

# The New Global History: A Sociological Assessment

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*“One cannot simultaneously fault the West for imposing its way of life upon the rest of the world and insist with equal fervor that its historical and cultural centrality has been greatly overstated”.*  
Moses (1995: xiv)

*“Despite its inadequate scholarship, the importance of [H.G. Wells's] The Outline lies in its introduction of so many now commonplace elements to broad numbers of people... The Outline of History was the most popular work of history written in the first half of the twentieth century, selling a million copies by 1931 and over two million in all”.*  
Costello (1993:44)

## INTRODUCTION

I want to deal in this paper with the increasing interest in world -- or, as I would prefer to say, global -- history. The issue as to whether we should best speak of either world or global history is one which is currently being disputed, but I will leave this matter for a much later stage of my discussion. Some historians are now speaking of the revival of the interest in world history and addressing the ways in and the degree to which this should be reconstituted in relation to the type of world history that was in vogue in much of the Western world in the early years of the twentieth century (Costello, 1993). That type of world history was undoubtedly Eurocentric and, moreover, a great deal of it was written within the genre of universal history. It was within the latter tradition that the most important of the well-known German contributions were made, the names of Hegel, Marx, and Max Weber -- with Kant (1963) in the background being particularly conspicuous. The specificity of universal history as a brand of world history (Kossok, 1993) is a matter that I will also weave into my deliberations.

The world history that was in vogue about one hundred years ago was largely centered on the problem of the "superiority" of the West, more particularly of Western -- and, to a degree, Central -- Europe, as well as of the relatively young United States; although, of course, the theme of the Decline of the West (Spengler, 1926, 1928) was a

significant variation on that tendency. The Orientalism (Turner, 1978, 1994; Said, 1978, 1993) that is to be seen in different forms in the very influential writings of Hegel, Marx, Weber and others was in fact a pivotal element in their projects of writing universal history (Robertson, 1985). For in each of these three men's writings, whatever the differences among them, the view that "the Orient" was off the path of world history was central to their respective oeuvres. Talk of the decline of the West should in this perspective be seen as a reaction, in particular, to the increasingly strong presence in the world as a whole of East Asian societies, most notably Japan. Japan's seemingly meteoric rise in the period 1870-1920 greatly challenged the Orientalisms of Hegel, Marx and Weber; although in a somewhat perverse sense it may also be regarded as confirming it.

Even though "Western" attempts to work in the vein of world, or universal, history, certainly did not disappear after World War I (Costello, 1993), it was certainly a much less conspicuous and "respectable" genre after that period. The long war from 1914 until 1945, and beyond, and then the eruption of the focus on the Third World, particularly from the early 1960s onward, clearly made old-style world history an unpromising subject. And yet, on the other hand, "the rise" of the Third World came to constitute a pivotal aspect in the making of a new type of world, or global, history. The massive critique of conventional modernization theory launched by Wallerstein around 1970 -- following the rise of dependency theory in particular reference to Latin America -- was based on the proposition that it was entirely wrong to study individual Third World societies as "islands" on their problematic way to becoming "Western," without comprehensive attention to a history of the world that would account for the very existence of Third World societies in a heavily stratified "world system (Wallerstein, 1979; cf. Nettl and Robertson, 1968: Robertson, 1992:8-31)."<sup>1</sup> The point was not to talk -- as, for example, Max Weber had done -- about the insignificant contributions to universal, world history of "Southern" societies or what are now called indigenous peoples, but rather to address directly the issue as to the ways in which their peripherality had come about at all. Not that Wallerstein et al. set out to redo world history as such, but Wallerstein's basically Marxist - - or, in a sense, Trotskyist -- project has stood firmly in the tradition of the kind of world history that Marx developed in revision of Hegel, as well as of Kant; even though it cannot be described as universal history.

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that a Latin American social scientist, Gustavo Lagos (1963) played a significant role in the development of globalization theory (Nettl and Robertson, 1968; Robertson 1992).

