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Undoing the Epistemic Disavowal of the Haitian Revolution: A Contribution to Global Social Thought
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In recent years, sociology – along with many other disciplines – has gone through a ‘global turn’. This focus on ‘the global’ has often been promoted as a way in which sociology can redress its previous neglect of those represented as ‘other’ in its construction of modernity. The most common form of engagement is to call for additional accounts of events, processes, and thinkers that can be used to supplement the already existing narratives, both historical and canonical. On such understandings, the global and global sociology are presented as descriptors of the present and a call for sociology to be different in the future. In contrast, I ask how sociological thought could be differently conceptualized if we took seriously global historical interconnections. I focus, in particular, on the instance of the Haitian revolution and what can be learnt, both from its omission from accounts of events claimed to be of ‘world historical’ significance, and from how theory would need to be rethought once we took other such events seriously. In particular, I want to examine what is at stake in such rethinking – what Santos (2014) has called for in terms of an address of *cognitive injustices* – and how we might consider alternative formulations through an approach I call ‘connected sociologies’ (Bhambra 2014).

There is little consensus on the meaning of ‘global’, either in its own terms or in the context of it as a qualifier of the way in which sociology as a discipline operates (or might come to operate). Ulrich Beck’s (2000) argument for a cosmopolitan social science, for example, challenges what he presents as its standard methodological nationalism. Instead, he argues for the need to take ‘world society’ as the starting point of sociological and other research. His ‘world society’, however, is one in which the historically inherited inequalities arising from the legacies of European colonialism and slavery play no part. Beck (2002) argues that he is not interested in the memory of the global past, but simply in how a vision of a cosmopolitan future could have an impact on the politics of the present. This, as I have argued at greater length elsewhere, is disingenuous at best (Bhambra 2014). Any theory that seeks to address the question of ‘how we live in the world’ cannot treat as irrelevant the historical construction of that world (for discussion, see Trouillot 1995). In this article, I take issue with the claims of global sociology more generally and examine the implications, precisely, of taking seriously the historical construction of the world in our theoretical conceptualizations.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there have been increasing calls for 'global sociology'. From early arguments by Akinsola Akiwowo (1988, 1999), among others, for the 'indigenization' of social science, to later calls by Syed Farid Alatas (2001, 2006) and Vineeta Sinha (2003) for an 'autonomous' social science (see also, Alatas, S. H. 2002, 2006). These have been complemented by arguments for Southern theory by Raewyn Connell (2007, 2010), for diverse sociologies by Sujata Patel (2010a, 2010b), and global sociology from below by Michael Burawoy (2010a, 2010b). These arguments go beyond recognizing the significance of 'the global' as a topic or theme within sociology and argue instead for sociology to recognize its multiple and globally diverse origins; that is, to consider what a properly conceptualized global sociology might look like and how it might better serve the global futures towards which we are seen to be headed (for further discussion, see Bhambra 2014).

Syed Farid Alatas (2006), for example, has argued for sociology to acknowledge the importance of civilizational contexts for the development of autonomous, or alternative, social science traditions. More generally, he has criticized 'the lack of a multicultural approach in sociology' (2006: 5). Autonomous traditions, he argues, need to be 'informed by local/ regional historical experiences and cultural practices' as well as by alternative 'philosophies, epistemologies, histories, and the arts' (2010: 37). This is because the autonomy of the different traditions, in his view, rests on historical (and other) phenomena believed to be unique to particular areas or societies. In this context, Western social science becomes a reference point for the divergence (or creativity, as expressed through the *appropriation* of Western traditions read *through* local contexts) of other autonomous traditions. There is little discussion, however, of what the purchase of these autonomous traditions would be for a *global* sociology, beyond a simple multiplicity of sociological 'cultures'.

Multiplicity, or simple pluralization, as has been argued by Dirlik (2003) in the context of similar theorizations of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000, Eisenstadt and Schluchter 1998), serves to contain challenges to the dominant understanding of the topic in question. It does not facilitate a reconstruction of that understanding based on deficiencies associated with an earlier neglect of other experiences of modernity. This can be the case even when theorists seek explicitly to challenge the mono-civilizational accounts of standard definitions (see Göle 2000). Theories of multiple modernities emerged in the late twentieth century in response to the unexpected fall of communism in Europe and a belief in the idea that, as Fukuyama (1992) argued, the 'West' had 'won'. Even for Fukuyama, however, the question emerged that, if this was the case, then why was 'the West' just a universal *model*, and not universally in *existence* across all societies in the world. It was in the attempt to explain both the seeming triumph of liberal capitalism and the continuing diversity and heterogeneity of existing societies that led to the reformulation of modernization theory as multiple modernities.¹

