The manacles of (uneven and combined) development: can we be released?¹

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Abstract

Must we think of the world as divided into ‘developed’ and ‘developing’? Is this a political choice or a material fact? This paper departs from Seth’s distinction between postcolonial theory and historical sociology as modes of critiquing Eurocentrism (2009) through an extended critique of the concept of ‘development’ in historical sociology. Despite recent attempts by Hobson and Rosenberg to rescue historical sociology from its imperialist and Eurocentric origins, the centrality of notions of ‘modernity’ and developmental historiographies mean that despite avoiding the open Orientalism of their intellectual inheritance, contemporary historical sociology has not managed to successfully avoid treating the world outside Europe as not deviant in important ways. This is a problem not entirely avoided by ‘levels of analysis’ solutions to Eurocentrism, such as those pursued by Chakrabarty and Chabal and Daloz, which seek to use adapted versions of historical sociological frames in their analyses. The most promising groundwork for critical revisions of historical sociology begin from radical critiques of developmental historiography such as those pursued by Bhambra and Ayers. The paper concludes with some reflections on how to ‘unthink development’ in the conduct of analysis.

Keywords: Africa. Historical sociology, development, modernity, time, post-colonialism

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Introduction

It is hardly novel to note that although the signifiers may be different, the deeper, hierarchical political relational logic of world politics remains untransformed in public discourse and much social inquiry. Whereas it may not be politically acceptable to describe Africa as ‘barbaric’, in relation to a ‘civilised’ Europe, or even ‘backward’ in relation to an ‘advanced’ Europe,² it is nonetheless ubiquitously politically acceptable – nay, politically responsible – to think of Africa as ‘developing’, and by implication Europe as ‘developed’.

The notion of ‘development’ is an absolutely central concept in the way that we make sense of the world, and particularly how European and American societies make senses of ‘Africa’ in both the public sphere and in the vast majority of academic work about the continent. This is perhaps as true for African publics and academic communities as anywhere else, where the notion of ‘development’ is a powerful discourse in political life. In a wide range of relationships from the international to the personal level, between various groups of people and individuals, the idea of societal ‘development’ generates particular responsibilities, legitimacies, authorities and necessities in our lives.

Recent historical sociological approaches to world politics have made an important critical contribution in wresting the notion of ‘development’ away from a methodologically nationalist one. In this line of argument, ‘development’ does not happen to different countries individually in an automatically linear way – rather it is the unfolding of capitalist modes of production that ties together economic structures around the world into relationships which are more or less uneven and combined.⁴ This is an important line of argument that does much to problematize the idea that contemporary economic conditions around the world are the production of inadequate levels of attainment in various fields of education or political legitimacy; rather, it is argued, they are built into the ways in which the global economy is structured.

What I want to pursue in this paper is the argument that even this useful critique is an unsatisfactory solution to the issues created by using the idea of ‘development’ as a natural benchmark for understanding human societies and their relationships. A central problematic of capitalist modernity, which itself depends upon notions of ‘development’ is the founding question for historical sociology as a project. Such a problematic tends, by its logic, to lens Africa and its polities as a subordinate articulation of a normalised capitalist modernity that finds its full expression in the contemporary West. In this sense it reinforces analytic norms which privilege a stylised and abstracted conception of European history as the most appropriate lens for looking at world politics as well as politics within the state. This serves to reinforce a developmentalised framing of human history, and perhaps more troublingly, to legitimate a politics of ‘developmentality’ in the space of former empires.⁵

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² Although even this, depressingly, remains a common designation, most obviously in the pages of Foreign Policy magazine.
⁴ There are of course strong and weak versions of this claim in HS.
⁵ The term ‘developmentality’ is already in circulation in a few selected works, notably that of Lord Mawuko-Yevugah and Debal Deb. Mawuko-Yevugah specifically applies the Foucauldian
I take up recent works in historical sociology as a starting point for connected reasons: firstly, these works represent some of the most interesting critical interventions in the study of world politics that seeks to remake our conceptual understanding of what the ‘international’ is; secondly, that historical sociology is very obviously influential for major thinkers and writers concerned with contemporary Africa; thirdly, that historical sociological theory has long been an important resource for development studies in its critical form; and fourthly, because various writers in the tradition have recognised and tried to confront the question of Eurocentrism in their analyses, suggesting that there are productive grounds for a conversation on this front.5

This conversation will need to confront the limits of historical sociology’s modernist conceptual assumptions in the quest to rethink critically the contours of international politics. These limits are being pushed indirectly in different ways in various literatures, as I will discuss later on. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the unsettling of the idea of ‘development’ by working through some of these important critiques, and inviting the reader to appreciate the notion of ‘development’ not as a natural phenomenon of history but a particular remnant of Eurocentric social and political theory that supports – however inadvertently – ongoing neo-racist constellations of power in world politics.7

Theories of development and the varying influence of historical sociology

Although the development industry as a whole has seen a wide range of shifts in thinking, and particularly shifts in the different social and economic theories underpinning its practices, it has nonetheless remained (obviously) resolutely tied to the notion of ‘development’ in some form, whilst often subverting many of the complex analytic claims entailed by such a position. Much more obviously than historical sociology, its directions are tied to the contemporaneous political struggles of the day and the emergence of different actors within the ‘development industry’. I argue that it has tended to fall back on historical sociology in times of intellectual and political crisis as a form of re-establishing its scientific and objective credentials. This

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5 Seth’s short essay comparing the strategies of postcolonialism and historical sociology as means of resisting Eurocentrism is a key touchstone for the argument, upon which I will later expand. Seth, S. (2009). “Historical Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Two Strategies for Challenging Eurocentrism.” International Political Sociology 3(3): 334-338