## **HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OR SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY?**

One of my main concerns in this paper is to consider the global circumstances that facilitate interest in world history. As I have said, I prefer the term global history, not least because, I will argue, there is an intimate link between the fates of brands of history of the world and empirical processes of globalization. But a few words on what has become widely known as historical sociology are necessary at this point. Writing quite recently, Dennis Smith (1991:1) observed that "fifty years ago historical sociology was on verge of extinction." Arguing that Fascism and Stalinism were very hostile to what Smith calls "its critical perspective," historical sociology as such was not widely practiced again until the second half of the 1960s. But since that period, Smith (1991:1) has argued, "it has emerged from the ashes like a phoenix. By the 1970s and 1980s it was soaring high."

Why did historical sociology gain such momentum, notably in Western Europe and the USA, during this period? The resurgence of historical sociology since the late 1960s had much to do with the leftward turn in sociology of the late 1960s. The late 1960s was a period in which there was an increasing theorization of the Third World, accompanied by an accentuation of interest in social history, more specifically "popular" history -- the history of those who had previously not had much of, if any, recognized history. This was epitomized in Britain by the wide discussion of E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (Thompson, 1968). This concern with a "national" proletariat (cf. Gilroy, 1993:5 ff.) was paralleled (also in Britain) by a rapidly developing concern with the Third World as a global proletariat (Worsley, 1964; cf. Lagos, 1963). I am not, it should be made clear, attributing to British scholars a privileged position in the reinvigoration of historical sociology. But it should be emphasized that the work of British historians and sociologists has been very consequential in the rise of historical sociology, not least because of the connections between historical sociology in Britain and the rise of neo-Marxian cultural studies in the same country. This cannot be the place for an exploration of the links between historical sociology -- or sociologically informed history - - and the remarkably influential form of neo-Marxist cultural studies that originated in Britain and has blossomed in various parts of the English-speaking parts of the world and beyond since the early 1970s. In spite of the strong presence of materialist Marxism in the modern resurgence of historical sociology, there can be no doubting the considerable impact of Gramscian cultural Marxism -- which has been at the center of much of the British form of cultural studies (Harris, 1992) -- in the present concern with world history.

Much of recent historical sociology has, however, been undertaken in the USA, notwithstanding the impact of the work of such British writers as Thompson, Hobsbawm, Benedict and Perry Anderson, Mann, and so on. In 1985 Skopcol edited a book entitled Vision and Method in Historical Sociology (Skopcol, 1984). This volume consisted primarily of essays on Marc Bloch, Karl Polyani, Eisenstadt, Bendix, Perry Anderson, Thompson, Charles Tilly, Wallerstein, and Barrington Moore, Jr. In the volume published six years later by Smith (1991) -- himself a contributor to the Skopcol collection -- the perceived scope of historical sociology was widened even further, with the inclusion of writers such as Braudel, Collins, Elias, Gellner, Giddens, T.H. Marshall, Lenski, Parsons, Runciman, Skopcol, and Smelser. Other books on historical sociology with different foci have appeared during the period in question, including those by Burke (1992), Lloyd (1986), Stinchcombe (1978), Tilly (1981) and Abrams (1982).

Two points should be made about the lists of historical sociologists produced in such books. First, "official" historical sociology -- which has been institutionalized in various journals and academic organizations, particularly in the USA -- is, in the terms of these compendia or surveys very much a "North Atlantic" enterprise. Its largest span is from Central Europe to California. Second, one sees, particularly when one compares the edited book of Skopcol with the survey of Smith a clearly discernible enlargement of the category, historical sociology, most conspicuously in the form of a shift from those with a concern with historical detail and contingency to a view of historical sociology as a sociology that is deeply informed by the significance of history, the latter phrase applying to such sociologists as Parsons and Giddens.