In developing this new paradigm, theorists of multiple modernities argued that two main fallacies needed to be addressed. The first, advanced against earlier modernization theory, is the claim that there is only one form of (Western) modernization. The second is advanced against critiques made

¹ See the two special issues of *Daedalus*: 'Early Modernities,' *Daedalus* 127 (1998) and 'Multiple Modernities,' *Daedalus* 129 (2000). For further details on the sociological debates on modernization and the shift to multiple modernities, see chapter 3 of my *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*.

by theorists of underdevelopment and dependency, and suggests that looking from the West to the East was not necessarily a form of Orientalism or Eurocentrism. While it was accepted that the particular historical trajectories and experiences of societies beyond the West needed to be taken into consideration in discussing the subsequent developments of modernity, the originary form of modernity was still nonetheless believed to be a uniquely European phenomenon. The focus of multiple modernities, then, was on the recognition of divergent paths and of the diversity of modern societies, not any reconsideration of what (European) modernity had been understood to be *and its developmental path*. This acceptance of plurality and diversity was believed to protect theories of multiple modernities against charges of ethnocentrism or the inappropriate privileging of some histories over others. However, as Dirlik has argued, while the idea of *multiple* modernities concedes ‘the possibility of culturally different ways of being modern’ (2003: 285), it does so without contesting *what it is to be modern* and *without drawing attention to the social and historical interconnections in which modernity has been constituted and developed* (see Bhabra 2007, 2014).

This is because they continue to accept standard historical narratives of modernity; for example, narratives which locate its emergence in a supposed ‘Age of Revolutions’ spanning the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries that bore witness to the American Declaration of Independence and the French and industrial revolutions. While these events are not the only ones to have merited consideration within the periodization popularized by Hobsbawm (2003 [1962]), among others, they are the most frequently cited events and they establish a particular idea of modernity, its initiation and its expansion.² The industrial revolution, for example, is understood to be a European phenomenon that was subsequently diffused globally. However, if we take the cotton factories of Manchester and Lancaster as emblematic of this revolution, then we see that cotton was not a plant that was native to England, let alone to the West (Washbrook 1997). It came from India as did the technology of how to dye and weave it. It was grown in the plantations of the Caribbean and the southern United States by enslaved Africans who were transported there as part of the European trade in human beings. The export of the textile itself relied upon the destruction of the local production of cotton goods in other parts of the world, not simply through price competition, but also through direct suppression (Bhabra 2007; Beckert 2014). Zimmerman (2010), for example, documents how cotton production in West Africa was suppressed and undermined in favour of US cotton. In this way, we see that industrialization was not solely a European or Western phenomenon, but one that had global conditions for its very emergence and articulation.

The history of modernity as commonly told, however, rests, as Homi Bhabha argues, on ‘the *writing out* of the colonial and postcolonial moment’ (1994: 250; see also Chakrabarty 2000). The rest of the world is assumed to be external to the world-historical processes selected for consideration and, concretely, colonial connections significant to the processes under discussion are erased, or rendered silent. Braudel’s three volume study of ‘Civilization and Capitalism’ is a prime example of this. While he points to the importance of global connections to what is presented as Europe’s industrial revolution, nowhere in the volumes does he empirically address the *substance* of those connections, that is, imperialism, enslavement, dispossession, and colonialism. Instead, he talks about ‘the discovery of America’ (1985: 388), slavery as part of the solution to a ‘problem’ of a

² For a discussion of the ‘age of revolutions’ within a broader geographical and temporal context, see, for example, Armitage and Subrahmanyam (2010a) and Blackburn (2011).

shortage of labour in the Americas, 'India's self-inflicted conquest' (1985: 489) and so on. The failure to offer a systematic account of phenomenon claimed to be European, but demonstrated to be global, I would suggest, is not an error of individual scholarship. It is something that is made possible by the very disciplinary structure of knowledge production that separates the modern (sociology) from the traditional and colonial (anthropology). The consequence is that no space is left for consideration of what could be termed, the 'colonial and postcolonial modern', that is, the modern that is understood in terms of the global conditions of its emergence (see also Dirlik 2005).