6 Although important to the broader argument, I will not in this paper discuss the various critiques that have been made about the development industry and development policy in particular – these are, briefly, its racialised character (see McCarthy, Race, Empire and Human Development), its depoliticising character (see Ferguson, the Anti-Politics Machine, Duffield, Development, Security and the New Wars), its highly restrictive account of human flourishing (myriad, although my favourite might be Shilliam’s counterpoint of Rasta cosmologies with Sen’s account of liberal development), its dysfunctional and contradictory implementations (Easterly, White Man’s Burden), its specific ideological forms (Williams, World Bank and Social Transformation), its active and systematic impoverishment of poorer countries (Ha-Joon Chang, Bad Samaritans, Kicking Away the Ladder) and so on. These are necessary arguments in the broader critique but do not in and of themselves unsettle the underlying issue.
happened with the rise of dependency theory in the 1970s, and is happening again with current development discourses of statebuilding, capacity building and good governance. Whilst from the perspective of historical sociology it is possible to critique many aspects of the development industry and its supportive framework of development studies, including implementation, assumptions, the generally ahistorical nature of its claims and its general optimism about the compatibility of different fronts of development, it also reinforces the general presupposition that ‘development’ is a historically real phenomenon and that the emergence of ‘modernity’ can be distilled to a number of core significant causes.

Colin Leys’ account of the rise and fall of Development Theory argues that different historical forces at different times influenced the nature of development theory, but that the underpinnings of the idea of ‘development’ are in some ways direct inheritors of Marxian and Hegelian traditions in Western thought and in particular the concept of ‘modernity’. Its emergence was a direct consequence of trying to conceptualise and mediate the appropriate relationship between Europe and its former colonies in the wake of decolonisation. However, due a number of factors, including the ardour of its proponents and the anti-Marxian nature of the Cold War academy, its early theorists were unable to confront the conceptual legacies of Marx that had delivered the main theoretical framing of capitalist development in the first place. Instead, the early proponents re-conceived ‘development’ as ‘modernisation’: innocuous in terms of political connotations, seemingly charitable, western and progressive in terms of social orientation, and all based around the Keynesian conception of the state as main architect of development.

However, the arguments and principles of historical sociology re-emerged within development studies as critiques, from both the left and the right, of mainstream development principles, which were seen to be failing in India and other parts of the ‘developing world’. Most obviously, this came in the form of dependency and world systems theory through the work of Andre Gunder Frank based on the Latin American experiences of underdevelopment, and of Immanuel Wallerstein, both of which re-animated the discussion on the structures of capitalism in the world. The Marxist tradition has continued to be pre-eminent amongst critical scholars of development, which locates the causes of underdevelopment in the structure of the global political economy, and in particular the neoliberal policies of wealthy countries and their multilateral agents.

The influence of sociology also came in the form of the ‘political development’ theories of Samuel Huntington in the late 1960s, which effectively called for a more Weberian approach to development, in the recognition of the role of political institutions in order to avoid ‘decay’ in the developing world. This line of argument legitimatized a more penetrative engagement inside Southern governmental institutions

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9 Ibid., 10-11.
by American and European development agencies. The rationale for this turn was
drawn from a return to ‘Weberian’ conceptions of the modern state as being expressed
through a professional and competent bureaucratic machine of government, for which
European bureaucracies are taken as emblematic models. The current formulation of
this line of argument, popular within the industry and development studies, have
overwhelmingly emphasised the need to build ‘good governance’ and capacity within
states as a path to development.¹³ Building on a preoccupation with the character of
political institutions, these theories and practices have sought to promote an agenda of
interventional statebuilding in a wide range of poor states. The threads of
Weberianism and Hegelianism in contemporary development practices and associated
thinking about world politics might be best lensed through the work of Francis
Fukuyama, who moves from a neo-Hegelian account of the liberal democratic polity
marking The End of History to a clear and prescriptive monograph about
Statebuilding and World Order, drawing on schema concerning the bureaucratic
capacity of the state, in which the completion schedule is laid out.¹⁴

All these lines of argument, of course, derived their authority from the necessary
presuppositions that ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ were both historical facts and
historical desiderata. Quite obviously, the argument was about how to achieve it more
quickly and securely than might otherwise be expected, not what it meant to do so. To
this extent, there was a symbiotic interplay of the ‘objective’ analyses and critiques of
historical sociology and the policies and practices of ‘development’. It is because of
this that historical sociology could remain a cogent and engaged critic of development
theories and practices – because there were many shared ontologies between the post-
independence practice of international development and the twentieth-century
intellectual project of exercising the sociological imagination, even under situations
where their utopias were divergent.

The argument here is not that historical sociology as an approach to social theory was
somehow directly responsible for the myriad complex, contradictory and sometimes
strange turns in development theory and practices over the period. Clearly, these
answered to many other masters and reflected a much more diverse set of concerns
from different places. The emergence of the Human Development Index in the 1990s
within the UN is one such phenomenon which took up activist concerns about the
overly economic tenor of development assistance and forced an explicit expansion of
it into multiple other realms, including health, democratic representation and the
environment.¹⁵ Clearly, the historic activities of development agencies have supported
both kinds of work – institutional engineering and attention to a human needs agenda.

The argument is that both policies of development and the scholarship of historical
sociology nonetheless labour under common suppositions about the historically
objective character of development as the realisation of modernity in such a way that
consistently reinforces its depoliticisation. Its normalisation as a moral agenda for

¹³ This turn is discussed lucidly by various scholars, including Graham Harrison (2005) The World
wealthy countries\textsuperscript{16} and the central objective of political life in poorer states\textsuperscript{17} necessarily depends on the universal acceptance of this basic proposition. In the next section I will look at the conceptual assumptions that underpin this proposition as they have emerged in contemporary Weberian and Marxian scholarship in historical sociology, and raise questions about their validity, scope and relevance, as well as the kinds of worldview entailed.

The generative grammar of historical sociology

\textit{“Generative Grammar: a device, as a body of rules, whose output is all of the sentences that are permissible in a given language, while excluding all those that are not permissible.”}\textsuperscript{18}

These next sections will argue that the generative grammar of the HS research programme commits it to analysing the social world in such a way as to normalise and centralise particular stylised conceptions of development. It will begin with a brief discussion of Weber’s and Marx’s conceptions of modernity before going on to talk about Hobson and Rosenberg as the contemporary critical inheritors of these traditions who lean on ideas of development.