A word or two is in order at this point about the very concept of historical sociology. Here I have in mind the choice that we have in talking about historical sociology or sociological history (Therborn, 1995a:1). Therborn's classification of his own recent book on European modernity but one of a number of different "routes to/through" modernity (Therborn, 1995b) -- as an exercise in sociological history, rather than historical sociology is interesting because he seems to be saying that sociological history is the more appropriate term for works that are concerned with contemporary history, rather than with "long," or "deep," history. I would, however, tend to make the distinction between historical sociology and sociological history more significant and consequential than that. Are "we" doing a qualified history or a qualified sociology? Does history or sociology have the pivotal, nounal status? Is sociology or history to become our real focal point? It is, I think, not the nomenclature that really matters: rather it is the spirit and thrust of our

endeavors. If I had to choose I would opt for sociological history, in large part because the contemporary discussion of global issues in historical perspective demonstrates at least, in my view -- that it is the discipline of history that is most in need at this time of sociology. I doubt very much if the historical ingredient of sociology will wither away in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, contemporary historical concern with globality and related themes is very much in need of the new sociological ideas that have emerged in recent decades.

What we lean toward in this respect is going to shape the disciplinary mutations of the next few years, as we enter the twenty-first century. More important, it is -- like it or not going to shape the future of the world in which we all live. These are precisely the kinds of questions -- and the answers that we proffer -- that will greatly affect the future of what has variously been called the global ecumene, global society, world society, the global field, the world system, or whatever. In any case, the sociological sophistication of historians is now becoming a crucial issue, as I hope to show in subsequent pages, in specific reference to the new world, or global, history and the systematic study of the historical process of globalization. With such considerations in mind I turn now to recent discussion among some historians of these matters.

### **THE NEW WORLD HISTORY IN A GLOBAL AGE?**

Specifically, I consider in the first place a recently published article in The American Historical Review, by Geyer and Bright (1995), a piece which follows closely upon Bright and Geyer (1987). In their 1995 paper Geyer and Bright address the theme of "World History in a Global Age." And I should say at the outset of this phase of my discussion of their main article that I have myself (e.g. Robertson, 1992) considered, be it all in a much less comprehensive form, the very issue of the way in which current conceptions of globality (cf. Waters, 1995) inexorably reshape our historical sensibility and sensitivity. Because their most recent article raises what I regard as very critical and exciting issues I give it particular attention. On the other hand, I believe the work of Bright and Geyer to be significantly flawed. Its deficiencies however are -- in the best sense -- provocative and, moreover, implicitly raise important issues about the relationship between history and sociology and, less implicitly, about the future of the world in this fin-de-siècle historical moment.

We are in a crucial phase when the relationships between history, as an orientation, history as a discipline (academic or otherwise), history as a profession, historiography, the philosophy of history, and so on, are almost impossibly confusing. It is upon this site of confusion that "historical sociology" has, so to say, landed. On the other hand, historical sociology has certainly added to the confusion, not least because the historicization of sociology, relative to the theorization of globalization, has helped to precipitate a "crisis" within sociology. My perception is that many people aspiring to the status of historical sociologist have thought of themselves as surrogate historians and/or as academics feeling a kind of awe for colleagues who "really know" about the world in temporal terms; although I am sure that there are quite a few people discussed in the books of Skopcol and Smith (among others) that I have previously mentioned who do not in fact have this highly deferential attitude toward "history" and historians. There is, to be precise, considerable variation from society to society or from civilization to civilization, as to the "pecking order" of historians and sociologists. I do want, however, to remark that on the more-or-less sociological side of the "fence" some prominent practitioners appear to be claiming legitimacy via "historical length." In other words, among historically inclined sociologists there is a not inconspicuous tendency to claim, at least implicitly, that the further back we go in historical time the greater the legitimacy and explanatory power of the relevant thesis. One sees this kind of contest occurring currently in the sphere of world-system studies (e.g. Sanderson, 1995; Chew and Denmark, 1996).

