978), Fals-Borda contrasts Latin American employment of ‘affective logic involving the heart versus dialectical logic’ of the Western world (1987 : 337), and Roy champions Asian efforts to forge alternative paradigms based on indigenous cultural orientations (1977 : 13–24).

Nevertheless, I would argue that this is a deceptive and decontextualised reading. A more nuanced statement by Akiwowo shows that the prime target is positivism and its privileging of instrumental rationality. ‘The strength of

positivism lies in the skilful use of logical sequence in reasoning, and in abstraction as a means of knowing reality. In our judgement, this orthodoxy denies the other powers of the mind such as intuition, feeling and physical sensation' (1989 : 156). Yet unlike some of their Western colleagues, fewer Third World theorists see a strenuous critique of positivism as precipitating them into radical relativism. Indeed Akiwowo's work has shown the way out of this cul-de-sac of intransigent diversity precisely by hanging on to the unicity of human reasoning – though inscribed in different languages and encoded in different terms. The epistemological significance of his research tends to have been brushed aside by those hastily proclaiming the discovery of a distinctive Nigerian sociology, whereas its real import is for international sociology itself.

The whole burden of Akiwowo's pioneering work has been to show the existence of oral Yoruba equivalents for Western sociological concepts, thus opening the possibility of teaching/doing sociology in the vernacular and reducing intellectual dependence on what Gareau (1985) calls the 'canned or the consular'. Here he is vindicating the Principle of Humanity, that people do think much the same way the world over; and such thinking about society is not a Western prerogative nor something conceptualised quite incomensurably in Africa. The real epistemological significance of this work on oral traditions appears to have been missed. Whereas Winch (1979 : 107) finally conceded certain strictly *biological* universals (birth, sexual relations and death) which constituted limits to relativism and a frail bridge across cultures, Akiwowo gives evidence that humankind universally thinks and talks about sociality – about creation, social origins, consanguinity and cohabitation. In Isichei's terms this leads to an anti-relativistic quest for basic conceptual categories whose empirical referents 'exist whenever human beings are found' (1988 : 26 f.).

This would be a fascinating charter for *historical* anthropology, but the anthropological order is passing away. The new international order, emerging under the impetus of globalisation, sets a different agenda. There are now two sides to the equation. On the one hand, indigenous conceptions of sociality; on the other, the confrontation with the global context. For the first must make sense of the second. At one time, assuming the Principle of Humanity, different indigenous discourses about sociality would *merely* have been mutually intelligible, but at the present time with its shared global context they necessarily address the same extraneous processes. Conversational exchange expands as we have more and more in common to talk about. Conversation will indeed centre on how to conceptualise shared problems – about which and whose terms to adopt, correct, elaborate, differentiate, delete or invent – such is the growth of natural language. Of course, Habermas' problem remains. Dialogue is undoubtedly hampered and distorted by power relations, but it is only deemed impossible by those who relativise or outlaw reasoning altogether.

To Akiwowo, the crucial factor which makes the task possible is *not* simply that we have a bridgehead of shared abstract concepts alone *but* that human beings *reason* in much the same way about their interconnections and relations

with the world. International understanding can embrace ‘oral traditions and Afro-centric thoughts *because the subject of thoughts in these fields of knowing are not contrary to reason*’ (1988 : 49). What this announces is a vital translation enterprise which privileges no particular language – the core of any genuine international sociology.

Finally, the fact that what we reason about in our spirituality and affectivity happens to be alien to instrumental rationality is simply an indictment of Rational Man. This cost-effective, risk-discounting bargain hunter has done sociological duty for the human being for far too long. As Horkheimer and Adorno rightly argued, instrumental reason alone yields ‘rationality with reference to means and irrationality with reference to human existence’ (1972 : 31–2). That our spiritual and affective commitments are too serious for us to have no reasons for them and do no reasoning about them is a well deserved rebuke from the Third World – to those neo-positivists who neglect them, to those emotivists who irrationalise them, and to the spiritless spirit of post-modernity which simply plays with them.