Scholars who have taken on this challenge, such as Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, have precisely argued for 'modernity' to be understood as 'modernity / coloniality' to highlight the inextricable association between them. The modernity that Europe takes as the context for its own being, as Quijano (2007) argues, is so deeply imbricated in the structures of European colonial domination over the rest of the world that it is impossible to separate the two. Mignolo (2007) further elaborates this distinction in the context of the work of epistemic decolonization necessary to undo the damage wrought by both modernity and by understanding modernity / coloniality only as modernity. By silencing the colonial past within the historical narratives of modernity that are central to the formation of sociology, the discipline itself is called into question. As such, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) calls for an 'epistemology of the South' that, in acknowledging the distortions created in the production of knowledge by colonialism, would enable the retrieval of different ways of knowing.

In particular, Santos (2007) points to the system of visible and invisible distinctions that structure both social thought and social reality. He argues that those events and processes that are standardly acknowledged – that is, are visible – within understandings of modernity are also constituted by events and processes 'on the other side of the line' that are not deemed to be significant for such understandings – that is, they are invisible. This form of thinking legitimates particular inequalities, according to Santos, and their address requires us to move beyond 'abyssal' thinking to take into account those aspects that have thus far been silenced. As suggested earlier, the standard accounts of modernity typically acknowledge events within Europe and the US and ignore consideration both of the global contexts of the emergence of these events and also ignore events beyond these particular geographical sites. Most discussions of the political revolutions seen to be constitutive of the modern world, for example, centre on the American and French revolutions. The Haitian revolution is rarely considered alongside them despite occurring at around the same time. The contestation and reconfiguration of our understandings of modernity, through the examination of other historical sites, points also to the possibility of a different politics for the present as the following sections will discuss.

II

In the context of the political revolutions that are deemed to have brought modernity into being, the standard accounts given are those of the American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution. Both of them form the basis of the classic account, by Palmer (1959), of 'the age of the democratic revolution'. In it, Palmer argues that while there were a great number of differences between the two revolutions, they nonetheless shared a good deal in common. The key

commonality was that the revolutions were essentially 'democratic', understood in the broadest terms, and, as such, defined the 'Atlantic civilization' of which they were a part. 'Democratic', in Palmer's terms, was used to signify 'a new feeling for a kind of equality, or at least a discomfort with older forms of social stratification' (1959: 4). Further, the term was used in a political context to deny the exercise of coercive authority by any individual or individuals over others. While many scholars today would question whether these revolutions were actually democratic on the basis of the definitions provided – citing the denial of the franchise to all but propertied white men, the dispossession and genocide of indigenous peoples and the institution of slavery within the US and the colonies claimed by France, among other aspects – few go on to re-examine the claims made in the context of taking the historical 'anomalies' seriously.

Alongside the USA and France, the other countries that Palmer pointed to as sharing in the spirit of the democratic revolutions were, notably, 'England, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy' (1959: 5). The one democratic revolution within the Atlantic civilization that he misses out is the Haitian Revolution. This is, in part, a consequence of Palmer ending his study of the 'original' democratic revolutions in 1799 and leaving all 'non-Western' revolutions for the second volume of his study. 'The eighteenth century,' he writes, 'saw the Revolution of the Western world; the twentieth century, the Revolution of the non-Western' (1959: 13). Thus, as Armitage and Subrahmanyam point out, democratic revolution is presented by Palmer as 'a gift from the North Atlantic world to other peoples who had apparently contributed nothing to its original emancipatory potential' (2010b: xvii). This narrative of diffusion is a common one. From the work of Marx and Weber onwards, the modern world has been presented as coming into being as a consequence of the diffusion of ideas and practices whose origins are identified in Europe and the West. There is little discussion of the global conditions of phenomena claimed as 'European', as discussed in the context of industrialization and cotton above. Further, there is a lack of consideration of other events and processes that could also be understood as 'world-historical'.

The revolution in Saint-Domingue that brought into being the new state of Haiti, for example, occurred around the same time as the American and French revolutions (Palmer's periodization notwithstanding). Yet, it is rarely accorded a similar status, that is, of being a foundational event of world history that brings into being the modern world. While there have been significant accounts of the Haitian revolution – most notably, perhaps, C. L. R. James's (1989 [1963, 1938]) *The Black Jacobins* – few histories of the general 'Age of Revolutions' variety have included it as part of their understanding of that age. As suggested above, Palmer only recognizes it as part of a subsequent wave that merely copied the originators of the North Atlantic, and Hobsbawm (2003 [1962]) scarcely mentions it either. Even avowedly 'global' histories of the 'birth of the modern world', such as Christopher Bayly's (2004) book of the same title or Jürgen Osterhammel's (2014) *Transformation of the World*, devote considerably more attention to the standard historical narratives of modernity than examining other global phenomena and, more significantly, reconsidering their accounts of the global on that basis.