In any case, claims as to which "discipline" is the most "foundational" are in dispute. Here again, there is variation from global region to global region or from country to country, and so on. Additionally, the relationships among cultural studies, sociology, comparative literature, philosophy, communication studies, history -- and yet other disciplines vary greatly across the contemporary global field (Robertson, 1992). My fear is that we are going to get caught-up in a contest between disciplines, rather than a concern with 1) what is, in a somewhat simplistic phrase, in the best interests of humanity and 2) what most advances comprehensive knowledge of the human condition (relative to its variously conceived animate and inanimate environments). In other words, disciplinary distinctions ought to be, and to some extent are currently being, transcended. On the other hand, there are very powerful academic-organizational and professional forces at work that constitute a brake on the move toward what I call transdisciplinarity.

In their "World History in a Global Age," Geyer and Bright start by remarking that in the USA, world history has for long been regarded as "an illegitimate, unprofessional,

and therefore foolish enterprise" (Geyer and Bright, 1995: 1034). Although they speak of dilettantish exceptions, they convincingly argue that world history "fell victim to...relentless professionalization" and to the "specialization and the objectivity it promised" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1034). They conclude their 1995 piece by speaking of "the challenge of the twentieth century as an age of world historical transformation" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1060). This is a circumstance in which "'humanity' has become a pragmatic reality with a common destiny" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1060), a point which I myself, and others, made some years ago (Robertson, 1992). Thus, maintain Geyer and Bright (1995:1060), "world history has just begun" (contra Fukuyama, 1992).

Generally speaking, I agree with this broad (but not unproblematic) claim. But their argument as a whole demands close scrutiny, scrutiny of a kind that I cannot fully supply even in this paper. But before considering the thrust of their argument, it is relevant to invoke a similarly problematic statement from the sociologist, Giddens, who has very frequently expressed his opposition to both evolutionism and functionalism (and thus particularly to evolutionary-functional accounts of change).<sup>2</sup> Giddens argues in The Consequences of Modernity (1990) for what he calls a "discontinuist" account of modernity, an account that views modernity as constituting a rupture vis à vis all prior types of sociocultural condition (cf. Therborn, 1995b). But he is quick to maintain that the deconstruction of evolutionism does not thereby lead to a chaotic vision in terms of which "an infinite number of purely idiosyncratic 'histories' can be written" (Giddens, 1990:5-6). According to Giddens we can make generalizations about "definite episodes of historical transition" (1990:6). Given that Giddens regards globalization as a clear-cut consequence of modernity -- a position which I find completely untenable (Robertson, 1992:138-45) -- he finds himself in the very difficult position of maintaining that in a global era, that has come about (according to him) through the extension of a West-based condition of modernity, we are in danger of having to cope with a proliferating series of local narratives unless we can transcend these small narratives by producing sociological generalizations about "definite episodes of historical transition." I find these specific formulations almost impossible to follow. Nonetheless the significance that they may have is to raise interesting questions about the contemporary relationship between history and sociology.

The considerable amount of recent talk among historians of the new possibilities -- indeed the need -- for either a revival of world history or a new kind of history of a global

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<sup>2</sup> I cannot discuss here the links between evolutionary theories and historical analysis. Cf. Habermas (1979).



kind also calls for a new kind of historical sociology, or sociological history. To put it more sharply, contemporary arguments for a new world or global history lead inexorably to considerations of a definitely sociological nature. In previously considering selected aspects of historical sociology I dwelled upon the historical turn in sociology. Now, at this point, we need to address directly the sociological turn in history. Here I must, as should be clear by now, limit myself to this turn in specific reference to the currently growing interest in world/global history. I believe that the sociological turn in history, which has been growing rapidly since the early 1960s, has largely been occasioned by the challenge of and to -- more important, the increasing need for -- comparative history in the circumstance of accelerating globalization and the seemingly unavoidable concern with what are sometimes called transnational, as well as inter-continental, issues (cf. Tilly, 1995; J. Goodwin, 1995).