As an analytic framework, historical sociology is defined by its concern with the formation and transformation of modernity.\textsuperscript{19} Different schools of historical sociology aim to explain or understand the formation and transformation of modernity in different ways, but are constituted by definition around modernity as the core ontology of its theories. Defining ‘modernity’ thus becomes an important step in offering historical sociological theory.

Another defining feature of historical sociology is a concern to tell causal historical stories about the emergence or non-emergence of modernity.\textsuperscript{20} This requires a theorisation of ‘cause’ and ‘effect’, and some means of distinguishing a ‘good’ causal story from a ‘bad’ causal story. Thus, as in the structure of any causal argument, there are \textit{explanans} – things doing the explaining, and \textit{explananda} – things to be explained. In the case of historical sociology, it is the existence and interaction of a limited number of key social ‘forces’ – e.g. relations of production, state-society relations, military power – that explain historical development and processes and constitute particular causal logics. This is the ‘sociological’ aspect of historical sociology.

The ‘historical’ aspect of historical sociology is furnished by what Popper and Chakrabarty identify as ‘historicism’\textsuperscript{21}, and what Lawson calls ‘the underlying reality


\textsuperscript{17} Makwuo-Yevugah, op.cit.


\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Lawson, Rosenberg quote below: analysis of causation.

\textsuperscript{21} Popper – Poverty of Historicism, Chakrabarty, Provincialising Europe.
that provides the environment for everyday action, events and processes’… which are seen as ‘structures and tendencies’.\textsuperscript{22} This is, in essence, the premise that history is meaningfully understood as ‘historical development’ or ‘historical process’—not a teleological history, as Chakrabarty points out,\textsuperscript{23} but a conception of the causally connected and cumulative nature of historical outcomes. This is fundamental to understanding the contributions of historical sociology as a project, particularly in IR whereby it seeks to displace neorealist, ahistorical and static conceptions of the international system.\textsuperscript{24} What historical sociology must exclude are versions of history that are either ‘radically historicist’ or ‘history without historicism’\textsuperscript{25}—the claims that either history can only be read in the frame of contemporaneous meaning, or that history is simply one damned thing after another. As such, the ‘task of historical sociology became the task of establishing… the movement of social forms, relations and trends across time and place.’\textsuperscript{26} As such, if historical sociology is to be coherent as a project, it must be based on the premise some sort of ‘development’ or ‘movement’. As Rosenberg notes,

``development’ connotes processes of directional change over time which can be theorized by analysing the causal properties of particular structures of social relationships. Abandon the idea of development in this sense, and the discourse of historical sociology goes with it, for this is the methodological linchpin of any notion that sociology can play a role in historical explanation.’\textsuperscript{27}

These core premises – the concern for modernity, causal logics and real historical development – constitute the ‘generative grammar’ of historical sociology. However, in order to discuss its constraints as a critical approach, I will discuss the more specific generative grammars of Marx and Weber – conceptually central to the discipline – with Rosenberg and Hobson, who are key representatives of where historical sociology in IR currently stands along these tendencies. Despite the conscious efforts to address the problem of ‘Eurocentrism’ within the latter two accounts, I argue that they are constrained by the generative grammar of their own models to be only able to view contemporary Africa primarily as fundamentally ‘underdeveloped’, or ‘un-modern’, these ultimate conclusions of the inquiry being already presupposed in the set-up. Again, whilst critical voices are beginning to unpick this problematic, the central writers within historical sociology have sought to absorb them within historical sociology without modifying the central structures of the analysis.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{23} Chakrabarty, ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{24} Hobden, S. and J. M. Hobson (2002). Historical sociology of international relations, Cambridge Univ Pr. ‘Introduction’.
\textsuperscript{26} Lawson, ibid., 358.
\textsuperscript{28} Bhambra, (2010), ibid.


What is Modernity in Historical Sociology?

A conception of ‘modernity’ is the basic ontology for both Weber’s and Marx’s social theory. Both thinkers develop their conceptual framework in the context of contemporaneous ideas and approaches to the study of society, as well as the political conditions in which they found themselves. As the concern of this paper is not their thought as such, I offer here only a very brief summary of the relevant conceptions of modernity as they relate to and inform their contemporary expressions in historical sociology.  

For Marx, the core ontological preoccupation is the nature of relationships in society as relating to the means of production. Capitalist relationships between a capital-owning class and a proletariat are fundamental to modern society, representing an advanced stage in human history. This is because human history is itself driven and organised by changes in modes of production and exchange. It is along the relationship to the means of production that society is fundamentally organised, and it is changes in the relationships of antagonistic classes that is historically significant. What emerges from this is a particular kind of historicism – historical materialism – whereby world-historical events are those that mark the life-history of capital, which is the ‘real’ driver and explanation for other kinds of events, such as wars and political change.  

For Weber, ‘modernity’ is represented as an ideal-type, which consists of a series of linked rationalisations: “the rationalised economy, bureaucracy as the rationalised organisation, the modern state as based on the formal procedures and rules of rational-legal authority”. Rational-legal modernity, as emergent with capitalism, is contrasted with other modes of political organisation and authority in which social structures are less differentiated and rule is more personalised. The ontological foundations of Weber’s modernity rely on particular social forms as best fitting industrial capitalism much more than historical inevitability. As Giddens argues, it was the deterministic account of history in Marx that Weber objected to, but not the idea that material forces were an important aspect of social change. Thus whilst Weber shares Marx’s basic concern with the origins and development of capitalism, his approach to what is historically significant is more multidimensional. Whilst the idea of social ‘development’ in Weber does not have quite the historical progressive tenor that it is given in Marx, Weber nonetheless refers to the modern state as ‘advanced’ in particular ways.