In Bayly's (2004) analysis, for example, Haiti barely gets a couple of sentences in the book even though the cover presents a striking portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley. Belley was a Haitian revolutionary and, as a representative of Saint-Domingue, was part of the delegation that travelled to Paris to speak to the Constituent Assembly. A formerly enslaved person, Belley had bought his

own liberty through his labour, and argued persuasively and successfully (albeit, in retrospect, temporarily) for the abolition of slavery within the French empire (Dubois 2005: 169-70). Thus, it was only as a consequence of a delegation travelling from Haiti to France, that the clause abolishing slavery was included in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.³ The most radical political statement of the French Revolution, then, that is, *the one with the greatest universal potential*, came from Haiti. Yet, this event is not included in Bayly's account of the birth of the modern world and, therefore, it leads to no reconsideration of the broader claims of European modernity that are otherwise being made and sustained. The dominant understandings of modernity that see it as formed in processes endogenous to Europe and abstracted from the entanglements of colonialism and Empire remain in place. Other events, to the extent that they are mentioned, simply add a descriptive embellish to the standard narratives, but do not transform them.

Osterhammel's (2014) account of Haiti in 'the transformation of the world' is similarly brief and provides little by way of reconceptualization of the global. There are just over three pages of discussion of the revolution in its own terms (2014: 528-532) in a book of over a thousand pages. Whenever it is mentioned throughout the rest of the book it is usually in terms of the implications of the revolution for France. As he writes, France lost many of its North American colonies in the late eighteenth century and 'suffered a further sharp setback in 1804, when its economically most important colony, the sugar-producing Saint-Domingue portion of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, renamed itself Haiti and declared independence' (2014: 400). No mention here of the fact that the revolution was one carried out by enslaved Africans who had been taken to the island by Europeans as part of the trade in human beings. Nor any discussion of the global connections of the revolution that not only linked Haiti to France, but also to West Africa (see Thornton 1993). Osterhammel later goes on to mention Haiti in the context of failed states where, as he writes, 'neither its political institution building nor its socio-economic development had made much progress' (2014: 409) in the hundred years of its existence. There is no corresponding mention of the devastating 20 year economic blockade by France of the new nation which was only lifted in 1825 on the agreement to pay France compensation for its loss of 'property'. Compensation was paid, that is, for the loss of 'property' embodied in those human beings who had been enslaved and now had the temerity to emancipate themselves. They, however, were not, in turn, to be compensated for their enslavement and dispossession.⁴

As Laurent Dubois (2005) argues, Haiti was punished for its revolution then and, it seems, scholars are still unwilling to acknowledge its import today (see also Trouillot 1995). To the extent that the Haitian revolution does get discussed within standard 'Age of Revolutions' narratives, the debate

³ This fact is missed from many such accounts and even Hobsbawm (2003 [1962]) attributes the abolition of slavery to the Jacobins of France rather than to the 'Black Jacobins' of whom James (1989 [1963, 1938]) wrote in 1938.

⁴ Compensation was set at 150 million Francs and, to put this into context it should be mentioned that, at around the same time, France sold the entire territory of Louisiana to the fledgling United States for 80 million Francs. Unable to pay the coerced indemnity, as Dubois argues, 'the Haitian government took loans from French banks, entering a cycle of debt that would last into the twentieth century' (2005: 304). Osterhammel does mention the 'exorbitant compensation' about 400 pages later, but this is in the context of celebrating Charles X signing a 'bilateral trade agreement with Haiti in 1825' thereby setting a European precedent 'by recognizing the breakaway black republic' (2014: 844). In the same sentence he discusses the 'dispossessed French landowners' but does not mention that what they were dispossessed of was their claim to own other human beings.

often seems to pivot on the following question, as noted by Sala-Molins: 'did Haiti make her revolution or did the French revolution spread to the colonies?' (2006: 122). Indeed, Osterhammel's framing of the Haitian revolution is that it 'should be understood as a direct consequence of the revolution in France' (2014: 529). While such Franco-centric historical accounts of the revolution may concede the uprising to Toussaint L'Ouverture's leadership, they rarely acknowledge any other source of inspiration;⁵ that is, as Sala-Molins (2006) highlights, the actions may have occurred in Haiti, but they are seen to have occurred as a consequence of ideas and influences from France and the European Enlightenment more generally. The inescapable conclusion of such a trajectory of thought is that '[t]here was no Haitian Revolution: there was only a Saint-Domingue episode of the French Revolution' (Sala-Molins 2006: 123). However, as Sala-Molins argues, if Haiti's Black liberators are going to be made disciples of the Enlightenment, 'then logic requires that things be clarified: these liberators subverted the language of the Enlightenment and gave it a meaning it did not have' (2006: 124); a meaning that would subsequently be rescinded by the supposed initiators of Enlightenment.