It was most certainly among sociologists, more than any other discipline, that the concern with globalization was developed most comprehensively in the first place (Robertson, 1992:1-31). This is not, I should emphasize, a form of disciplinary imperialism on my part; although the ways in which economists and practitioners of business studies have recently tried to highjack the concept of globalization and in the process attempted, rather successfully, to render it as a primarily economic process (not least in Latin America) tempts sociologists like myself to become rather more assertive vis à vis other disciplinary perspectives (cf. Markoff and Montecinos, 1993). In any case, in relatively recent years there have emerged certain difficulties within canonical, specialized history as a discipline that have led to the raising of issues demanding a new relationship between history and sociology. These difficulties currently center upon the issue of globality.

Until Wallerstein's pioneering work, modern historical sociology had been almost entirely "national" in its foci (cf. Nettl and Robertson, 1968). And while neither Wallerstein himself nor many of those closely influenced by him have taken easily to talking about either globality or globalization, it is clear that Wallerstein's work played a considerable part in broadening the scope of historical sociology in a pre-national, transnational and global direction (a project that in his case built on the ideological perspective of, among others, Marx, Lukacs and Trotsky). Specifically, it was (1) the shifting of the debate about the transition from feudalism to capitalism beyond the intranational to the international arena and (2) the opposition to Stalin's notion of socialism in one country that constituted the ground for Wallerstein's "global turn".

Geyer and Bright, in noting that "world history has become one of the fastest growing areas of teaching" during the past twenty years or so argue thus:

World history at the end of the twentieth century must...begin with new imaginings. It cannot continue to announce principles of universality, as if the processes shaping the globe into a materially integrated totality have yet to happen. Global integration is a fact, now part of the historical record; but, because it has little to do with the normative universalism of Enlightenment intellectuals or with the principled particularisms of *tier-mondists*, nothing is gained by spinning out ideas about westernization of the world or the authenticity of non-Western cultures. The effects of globalization are perplexing, but the world before us has a history to be explained (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1037).

In this perspective Geyer and Bright further contend that:

The central challenge of a renewed world history at the end of the twentieth century is to narrate the world's pasts in an age of globality. It is this condition of globality that facilitates the revival of world history and establishes its point of departure in the 'actually existing' world of the late twentieth century. While this assertion may raise alarms about undue presentism, it will also dramatize the new situation historians face, which is neither the fulfillment of one particular history nor a compendium of all the world's histories. World history in the late twentieth century must be concerned with these conditions of its own existence. (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1041; emphasis added).

Another provocative point made by Geyer and Bright is that the big narratives produced in the Enlightenment vision of universal history and then in the nineteenth century tradition of comparative civilizations "ceased to produce explanations at precisely the moment that a global history became possible...." (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1041). "The project of universal history that sought to narrate the grand civilizations comparatively was always an implicit meditation on Western exceptionalism and, as the West moved (comparatively) 'ahead,' a justification for Western domination" (Geyer and Bright,

1995:1041). But, emphasize Geyer and Bright, the destabilization of world historical narratives cannot "be remedied by a more all-in, encyclopedic approach, as if equal time for all the world's histories will make history whole" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1042).

What, then, do Geyer and Bright propose? In advocating that we now need to concentrate on the world's pasts, they insist that this is not primarily for reasons concerning the desirability of more comprehensive coverage but "because, in a global age, the world's pasts are all simultaneously present, colliding, interacting, intermixing producing a collage of present histories that is surely not the history of a homogeneous global civilization (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1042). In attempting to clinch this particular point they speak of "the rupture between the present condition of globality and its many possible pasts...." (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1042). Indeed, it is according to these authors that it is this rupture that "gives the new world history its distinctive ground..." (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1042).

When, then, do Geyer and Bright see this "rupture" as having occurred? Their answer: in the mid-nineteenth century. This response is embedded in the perspective of a "long" twentieth century, involving increasing global heterogeneity in contrast to the more fashionable stress on increasing global homogeneity. (I myself have written at length in opposition to the latter thesis, most recently in Robertson [1992, 1994, and 1995].) Nonetheless, I do not find Geyer and Bright to be convincing in terms of their own perspective on heterogeneity. They do not appreciate the importance and salience of the complex relationship between universalizing tendencies, on the one hand, and particularizing tendencies, on the other. For them particularizing, difference-making thrusts appeared first. These thrusts constituted "the rupture." Then universalizing, "global age" trends made their appearance. This is implausible.