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29 Of course, these are two highly complex thinkers with large bodies of work, and I necessarily gloss over many important controversies of interpretation and application, including whether Marx would himself have recognised what he was doing as historical sociology in the sense later adopted.

30 Marx, The German Ideology


33 Collins, op.cit.,

34 Giddens, op.cit.
Contemporary historical sociology has nonetheless become increasingly uncomfortable with what it sees as Eurocentric and Orientalist tendencies within the work of its classical forbears, and has sought to address it in recent work. Hobson argues that both Marx’s and Weber’s conceptions of modernity are foundationally both Eurocentric and Orientalist in their meaning. These critiques have provided an important platform for where historical sociology has sought to go subsequently.

Hobson’s critique of Marx argues that his Orientalism was a fundamental aspect of his ultimately Eurocentric historical materialism. Hobson reads Marx as re-emphasising the ‘rotting’ character of Asian civilisations, which are regarded as having ‘no progressive history’, but are rather caught up in cycles of despotism.\(^{35}\) Marx’s Orientalism is in his deployment of particular images and stereotypes with regard to non-European societies to support a particular reading of European ones. In Marx, these are images of social decay, superstition and barbarianism, in which private property does not emerge. The analytic Eurocentrism of historical materialism is thus premised on the unique and historically progressive character of European capitalism, which, through the bourgeois institutionalisation of private property, gives rise to the forms of accumulation and alienation which would accelerate historical changes in the relations of production. As such, it was only through incorporation into European modes of production through imperialism that such societies would break out of their pre-historical cycles.\(^{36}\)

For Weber, ‘modernity’ was about the rationalisation and de-personalisation of the apparatus of the state and the emergence of modern capitalism; features which he contrasted with the patrimonial, superstitious, undifferentiated nature of Eastern state-society relations.\(^{37}\) As Hobson argues, Weber’s analytic methodology presupposed Western exceptionalism on all aspects of modernity, which were counterposed with ‘imaginary blockages’ in Eastern despotism in order to explain the emergence of modernity in the West.\(^{38}\) This was another Orientalist imaginary which supported and embedded a Eurocentric analysis of development. It was Orientalist in the sense that it presupposed and imputed particular characteristics of Eastern societies as ‘irrational’ through a set of cultural stereotypes whose function was to contrast with and support a particular stereotype for the ‘rational’ West. The resultant analysis of development is Eurocentric because it systematically privileges a narrative of European agency and exceptionalism in the unfolding of modernity.

It is to this latter challenge that Hobson’s own research subsequently responds, in demonstrating the deeply interconnected ways in which modernity in the West arose, in no small part due to a series of technological and intellectual advances which had their origins in the East.\(^{39}\) In this reading of world history, Eurocentrism, understood as a belief in the historically progressive and exceptional/independent character of European civilisation, is systematically undermined.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 16.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
Hobson’s critique of the Orientalist Eurocentrism in Marx and Weber is lucid and important – however, I argue that it does not pursue its own critique far enough. Hobson’s response to the Orientalist Eurocentrism in historical sociology is principally an attempt to refute factually the assumptions of European exceptionalism underpinning Marxist and Weberian analysis. However, as Hobson himself points out, Orientalist Eurocentrism is written conceptually into the grammar of the analysis – yet this must mean the ways in which analytic priority is accorded, the framework of evaluation, the underlying conception of historical ‘development’, and in some senses in the idea of modernity itself. Nonetheless, Hobson’s analysis tends to preserve these elements carefully within the framework of his own research – indeed what he shows, using but inverting the Marxian concept of late development and the Weberian account of modernity – is simply that the East and not the West was the prime historical mover of this development.40

Working more clearly from within the Marxist tradition, Rosenberg very clearly sees and attempts to confront the problem of ‘teleological fallacy and ethnocentric prejudice’ that might arise from the category of ‘development’, which is central to the notion of ‘uneven and combined development’ he puts forward as a sociological theory of the international. His response is to carefully spell out a case for it remaining a category derived empirically from human history rather than a murky (read: Orientalist) prejudice embedded into the methodology of historical sociological thought.41 It is worth going into his argument in more detail here, since it illuminates acutely and precisely the issues that historical sociology faces in trying to overcome its Eurocentric generative grammar.

Rosenberg argues that:

“one need make no teleological assumptions in order to register the fact that over this period the general social conditions have indeed undergone a number of large changes… Hunter-gatherer, agrarian and industrializing societies have in fact predominated in the course of human existence in chronologically successive periods…Here at any rate the world historians agree.”42 [my emphases]

Here, I would note that despite the heavily qualified nature of the statement, substantively ‘the general social conditions’ which Rosenberg implicitly makes the ontological core of inquiry are equated to modes of production in defined societies, which are chronologically successive. Note that this becomes a factual rather than conceptual claim, which is the way in which Rosenberg attempts to steer the notion of ‘development’ away from its analytically teleological moorings. It also, as will be discussed further later on, has to be an extremely broad claim, divested of any complicating empirical detail.

Rosenberg also carefully notes that the concept of development depends on a ‘cumulative movement’ and builds this into the next step of the argument:

40 Ibid., 20.
42 Ibid.,
‘No one disputes that these three types of society are distinguished – each from its predecessor – by ‘step-level’ augmentations in the productive transformation of nature, the orchestration of social power and the cultural rationalization of knowledge forms. Empirically therefore, there is a sequence in historical time in which types of human society which have arisen in succession would also have to be placed each on a ‘higher’ level than the last in terms of an ascending linear scale drawn within each of these three abstract, comparative dimensions. There exists, in other words, an on a very broad level, a real historical referent to the term ‘development’.43 [original emphases in bold, mine in italics]

Two more steps are made to flesh out the idea of ‘development’ here, both of which are ‘empirically’ rather than theoretically grounded according to the argument. Firstly, linkages are made between the ‘productive transformation of nature’, ‘the orchestration of social power’ and the ‘cultural rationalization of knowledge forms’. It is not entirely clear for this reader what is meant by the latter two, although they gesture in the direction of Weber’s analyses of forms of political and social organisation, and sources of authority. The second step is the description of these abstract dimensions as undergoing ‘augmentation’ when compared to one another – which must mean higher productivity, greater orchestration of social power and greater cultural rationalization of knowledge forms in these different types of societies.