The recent focus on Haiti within contemporary scholarship is due in no small part to the endeavours of scholars such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), David Geggus (2002), Sybille Fischer (2004), and Laurent Dubois (2004, 2005) among many others. Building on the seminal work of James (1989 [1963, 1938]), they have retrieved and made accessible to wider audiences the histories of the Haitian Revolution.⁶ Before these accounts, in the nineteenth century, knowledge of the Haitian revolution circulated extensively among communities in struggle. It was significant to revolts of enslaved peoples in the US (Geggus 2001, Jackson and Bacon 2010), to the independence movements of Latin America and the Caribbean (Dubois 2004), to the cultural renaissance in Harlem and elsewhere (Jackson 2008), to the Maori movements for justice and equality (Shilliam 2012), among many other such events. These broader, and earlier, resonances of Haiti suggest that the silence of the Haitian revolution is a silence primarily in the academy where we have failed to take seriously the significance of the revolution and to learn anew from it. So, what might we learn about the birth of the modern world and its transformation (and the politics of knowledge production, more generally) if we took the Haitian revolution seriously?

First, in terms of Haiti itself, we would learn about the ways in which those who had been enslaved, on achieving their freedom and independence, honoured the people who preceded them on the land. In renaming Saint-Domingue as Haiti they honoured the name given to the island by the Taino Arawak people who were wiped out by Spanish and French colonization (see Geggus 2002: 207-220). Second, we would learn that on achieving freedom and establishing the independence of Haiti, the working out of the Haitian constitution was itself predicated on an understanding of citizenship that

⁵ Hobsbawm's comments on the Haitian Revolution, for example, point only to the idea of French inspiration. First he suggests that the French 'abolished slavery in the French colonies, in order to encourage the Negroes of San Domingo to fight for the Republic' (p93) and then, a few pages later, writes about 'the movements of colonial liberation inspired by the French Revolution (as in San Domingo)' (p115).

⁶ CLR James' classic work was itself preceded by that of Anna Julia Cooper who successfully defended her PhD thesis on 'The Attitude of France on the Question of Slavery between 1789 and 1848' at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1925. In the dissertation, Cooper (1925) questioned the impact of slavery on the debates in the revolutionary period in France and compared the revolution in France with that in San Domingue. Her dissertation was subsequently published in English as *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutionists* (Cooper 2006). For discussion, see May (2008). I am indebted to Jeanette Ehrmann for drawing my attention to the work of Anna Julia Cooper on Haiti.

had greater universal applicability than similar notions developed in the French Revolution. According to Fischer (2004: 266), by making freedom from enslavement and racial discrimination the bedrock of political understandings and unlinking citizenship from race, the Haitian constitution radicalized and universalized the idea of equality. At the time that the revolutionary leaders were calling for ‘the immediate, universal abolition of slavery’, in the 1790s, there was no similar such call elsewhere in the Atlantic world (Nesbitt 2008: 13). In light of this, it is no wonder that Trouillot (1995) suggests that the Haitian revolution was the most radical of its age and silenced, precisely, for its radical nature.

As discussed above, it is the circumscribed accounts of the ‘North Atlantic’ revolutions of the US and France that are standardly understood as foundational for understanding the world historical significance of democracy and its universal claims. Indeed, Osterhammel goes further to suggest that one reason for the relative silence about the Haitian revolution is that ‘it seemed to emit no universalizable political message over and above a call for the liberation of slaves throughout the world’ (2014: 531). This extraordinary political act, it should be noted, occurred as the American Revolution maintained enslavement and segregation of its populations and the French maintained forms of domination and exclusion with their colonies and over their colonized populations, with Napoleon reintroducing slavery in the French colonies in 1802. Despite the limited nature of these ‘democratic revolutions’, their appeal is seen by commentators such as Osterhammel and Bayly as universalisable, while the call for equality and freedom by the Haitian revolutionaries is not.