Geyer and Bright emphasize heterogeneity because they think that conceiving of globalization as a relatively recent phenomenon of the "real" twentieth century tends to restrict our vision to homogenizing tendencies. I have, on the other hand, insisted that even if one were to think of globalization as a recent phenomenon (which I certainly do not), it would still be more than appropriate to consider the pivotal aspect of globalization to be the ongoing interpenetration of universalizing and particularizing tendencies. This interpenetration I have specified, in summary conceptual form, in the concept of globalization (Robertson, 1992, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Roudometof and Robertson, 1995; Robertson and Roudometof, forthcoming).

Before coming to the relevant details of my own thesis let us consider the basis of the proposition of Geyer and Bright that until the middle decades of the nineteenth century

"global development rested on a series of overlapping, interacting, but basically autonomous regions, each engaged in processes of self-organization and selfreproduction" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1044). Here, rather ironically, Geyer and Bright invoke two genres that otherwise they oppose in support of their thesis: Prior to the midnineteenth century rupture, when the global age is said to have begun, the pre-global circumstance was "a reality represented very successfully in the narrative and analytic conventions of comparative civilizations and empire studies" (Geyer and Bright, 1995; 1045). They see the mid-nineteenth century as of caesural significance largely because it was then that there was a series of revolutionary disturbances and counterrevolutionary reactions. The nineteenth century ended with "the world being drawn together as never before but with peoples asserting difference and rejecting sameness on an unprecedented global scale" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1044).

This is not at all an adequate account of an historical rupture. For no serious attention is paid to the process of globalization per se. Nor is any attempt made to explain why the events of the mid-nineteenth century that they indicate should themselves have led to global compression on an "unprecedented scale". In this connection they overlook the ways in which "world society" was being formed in relative independence from the circumstances to which Geyer and Bright draw attention. The word globalization, as well as the highly problematic notion of "global integration," make frequent appearances in their paper, but neither concept is in fact defined. The "global age" is conceived as following directly from the simultaneous eruptions of the middle decades of the nineteenth century. When they use the phrase "global scale" Geyer and Bright are employing or so it seems -- the adjective "global" simply to mean worldwide, or nearly worldwide. This is not at all unusual these days, but one has nonetheless to distinguish carefully between global as denoting wide geographical scope and global as referring to features of the world as a whole. It is in this, second sense that Geyer and Bright appear to use the adjective "global" when they employ uncritically the concept of "global integration."

Once we acknowledge, reflecting on the conditions of the present world, that the processes of global integration have not homogenized the whole but produced continuing and ever-renewing contestations over the terms of global integration itself, then the histories of all regions (and their changing spatial, political, and cultural composition) become immediately relevant to

world history -- and not simply for reasons of equity or to establish the 'essential' qualities of their civilizations but as actors and participants in the very being narrated (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1044-5).

So Geyer and Bright see what they call "global development" as being grounded in "a series of overlapping, interacting, but basically autonomous regions, each engaged in processes of self-organization and self-reproduction" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1045) until the mid-nineteenth century. Up to that period this regional autonomy was reproduced by "spatial distantiation." The "regions" were linked by "specialized mediators and interlopers" until at least the middle decades of the nineteenth century. This argument, which depends a lot on the idea of "a series of parallel, simultaneous crises in the organization of power, production and culture...of virtually every region of the world" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1045), brings sharply into focus a number of things which we should regard as highly problematic. Perhaps the most basic of these is the very ideas of "regions" or of "civilization." Geyer and Bright veer toward a kind of geographical, or spatial, essentialism. They appear to subscribe to a view that "the map" of the world is essentially "true," reflecting a reality in-itself. They do not acknowledge that, like history, geography is "Kantian." Specifically, the rationality and spatiality of the world has, like history, been intersubjectively "constructed" (cf. Shirley, 1987; Soja, 1989).<sup>3</sup>