Yet the seemingly universal character of the “real historical referent” depends on the validity of very particular assumptions. If one has already accepted that 1) societies can only be typified in this specific way, and 2) what defines this typification is positioning along Rosenberg’s identified axes, and 3) that these axes represent primarily rankable rather than non-rankable facets of social existence, then yes, ‘development’ is a real historical phenomenon, presupposed by this set of premises. Prima facie, it could seem that no one could dispute that augmentations had been made in the productive transformation of nature. However, even this judgement relies heavily on particular evaluative frameworks.

For example, saying that the productive transformation of nature has been augmented depends on, firstly, a particular view of the relationship between ‘man’ and ‘nature’ as best characterised by quantities appropriated, and secondly, the character of culturally and historically specific exchange values for particular goods and forms of labour, since in very few cases is the comparison between like for like. To argue for example that migrant Europeans more productively exploited land than did indigenous peoples in the Americas is to accept the European evaluation of what constituted a ‘productive’ or valuable use of land and for whom. We might similarly problematize the notion of ‘orchestrated social power’ as not obviously comparably linear (is military power an ‘augmentation’ of lineal authority?), and the ‘cultural rationalisation of knowledge forms’ as depending on a meaningful division between ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ cultures of knowledge forms in different societies. The indisputable foundations upon which Rosenberg wishes the analysis to rest are very much disputable.

43 Rosenberg, ibid., 329-330.
Much seems to hinge on the claim that this takes place ‘on a very broad level’, but here Rosenberg’s own story of human history as multilinear and societally interactive seems to undo the empirical claim that human history provides an empirically real referent of chronologically successive development. On the level of the particular of course, it seems chronological reversals on these axes are eminently possible. For example, in Mozambique since independence, there have been clear periods of decline in the productive transformation of nature and active reversals to subsistence farming in many of the post-colonial rural areas that had previously been ‘industrialised’.

In Britain, it could be argued that after the fall of the Roman Empire, there were decreases both in the orchestration of social power and the cultural rationalisation of knowledge forms. Thus if we are to posit a ‘real’ historical referent for development, as Rosenberg would like, it can only be a very widespread one. Rosenberg goes on to argue, contra Nisbet, that the problems in terms of conceiving development thus can be solved through conceiving it as ‘uneven and combined’.

However, this line of argument is premised on the idea that Nisbet’s challenge of the multilinearity and interactivity of history is confined to the “defective historical sociological method” [my emphasis].

The bigger challenge to Rosenberg’s position is the problem mounted to the question of such a type of historicism itself. According to Chakrabarty:

“…we may say that ‘historicism’ is a mode of thinking with the following characteristics. It tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first, as an individual and unique whole – as some kind of unity at least in potential – and, second, as something that develops over time. Historicism typically can allow for complexities and zigzags in this development; it seeks to find the general in the particular, and it does not entail any necessary assumptions of teleology. But the idea of development and the assumption that a certain amount of time elapses in the very process of development are critical to this understanding. Needless to say, this passage of time that is constitutive of both the narrative and the concept of development is, in the famous words of Walter Benjamin, the secular, empty, and homogenous time of history.”

This description would entirely fit the claims that Rosenberg wishes to make about the notion of historical development. However, as Chakrabarty notes, in his reading of Marx, this account of development could only make sense through a conscious effort to distinguish what did contribute to the ‘histories posited by capital’ from that did not belong to its ‘life process’. On my reading of Rosenberg’s assumptions, this distinction is made by assuming that ‘history’ itself is empirically of broad changes in modes of production. For Marx, this assumption is achieved through the explicit hiving off and abstraction of the ‘real’ motions of capital that Rosenberg relies on as basic historical fact. Marx can only achieve this through the progressive ranking of advanced capitalism against the backward nature of other economies, with which he is entirely comfortable because he is explicitly arguing for an underpinning historical

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45 Rosenberg., ibid., 334.
46 Ibid., 333.
47 Chakrabarty, ibid., 22-23.
48 Ibid., 50.
teleology in his approach. That is to say, that Marx does not have a problem with seeing History moving in a single direction, and it is this logic that underpins Marxist historiography, upon which Rosenberg must rely.

What Hobson and Rosenberg do not do, ultimately, is acknowledge that the particular socio-historical origins of the generative grammar of Marx and Weber pervade the rest of their work. This is about the analytic centrality of a particular set of societal experiences, which are then universalised as a metric for evaluating social history in the West and elsewhere. ‘Development’, in Hobson and Rosenberg’s work, continues to stand as assumed universalisable fact, rather than ideal-type or particular explanatory device. This is a much bigger problem, analytically and politically, than the temporal errors about the development of the East committed in Weber et al or the unsophisticated and degrading analysis of the East by Marx. It is about how they constructed what counted as being historically significant or meaningful, and their assumptions about what could constitute a ‘cause’, that necessarily provincialise the analysis as being of its time, place and purpose.

This would not be a problem were it not for the claims within historical sociology to be dealing with what is ‘real’ or ‘causal’ in social science: the evaluation of the quality of the claims is done against a framework that already presupposes the preference for a modernist explanation over others. As Chakrabarty points out, there is no room for gods or deities as agents to explain any events in Marx’s understanding of ‘History 1’ i.e. his historical materialism. Logically, since Marx is concerned with historical changes in the relations of production, and their generation through antagonistic class relations, there is no way in which things outside this logic could be causally generative. There is, embedded in the logic of the system, no historically significant role attributed to other organising principles such as relations of gender, nor of race – they can neither be explanans nor explanandum in any meaningful sense. The processes of the abolition of slavery and the enfranchisement of women are not of any historical significance, because they are simply expressions or products of particular outcomes of the struggle over control of the means of production – they cannot help us periodise or discern causal mechanisms of development. Twentieth century decolonisation, on this logic, is not a historically significant event on a Marxian account of world history – in fact the key claim of dependency theory in HS is that decolonisation in the twentieth century was not a significant historical event in and of itself. This conclusion also follows from the logic of Weberian and neo-Weberian analysis, which is preoccupied with the development of capitalist modernity as expressed in the rationalisation of bureaucratic structures, the formal depersonalisation of rule and the emergence of a rationalised economy.