III

What is important to recognize, however, is how the issue is not simply to rectify an omission by acknowledging its particular significance in its own terms – the implication of arguments for a sociological multiculturalism like that of Alatas (2006) – but to understand how that omission structures and distorts hegemonic accounts such as those, for example, of European cultural ‘identity’ and its ‘others’. Pierre Rosanvallon’s (2013) recent book, *The Society of Equals*, mentions Santo Domingo (as the French colony is named by the translator) on page 16, alongside the United States and France, as one of the *fundamental* sites of the new spirit of equality that animated the revolution of modernity. It is then never returned to through the rest of its 384 pages. Instead, the discussion of equality – its historical conditions and contemporary political possibilities – is articulated through a discussion of selective episodes of US and French history. As such, Rosanvallon appears to believe that equality can be conceptualized through a discussion of US and French history that, not only fails to address issues of dispossession, appropriation, enslavement, and colonization as limits to the contemporary ideological understandings of equality, but also fails to consider these as perhaps the very negation of those understandings.⁷ In the following section, I discuss the

⁷ Interestingly, Rosanvallon has written at length, elsewhere, on his choice of method – philosophical history – where the ‘central objective is to apprehend an issue by placing it within the context of its emergence’ (2001: 194). The point for Rosanvallon is to write ‘a history that could be qualified as comprehensive’ through a ‘self-conscious immersion in the very questions investigated by the authors themselves’ (2001: 197). That is, for Rosanvallon, a philosophical history of concepts, such as those associated with ‘the society of equals’, could only be deemed to be adequate to the extent that it engaged with the questions that were of concern to those about whom the history is being written. As we will go on to see in the rest of this article, the colonial context of Haiti was of deep and abiding concern to the actors and events central to the

significance of the omission of the Haitian Revolution, both in its own terms and in terms of the implications of such omissions for social scientific considerations of 'the global' through a reading of Rosanvallon (2013).⁸

The idea of the 'society of equals' at the heart of Rosanvallon's (2013) book concerns the forging of a world of like human beings, a society of autonomous individuals, and a community of citizens. What is needed, he argues, is a revised understanding of equality that starts from the position of singularity and distinction rather than a 'homogenizing' universality. That is, he seeks to conceptualize equality from an acknowledgement of the many ways in which we, as individuals, are different, rather than by way of what we might share. Indeed, one of the poisons of equality, he suggests, is separatism – group identity in all its varieties – which undercuts the commonality constituted by a democratic equality of individuals and, paradoxically, can also derive from a universalistic imaginary. In this way, Rosanvallon moves from the idea of the universal to the idea of the individual and only addresses 'group' identity implicitly in terms of its contemporary threat, as a form of separatism, to the 'society of equals' he wishes to be established. However, he does not address how groups come to understand themselves as such and so naturalizes both the process of group formation and of understandings of membership within groups.

Much as white males, for example, might have believed themselves to be neither gendered nor in possession of an ethnicity, but simply embodiments of a universal, so throughout the book, Rosanvallon works with a conception of the French nation that sees its population, historically, as constituted solely in terms of its white citizens. He does not mention the many debates over who was to be a citizen and how membership was to be claimed. Group identity is presented by him as a later disruption into a society of individuals, notwithstanding that such a society was constituted by exclusions of others on the basis of characteristics ascribed to them as members of groups. The *Code Noir*, for example, was established in the late seventeenth century to regulate the lives of the enslaved in the French Caribbean. It was extended in subsequent years to cover the conditions governing the lives of those within French colonies and those who had migrated from the colonies to the French national state (Riddell 1925, Stovall 2006). It was, as Stovall (2006) argues, one of the first major examples of the conflict between political and legal equality and racial discrimination within the French state. Beyond this, however, it was also 'the only comprehensive legislation which applied to the whole population, both black and white ... affecting social, religious and property relationships between all classes' (Palmer 1996: 363). The decree applied to all within the imperial territories of the French state, including Saint-Domingue and Louisiana, and also governed the lives of those deemed other within the French national state.

Notwithstanding the regulation of life inscribed within the *Code Noir*, there were many debates during the revolutionary period in France over whether Black men could be citizens or whether colour, itself, was a radical obstacle to civic and political equality. Many of these debates turned on

period that Rosanvallon is interested in, but they do not constitute any aspect of his analysis. As such, in terms of his own explicitly stated standards, Rosanvallon falls short. I am grateful to James Ingram for drawing my attention to this point.