Part of the problem here is the skepticism of Geyer and Bright (1995:1044) concerning my own notion of global consciousness. They object to my considering global consciousness as a corollary to globalization, whereas I have in fact (for nearly twenty years) defined globalization as partly consisting of the extension of "global consciousness." It is materialistic and positivistic to deny ideas, beliefs, values, symbols, and so on (generally, "culture") a place in the globalization process. It is possible, that Geyer and Bright interpret my concept of "global consciousness" to mean something like conscience collective, in the Durkheimian sense; or that a phrase like global consciousness appears to some to have a "spiritualistic," Hegel ring to it. That is, however, a matter about which I can only speculate. But I can say here that in using the concept of global consciousness I have only been attempting to theorize the analyticalinterpretive idea of people-in-the-

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<sup>3</sup> This construction of regions, civilizations, and so on, has frequently involved interplay between orientalisms and occidentalisms (Chen, 1995; Robertson, 1990). See also Mathy (1993). For a preliminary attempt to comprehend Latin America in such terms, see Martinez and Robertson (1993).

world-as-a-whole becoming directly or indirectly aware and, positively or negatively, oriented to the global circumstance (Robertson, 1992:61-84). How intellectuals, academics, or -- for that matter journalists can deny this is a puzzle. How historians, in particular, can marginalize this consideration is a big conundrum. So when Geyer and Bright speak of historians having to comprehend the conditions of their own interest in world or global history they considerably undermine their own thesis by dismissing "global consciousness" as a relevant factor. Open engagement with what I would call the cultural factor (Robertson, 1992:32-48; Hunt, 1989; Mah, 1992) is, it seems, still something of a problem for contemporary historians; although "culture" is rapidly becoming problematic for all disciplines, partly because of its infaltonary deployment and partly also because of the tenacity with which many analysts still cling to the idea of culture as binding "homogenized" individuals into relatively cohesive communities.

Discussion of global consciousness and, more generally, of culture leads us back to the use by Geyer and Bright of the concept of "global integration." Given the, they emphasize the ever-renewing contestations over the terms of global integration" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1045), it is difficult to see how they can at the same time speak of the increasing integration of the world as a whole. Their dismissal of my own on global consciousness, in the sense of awareness of the world as a whole, as an ingredient of globalization is in fact contradicted by their own concern with "contestations over the terms of global integration." If the terms of such integration are indeed contested and disputed -- as is to be seen, to take but one example, in the contemporary intercivilizational disputes over human rights then how could they not take place in terms of what I would call the discourse(s) of globalization"?

When Geyer and Bright (1995:1046) talk of "new global imaginings" at the very point that they say (wrongly) that I conceive of "a global consciousness as a corollary to globalization" (I see it as intrinsic to globalization), one cannot see what kind of distinctions between consciousness and imaginings they have in mind. Geyer and Bright stress that the nascent global imagination, while seeing the world as an interconnected whole, "saw these connections [sic] differently from every vantage point (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1046). This "particularistic universalism" is indeed something that I have stressed time and time again; although the concept of particularistic universalism is alien, it should be stressed, to the Geyer-Bright lexicon or so it seems. The very process of globalization is itself pivotally defined by the relationship between universalism and

particularism, and between processes of homogenization and processes of heterogenization.<sup>4</sup>

Geyer and Bright themselves contend that "Western exertions produced...a disorderly world of proliferating differences, a world in which the very production of difference was lodged in the processes of globalization that the West had presumed to control" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1052). Here Geyer and Bright fully divulge their subscription to the widely held but, I believe, very misleading view that globalization has been, or at least originally was, a Western product. Here they are insufficiently subtle in recognizing the difference between the Western form of globalization and the project of Westernization. While they try to distance themselves from what they rightly call "the obsessive fear of homogeneity that has lately become a speciality of French intellectuals in their campaign against Americanization" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1056), much of the argument of Bright and Geyer nevertheless sits very easily with the predominant French-intellectual perspective. In France the general and conflated notion of "American homogenization" has acquired a hegemonic, ideological status, from Right to Left. This is a phenomenon that has to be explained not merely noted. French or, better, French-intellectual conflation of "Americanization" and "globalization" is a crucial and very interesting feature of globalization, in a sociologically sophisticated rendering of the latter concept. World/global history has to theorize an issue such as this not merely record it, as if it were just another intellectual and/or ideological stance.