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49 Chakrabarty, ibid.
The study of Africa and the selective use of Historical Sociology: analysis, agency, angst

The seeming disconnection between specialists in the study of Africa and historical sociologists is, I suggest, not simply a function of their being interested in micro- and macro- level phenomena respectively. Rather, it seems to reflect a troubling tension between the various notions of ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ and competing scholastic and political interests in narrating the life-worlds of African political space as being meaningful and understandable. As suggested earlier, if there is a basic presumption that history is about the development of societies along sequential paths of rationalisation or capital-intensification, other historical events become necessarily epiphenomenal, or requiring of explanation for their deviation. However, much of the major literature on ‘Africa’ written by area specialists critiques the general applicability of concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ as developed in the HS literature.

A primary example of such a text is Chabal and Daloz’s *Africa Works: Disorder as a Political Instrument*. Chabal and Daloz say that must argue their case for the ‘rational’ nature of African political order in terms that are “universal analytical tools” with which to comprehend the “crisis of modernity” evident in African polities. The analysis proceeds by outlining the ways in which the apparent disorder and irrationality of African societies is in fact the production of a particular type of modernity – a “modernity without development” or formalisation. Through engagement with the political, the ‘cultural’ and the economic domains, the authors argue for the durability of this patterning of African social (in its broadest sense) organisation. Importantly, they deploy these analytic tools in order to combat what they see as gross mythmaking and stereotyping in public discourses about Africa and its un-modern nature.

Although they seem to be using a number of ‘moderno-normative’ sociological categories and modes of reasoning in their research, ultimately the analysis seems to lead towards a critique of historical sociology as it has been described earlier in the paper, insofar as it pushes hard for an understanding of *really-existing and significant historical heterogeneity of modernity* in the case of contemporary Africa’s experiences. In leaning on the interpretive interpretation of Weber, they argue, amongst other reasons for apparent ‘disorder’ that African political society must be seen as fundamentally reluctant to accept Western political and socio-economic versions of political order, in part because they do not accord with a core number of cultural and political values, which realms of meaning restrict what is politically possible at any one time. In their description of these values, the question of identity

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53 Ibid., xvi.

54 Ibid., xviii.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 132.
and the notions of rationality, Chabal and Daloz are attempting to deliver the sense of a distinctive African ‘life-world’ – a horizon of meaning within which behaviour is intelligible and intelligent. Thus, throughout the work there is a tension between the historicist and interpretive strands of sociological explanation. This can be understood insofar as Chabal and Daloz principally seek to tell a convincing and general story about the contemporary state of Africa. Indeed, they expressly disavow engagement with the question of development’s political desirability, other than to point out that it may not have happened on the continent as expected. And by the end of the work it is clear that the term ‘modernity’ is no longer being used as a sociological category in the sense used in historical sociology, but rather to convey a sense of contemporaneity and interconnectedness to Africa’s contemporary social realities.

In this sense, although the modifications might cast itself as a ‘levels of analysis’ problem they more deeply problematize the framework of ‘modernity’ abstracted from Europe as a useful analytic framework for Africa. Rather, the critique that this type of study presents to historical sociology as understood is the critique of the ontological realism of the historical sociological framework argued for by Lawson, and the conception of development as a ‘real historical referent’ deployed by Rosenberg. On Chabal and Daloz’s reading, the organisation of social reality depends on basically different mechanisms, which do not point to an eventual ‘modernising’ of Africa in the terms anticipated by historical sociology, which in turn undermines the claims to the underlying ontological ‘realism’ upon which its core claims rest.

**Rethinking historicism and historiography**

Bhambra’s work has sought to deepen the critique of Eurocentrism within historical sociology through explicitly problematizing the concept of ‘modernity’ and the underlying Eurocentric historicism that underpins the theoretical gaze. This compelling critique goes much further than the ‘life-world’ solutions that Chakrabarty and Chabal and Daloz propose in attempting to overcome Eurocentrism. Following Dirlik, she argues that to continue to allow an understanding of European social arrangements as ‘modern’ to inform a more culturally specific analysis of different parts of the world, is to continue to frame the world through a lens which is non-teleological but remains Eurocentric. In this sense, even the ‘multiple modernities’ approach of Eisenstadt and Schlueter remains problematic.

The problem, Bhambra argues, inheres in accounts of history which retain a stadial (stages) form, but were in their Enlightenment conception connected with the idea that ‘discovered’ peoples such as Native Americans represented historical forebears to Europeans in terms of their development. In this the critique points to the ongoing fusion between the spatial and temporal that underpinned European views of

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58 Ibid., 75.
59 Ibid., 64.
themselves as being advanced and modern, which was generated through – and not before – the practices and ideas of colonialism.\textsuperscript{60}

The historiography underpinning the sociological imagination has retained some aspects of this colonial mentality through its historicist and developmental approach to the understanding and analysis of human societies. As Bhambra argues, this is contingent upon the continued application of ideal-types which supposedly captured the European experience of the emergence of modernity and the social transformations therein.\textsuperscript{61} Yet, as an alternative exploration of key aspects of European modernity show, the facticity of these aspects can be challenged through a consideration of the connected histories of Europe with other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{62} The mainstream sociological imagination is predicated, through the idea of modernity and its origins in Europe, on the invisibility and irrelevance of such connections. Yet through centralising the conjunctures and connections upon which particular aspects of cultural, political and economic changes depended, one opens possibilities for thinking about the future in terms which are less restrictive.