International sociology: respecting humanity

Finally, I want to carry this argument to its conclusion, namely that our common humanity is the bridge to One Discipline working for and in One World – the only load-bearing source of unity in both theory and practice. For far too long the human being has been a stranger to sociology. Neo-positivism substituted the pre-programmed humanoid, the passive actor at the mercy of pushes and pulls from social hydraulics. Structuralist neo-Marxism offered much the same with humankind reduced to passive *Träger* of social forces, forever entrapped in ideological false consciousness. Passive agents are the puppets of external pressures: to explain their actions consult the outside causes working upon them, for a marionette has no internal reasons to offer as causes of its actions. Instead of the fashionable de-centring of the human subject she and he need relocating at the centre of the discipline. This is not to advocate an anthropocentric perspective on the world: there are plenty of things in the natural world which subsist independently of people and yet constrain them, and much in the social world which escapes human intentionality but yet returns to us as constraints. However, if we accept the ontological status of One World, which globalisation is making smaller, the only epistemological basis for One Discipline lies in the unicity of human nature itself. Akiwowo’s own conclusion endorses this, in stressing One World which One Sociology addresses: ‘We all share the impacts of the capitalist systems – good and bad. We should, with open minds, establish a reciprocity of scholarly traditions . . . But in the final analysis there is but one social science, but many societies and cultures: many languages, intelligences, but one mind, the human mind’ (1988 : 57). This endorsement of realism, reasoning and humanity constitutes the bridge to international sociology: relativists from any part of the world are bridge-burners.

Re-centring humanity has ethical implications, for the demise of positivism and its puppets reveals the ‘fallacy of amoral objectivity’ (Giner 1987) which it

had endorsed as links with moral philosophy were severed, sociology announced itself as value-free, and promptly became guilty of culpable scientism. If the unicity of humanity is the predicate of international sociology, concern for humankind is also its principal goal. Yet the latest tragedy is that the most passionate critics of positivism have opted for passionless nihilism rather than the demands of humanism. The Death of God, of the Social, of Reason has been joined by the death of Concern. 'All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces – that is post-modern' (Baudrillard 1984 : 24). But the 'pieces' are ultimately human and there is a very dangerous anti-humanism in this notion of 'playfulness'. Celebration of intransigent diversity re-announces the superordinate nature of cultures over dehumanised subjects. Humanity thus becomes 'that spongy referent, that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness' (Baudrillard 1983 : 1–4), for 'a *self* does not amount to much' (Lyotard 1984 : 15) – merely a nodal point through which multifarious cultural messages pass. The masses live in 'hyperconformity'; vision exhausted, politics obsolete and sublimity renounced. Yet whose condition are they describing? Not that of humanity; not that of peoples in Eastern Europe, South Africa or Latin America. Their own, the condition of (some of) today's intellectuals (Bauman 1988; Lyotard 1988). Deprived of colonial self-confidence and disenchanted with the Enlightenment project they turn inwards towards nihilism (Douglas 1986).

If this is the case, one questions their licence to speak for anyone but themselves. Concelebrating *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* is only another version of the West versus the rest – one Ibn Khaldun would simply have called decadent. As globalisation proceeds, post-modernist intellectuals are refusing a *reasoned* egalitarian dialogue about the *reality* of survival. This rejection of the global concerns of humanity, whose challenge they refuse, places their advocacy of 'gaming' and 'drifting' in its privileged but parochial place.

Fostering egalitarian dialogue is the vocation of international sociology. The ISA's response is three-pronged. Firstly, it stimulates reversal of the neo-colonial situation in which 'the centres send out messages, but receive little inflow in return' (Gareau 1985). This was the impetus behind the foundation of our journal *International Sociology*, whose editorial policy insists that dialogue is more demanding than a parade of sociological pluralism worldwide. Instead it entails a second kind of information flow, one which develops in the 'periphery' itself and generates its own concepts to capture regional tendencies and trajectories. Commentators differ about whether this will increase dissensus in the discipline (Gareau 1985) or whether this type of indigenisation is clearly related to internationalisation (Loubser 1988).

Neither consequence is automatic or necessary, for there is the alternative of promoting a genuinely international information flow of a multi-directional kind. Thirdly, then, through agencies like the ISA's Research Committees, there are dialogical tasks to initiate (concept mapping, correcting, assimilating and stretching) which specify how global tendencies combine with regional circumstances to produce new trajectories calling for novel theorisation (Øyen 1990).

The ultimate aim of egalitarian discourse is itself global. Globalisation is now generating social agents of unprecedented size (the peace movements, feminism, Friends of the Earth). International sociology aims at no less than the mobilisation of Humanity itself as one self-conscious social agent. What ecologists have done for the protection of the natural world, only the sociologist can attempt for the most dangerous and endangered species. In so doing, a genuine international sociology must abandon one of the most imperialistic assumptions ever visited on the world by our discipline – namely, that the human being is merely a socio-centric product and that humankind is a purely social creation formed from Durkheim's (in)famous 'indeterminate material'. For commitment to Humanity is also an affirmation that it is ultimately one and indivisible.

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