⁸ The arguments made in this section are developed from comments first published on the Theory, Culture, Society website on 30 October 2014 at <http://theoryculturesociety.org/gurminder-bhambra-what-does-the-haitian-revolution-tell-us-about-the-society-of-equals/> and on 25 November 2014: at <http://theoryculturesociety.org/gurminder-bhambra-on-the-society-of-equals-part-two-some-groups-are-more-equal-than-other-groups/>

the group characteristics ascribed to individuals. In 1791, for example, it was proposed that only ‘non-whites born of free parents, not freedmen’ should be accorded political equality (Geggus 1989: 1303). This limited decree was passed in May of that year and overturned a couple of months later. Events in Saint Domingue intensified over the summer as a consequence of this roll back and ‘the largest slave revolt in the history of the Americas’ ensued (Geggus 1989: 1303). This put further pressure on ‘French legislators to concede full racial equality (1792) and eventually slave emancipation (1794)’ (Geggus 1989: 1303). These tremendous achievement were not long-lasting, however, as both were overturned within a couple of years. Slavery was re-established within the French empire by Napoleon and citizenship re-confirmed as the preserve of white men (with property) (Brown 1922, Dubois 2000, Sala-Molins 2006). Nonetheless, the contestations are significant and point to more complex histories of citizenship and equality than those presented in Rosanvallon’s account.

There is no discussion within Rosanvallon’s book of what implications the demand for inclusion by the delegation from Saint-Domingue had for understandings of being a French citizen. Initially, this delegation had sought simple inclusion and representation within the new revolutionary state. It was only on being denied this that full independence was then sought and equality established on their own terms within the new state of Haiti.⁹ The failure to engage with the complex relationship between France and Haiti impoverishes Rosanvallon’s arguments. Ultimately, the failure to transcend racial categories (or their own group identity as white) that had white French citizens deny the claim for participation and representation being made by Black appellants suggests that the idea of equality, in its dominant French articulation, was, and is, limited by race (see Geggus 1989). This limitation is not just on the basis of effecting an exclusion, but also points to the relations of domination that were under challenge at the time.

This tumultuous period offers up a moment of history in which arguments for universal (male) equality transcended, however fleetingly, the racial divisions that were otherwise being maintained. It is through consideration of the broader debates and arguments of this time that we could learn more about what it would take, truly, to create a ‘society of singular equals’. And, yet, Rosanvallon neglects to address this aspect of revolutionary French history and its significance for the present. By not addressing this initial exclusionary moment (or then subsequent ones in the context of Algeria and other colonies claimed by France), Rosanvallon also cannot account for later demands made by those such as the *Indigènes de la République* (see Grewal 2009). He understands them as separatist claims that would undercut a society of equals established on the democratic equality of all citizens understood as individuals. Indeed, Rosanvallon argues that the solidarities of immigrant communities are somehow in breach of the foundational equality of citizenship within the French nation. This, despite the fact that some of the people who claimed citizenship, as individuals, would have been denied it on the basis of ascribed membership to groups by those very citizens who understood themselves as ‘equals’. The repercussions of this in the present are profound (see, Vergès 2010).

Rosanvallon’s implicit suggestion that national identity is itself not a ‘poison’ of equality in the way that other group identities are presented as being normalized and, more significantly, homogenizes

⁹ This parallels an argument made by Danielle Allen (2014) regarding the establishment of the United States.

'national' group identity. Further, the emergence of the nation is presented as an endogenous event and unconnected to broader processes of colonization, dispossession, and appropriation. In failing to locate the nation within these broader processes, all 'others' are external to the nation as conceived by Rosanvallon. This is what enables him to normalize the group identity of the nation conceived in homogenous terms and to pathologize the group identities of multicultural immigrants and diverse others. Such a presentation enacts a variety of exclusions. For example, the conditions of diversity in the present are made anomalous in terms of the version of the past that is being put forward. This is what enables him to make his argument that what is *now* needed is simply for us to treat each other equitably, as equals. However, this does not address the ways in which those identified as 'other' were rarely treated as equals in the past and so effaces the question of restitution for past wrongs (that continue to structure present inequalities) as part of the process of how we might create a society of equals. Another way to put this is to suggest that what is happening is the misidentification of relations of domination as exclusion which then suggests that the remedy to the wrongs of the past is inclusion, not, more appropriately, an address of domination (see Allen 2005).