In a move which is complementary to Bhambra’s re-investigation of Europe’s modernity and the rise of the nation state, Ayers’ critique of imperial historiographies more directly attacks the silencing and invisibility of the political histories of pre-colonial (and for many pre-historical) Africa.\textsuperscript{63} Through a discussion of diverse and specific forms of political rule and organisation, Ayers articulates not just a series of historical details regarding different forms of rule but rather an alternative historiography of political society in the continent. She argues that these show traditions of re-distributing wealth and working through building consensus as ways of dealing with conflict in the political system. Such methods embody particular principles of empowerment, ideas of economic value and labour, ideas of justice and mechanisms of redress. As such, the presumption that prior to the arrival of imperial powers and capitalist production practices, African societies lacked complex and accountable structures of political authority is shown to be basically false. In Ayers account, then, there is a meaningful heterogeneity of social histories that is erased by colonial historiography, the recovery of which is a radical counter-argument to colonialism.

Importantly, these critiques are different from those posed by Chakrabarty, where the main focus of attention seems to be on the level of analysis rather than the construction of historiographical categories themselves, or on the foundational heterogeneity of human history. Both of these latter problems point to the need to rethink how we conceive of social histories more deeply.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, ch. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., [insert page nos]
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., part II.
Unthinking ‘development’

It is from this deeper challenge to historicism and Eurocentric or imperial historiography that challenges to the idea of ‘development’ need to begin. As long as it is taken for granted that ‘development’ constitutes a ‘real historical referent’ rather than a set of connected historiographical choices made by thinkers who began from an explicitly Eurocentric and sometimes pro-imperial world view, it will not be possible to substantively deconstruct the colonial worldviews that persist in thinking about world order, both in reference to how we think about the ‘West’ and the ‘non-West’.

In the last part of this paper, I want to begin to lay the groundwork for such an exercise. Part of the provocation comes from Hindess’ public excoriation of the idea that the notion of development could be ‘inadequate but indispensable’ in the way Chakrabarty argued. Why could we not simply do without it?

In a broad sense, unthinking ‘development’ would require us as ceasing to see world-time cumulatively and chronotically, of seeing necessary connections between forms of production and commerce and political order, of wealth or poverty as accumulating naturally and progressively, of cultures, polities and peoples as being ahead or behind each other. Cartographically, as Hobson and others note, it might mean re-sizing and re-positioning the map of how the world is spatially related. It would require a more serious appreciation of the heterogeneous forms of contemporary societies and their histories, as well as their inherently interconnected nature. Perhaps most seriously, it can allow us to begin thinking in a less racialised way about world politics.

Yet in thinking about what it would mean to stop talking about the ‘development’ of human societies, with the particular implication that some societies were ‘developed’ and others were ‘developing’, we need to address what kind of intellectual contribution the term is currently seen to have, and to see what kinds of other language or ideas might be used instead. I will only sketch some preliminary ideas here.

One of the most important is a kind of ‘economic’ function. Most basically, in contemporary political speech, it is a way of saying that some countries are wealthy, and others are poor. As mentioned at the outset of this essay, this is seen as a politically responsible way of viewing the world, in a way which invites ‘developed’ countries to offer guidance and material support to ‘developing’ countries, and which puts the onus on ‘developing’ countries to ‘develop’. But this is clearly not all it says – it says that some countries are wealthy because they have particular modes of production, and other countries are poor because they have not yet achieved the move to these particular modes of production in their histories. As such, their economies have not grown. The notion of ‘development’ when used in an economic sense specifically denotes wealth and poverty with particular causes. It is interesting to note that of course, these delineations are more rarely used intra-societally in Europe and North America to speak of wealth and poverty (Trotsky’s analysis of Russia notwithstanding) amongst white populations. One does not speak of rural Wales as ‘developing’ or ‘underdeveloped’, although discourses of ‘regeneration’ point to a cognate logic. Indeed, the statement ‘Wales is a developing country’ is comic

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64 In comments on a panel devoted to honouring his work, ISA Convention 2011, Montreal.
precisely because it subverts the associations of what the term ‘a developing country’ means.

What other terms might we use to describe economic conditions in the world? One obvious dynamic obscured by the ‘developed’/’developing’ binary is an ‘possessing’-‘dispossessed’ spectrum, which arguably has a more substantive claim to historical importance than stories about backwardness. Such a framing would highlight the transfer of wealth and capital that have underpinned colonial and postcolonial economic structures of trade and industry. Yet perhaps a simpler and more attractive framing might be ‘rich’ and ‘poor’, that might leave open a) who ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ might be and b) the causes of wealth/poverty. In this sense, these categories allow for a relational understanding of material conditions in the world without labelling them as deviant from the model of modernity.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of jettisoning the framing of ‘developed’ and ‘developing countries’ as a starting point for thinking about material conditions might be the potential for highlighting the extremes of wealth and poverty that exist ‘within’ bounded political communities, in both former colonial powers and former colonies. Sandra Halperin’s recent work, which focuses on ‘poles’ of accumulation, invites us to imagine the global economy as a set of connected sites (generally urban) of accumulation, and the social dynamics with which this is associated. In this, it can avoid the historicist logic of normalising a developmental modernity but can still discuss and articulate changing material conditions. This begins to open up a whole series of connections between the fates of peoples that do not normally appear in accounts of international relations, in a complementary way to the ‘connected histories’ scholarship.

Of course, there are a raft of non-material connotations and functions of ‘development’ in contemporary usage, many of which implicitly or explicitly regard development as requiring or being associated with the emergence of a political arrangement of secular, legal-rational, bureaucratically managed democracy. On the one hand, I would note that these are largely secondary to the economic questions, since the institutionalisation of these aspects do not take a country out of the ‘developing’ / ‘developed’ bracket (think about India). This discourse has been overtaken by discourses of ‘bad governance’, ‘state failure’ or ‘state fragility’ in public discourse, and particularly so in the development policy literature. As the idea of ‘development’ has become mainly associated with economic questions, these other discourses have emerged in support as ways of characterising political society in post-colonial states.

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66 As a nice example: according to scholar and activist João Pereira, development aid is in large part the transfer of resources from the poor of the West to the rich of the South. Interview, August 2009, Maputo.
67 There has been a lot of interesting discussion recently on whether it is appropriate for the UK to give development aid to India, in the light of its defence, nuclear and space programmes. See http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2011/feb/14/government-defends-1bn-aid-india
The function of these discourses is to write a developmental political historiography into how we see politics in formerly colonial spaces; yet they simultaneously erase the histories of political authority and struggle in those spaces, as Ayers reminds us, naturalise an ideal-typification of European political states and society (“getting to Denmark”\textsuperscript{69}) as the obviously desirable trajectory, and treat as illegitimate – and critically, unnatural or untimely – other forms of political action, authority and organisation.

The broader critical scholarly literature is in some senses getting better at understanding the limitations of state-centric political analysis, and I will not re-labour these points which are well-understood.\textsuperscript{70} In response to accounts which argue that the liberal democratic state is ‘the only game in town’, a starting point must be that this is neither historically nor contemporaneously true, if the ‘town’ in question is the world.

In terms of thinking about political communities, my preference has been to think about forms of rule in various spaces, as an alternative to thinking about states or polities. This simpler formulation frees up in the intellectual imagination in some important ways. Firstly, it draws attention back towards the relationship between the ruler(s) and ruled which in my view should be the first point of departure for studies of the political. In this sense, we can importantly look beyond the arbitrary external-internal boundaries of rule contained by contemporary state borders. We can also see and contemplate more fully the kinds of ‘internal’ rule (over women, slaves, servants) over different kinds of political subjects that exist beyond the formally ‘sovereign’ character of high politics. Secondly, and I think crucially, it allows for there to be an understood incompleteness between the efforts of rulers to rule and the effective extent of that rule. Thirdly, it does not privilege any particular aspect of rule – material, discursive, cultural – but allows for a holistic consideration of how these aspects interact as some strains within anti-colonial thought have historically advocated.\textsuperscript{71}

Pertinently, using the framing of ‘forms of rule’ de-naturalises the contemporary state within Europe and offers a way into thinking about the processes of ‘internal’ colonisation, authorisation, displacement and disciplining which are so often written out of the version which is exported as ‘developed’. Rather, to frame the status of political authority in contemporary Europe as ‘forms of rule’ rather than accepting at face-value that they are ‘liberal democratic states’ allows us to appreciate that they may be more continuous than discontinuous with politically troubling pasts.

As an intellectual agenda for re-thinking the present within Africa as well as elsewhere, a movement away from a historicist, developmental, methodologically nationalist framework of analysis to one which thinks in terms of diverse poles of material accumulation and forms of rule provides a platform for alternative

\textsuperscript{69} Fukuyama, amongst others, uses this in his book on \textit{State-building and World Order}. It is interesting that it should be ‘Denmark’ rather than any other, better known, European country, all of which have more obvious question-marks over their political history. Denmark’s own interesting history with fascism and colonialism is only very narrowly remembered.

\textsuperscript{70} See Ferguson and Mansbach on ‘polities’, although even this term may have problematic baggage about what counts as a political community proper and what does not.

\textsuperscript{71} I develop this notion further elsewhere with regard to the thought of Fanon and Cabral.
understandings of the past and present. Certainly, as many increasingly argue, it would allow a greater appreciation of the interconnected character of world histories, and of the role of conquest, colonialism and empire in bringing together the fates of peoples in different parts of the globe.\textsuperscript{72} It also undermines the moves to ignore, silence, treat as deviant or gloss over the forms of economic, social and political life that do not fit the norm of ‘modernity’ which social sciences have tended to centralise. In the present, critically, the various ways in which political contestation is deferred through the notion that a country, society or indeed people is ‘developing’, and as such are not placed to make decisions about their political fate, are also challenged. More radically, it may also allow us to undo the founding myths of political separation and belonging upon which the idea of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ societies is based. In its most radical state, it might mean de-naturalising the idea of different bounded ‘societies’ altogether and trying to think about the human condition as simultaneously interlinked and diverse. In this story, the international is not a sparse space of minimal interaction in comparison to the ‘thick’ connections of domestic social order; rather the social spaces and structures of humanity express constellations of wealth, power and authority which are constituted by a complex and connected set of discursive and material relations determining their distribution.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that historical sociology is a way of understanding the world that is tied to the structuring concepts of ‘development’ and ‘modernity’, which produce a particular understanding of history and social reality that is necessarily restricted and parochial, despite attempts to overcome or avoid this. It has fed in at various junctures to ‘development theory’ and the reconceptualisation of the problems of modernity, particularly in Africa, that have heavily structured the discourses of politics both about and within the continent, which has led to the diminution of its political horizons and choices. I have suggested that Africanist literature has found itself unable to fully absorb the theoretical stipulates of historical sociology and has instead tended to use but ultimately subvert its moderno-normative orientation. I have also argued that deeper critiques of historicism and imperial historiography can be used as a platform from which to rethink the idea of ‘development’ in the study of world politics.

This paper is but a small beginning in what is intended to be a wider project problematizing the notion of ‘development’ in our understanding of the international. It has sought to argue against the notion that it constitutes a ‘historically real referent’ such that it can survive as an unproblematic and universal character of analysis. Through challenging both its analytic neutrality and basis in historical facticity, I have aimed to open up some spaces for thinking beyond world politics in terms of ‘development’, which is a necessary part of combating a politics of ‘developmentality’. Future work on this project must simultaneously involve the project of reconstructing erased histories of politics and economy, as well as the re-thinking of the present and futures outside this blinding political frame.

\textsuperscript{72} This much is under discussion in this conference’s keynote! See Buzan, B. ‘The Global Transformation: Understanding the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century in International Relations’.