Throughout the book, Rosanvallon equates equality with sameness or homogeneity of membership within a community. This, after all, is the way in which he is able to discuss equality in the round without any reference to the limiting historical instances of enslavement or colonization – those who were enslaved or colonized are not recognized as members of the communities under discussion. This sameness of community is linked to notions of citizenship and has disturbing connotations in terms of identifying those towards whom we might be obliged to act equitably. If the political community of France had been extended to include also the colonial possessions of France, then different understandings of equality may have been possible. This would have been further facilitated by taking the case of Haiti seriously. However, Haiti remains invisible, 'on the other side of the line', that Santos (2007) suggests bifurcates abyssal thinking and radically excludes all that is produced as non-existent.

For Rosanvallon, taking Haiti seriously would have forced him to confront the fact that as Haitians fought for self-emancipation, they did so from that country otherwise presented as the fount of liberty and equality and brotherhood (or, more simply, modernity) – France. It is this that explains why Rosanvallon, while referencing Santo Domingo, cannot consider it further, because to do so with any seriousness would cause him to have to reflect on its implications for the whole theoretical edifice of his understanding of equality. It would require a radical reconstruction of the very idea of equality through the engagement with and development of traditions not usually presented as central within the academy. It is significant that Rosanvallon (2013) uses the earlier Spanish name for the island – Santo Domingo (or, in the original French version, Saint Domingue) – rather than that chosen by the self-emancipated citizens, Haiti. Even in its naming, Rosanvallon chooses to efface the momentous achievements of the Haitian Revolution and to defer consideration of how the ideas of equality that emerged in *this* revolution could contribute to, challenge, and inform contemporary understandings of equality and what it would take to create a society of equals.

Returning to questions of global sociology, it is perhaps clearer how discourses of modernity, claiming world-historicity, but presenting a truncated version of European history, are indeed parochial rather than global. Additionally, this points also to the deleterious impact on the development of concepts and categories, as evidenced by the discussion of Rosanvallon above, of taking parochial histories as global ones. The world-historical events recognized in the constitution of modernity remain centred upon a narrowly defined European history and there is no place for the broader histories of colonialism or slavery in their understandings of the emergence of the modern or modern concepts. Further, the complex historical interconnections forged through colonial processes of domination and subordination are also subsumed within contemporary sociological thought. These histories – and the resistance to the modes of domination they illustrate – need to be taken as central to the development of the idea of the ‘global’ within our disciplines. Why? Well mostly because the global, empirically, is constructed through such processes.

The perspective of ‘connected sociologies’, with which I wish to conclude, starts from a recognition that events are constituted by processes that are always broader than the selections that bound events as particular and specific to their theoretical constructs. It is inspired by the call, by historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997), for ‘connected histories’. ‘Connected sociologies’¹⁰ recognizes a plurality of possible interpretations and selections, not as a ‘description’ of events and processes, but as an opportunity for reconsidering what we previously thought we had known. The different sociologies in need of connection are themselves located in time and space, including the time and space of colonialism, empire, and (post)colonialism. They will frequently arise as discordant and challenging voices and may even be resisted on that basis (a resistance made easier by the geo-spatial stratification of the academy). The consequence of different perspectives must be to open up examination of events and processes such that they are understood differently in light of that engagement. Put another way, engaging with different voices must move us beyond simple pluralism to make a difference to what was initially thought; not so that we come to think the same, but that we think differently from how we had previously thought before our engagement (see Holmwood 2007).

Much contemporary sociology and political thought sidesteps the issue of historical global interconnections – those connections argued for in the call to take seriously the Haitian Revolution as a world historical event. They often only regard as significant those connections that brought European modernity to other societies. Although, of course, they rarely address the actual historical processes of colonialism, enslavement, and dispossession that were involved in the making of such connections. Rather, these are euphemized under terms such as European contact or mere diffusion. In this way, theorists continue to assert the necessary priority of the West in the construction of conceptual categories and end up privileging the same understanding of modernity and modern societies as earlier scholars. As Santos (2014) has suggested, there is a cognitive injustice at work here and its sociological address requires a radical revision of Western sociology’s self-understanding. It should be noted, that such a revision necessarily decentres that European self-understanding, but it is inclusionary and ‘universalisable’ to the extent that it seeks to address connections at the same time as displacing ‘myths of origins’.

¹⁰ For a fuller elaboration of the claims made here, please see Bhambra (2014).

A 'connected sociologies' approach, then, enables us to locate Europe within wider processes, address the ways in which Europe created and then benefitted from the legacies of colonialism and enslavement, and examine what Europe needs to learn from those it dispossessed in order to address the problems we currently face. 'Connected sociologies' points to the work needed in common to make good on the promise of a reinvigorated sociological imagination in service of social justice in a global world.

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