It is the "new condition of globality" that depraves us of the "capacity for narrating our histories in conventional ways, outward from one region..." (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1058). Now, they contend, we are "gaining the ability to think world history, pragmatically and realistically, at the interstices of integrating circuits of globalizing networks of power and proliferating sites of localizing politics" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1058). The difficulty with this stance is that Geyer and Bright provide no convincing reason as to why we should now have fewer, rather than more, local, national and civilizational narratives. Surely globalization encourages the proliferation of these non- or even anti-global narratives. This is in fact one of the central features of the heterogeneity and difference-producing of the overall globalization process (Robertson, 1995a). It is also another perspective on the complex relationship between universality and particularity to which I have frequently drawn attention.

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<sup>4</sup> For appraisals of my thesis concerning universalism and particularism, see, inter alia, Spybey (1996) and Buell (1994). See also Robertson (1995a).

All in all, it is not surprising that Geyer and Bright eventually drive themselves into a cul-de-sac. In refusing to accept the possibility of "a general theory or global paradigm," they argue that, instead we should acknowledge that "there is general and global knowledge, actually in operation, that requires particularization to the local and human scale" (Geyer and Bright, 1995:1058). Thus the promise of world history now coming to comprehend the conditions of its own existence is not fulfilled. Geyer and Bright remain victims of the very form of world history that they have sought to discredit. This is particularly apparent in two respects. First, their unreflexive opposition to old-style universal world history leads to them becoming obsessed with the universalizing and homogenizing thrusts of the Kantian dream (Kant, 1963), so much so that they have looked for the earliest possible time after the European Enlightenment project had crystallized for clear signs of particularistic resistance to that project (which they claim to discover in the mid-nineteenth century). Had they, on the other hand, been less obsessed with the Enlightenment project, they might well have been able to see that the relationship between universalism and particularism should not simply be seen as a temporal one of "thesis and antithesis," but rather that it has crucial synchronic (as opposed to diachronic) aspects. The interplay between universalism and particularism is many centuries older than the European Enlightenment. It is, I believe, a fundamental feature of the human condition. It is, to use Durkheim's phrase, the "elementary form" of globalization.

Second, Geyer and Bright do not even vaguely attempt to consider the historical details of the globalization process per se. For them that ill-defined process apparently has no interesting history and, in spite of a few general nods toward the long history of globalization, they like Friedman (1994) -- tend to see globalization as a relatively modern phenomenon. Systematic investigation of the terms in which the contemporary world has been formed over many centuries is surely required (Robertson, 1992), although of course individual scholars can only accomplish part of this enormous project. But the least that should be attempted in trying to grasp the conditions of our interest in world, or global, history is to study the ways in which relatively recent globalization is inextricably linked to different genres of world/global history. Indeed it is supremely ironical that Geyer and Bright should at one and the same time deny the significance of global consciousness, on the one hand, and speak of the condition of globality that is currently facilitating our historical consciousness about the making of the contemporary world, on the other. In any case, I maintain that different kinds of world history are to be found in different phases of globalization (Robertson, 1992:57-60 and general', Geyer and Bright are fond of talking



about the terms of "global integration," but they never indicate, even skeletally, what they mean by the phrase "the terms." Were they, do that they would probably find that the disputed terms of relatively recent globalization were in fact primarily European in origin, but that the spread and/or imposition of terms has led considerably to their modification.

## **GLOBAL HISTORY IN A GLOBAL AGE?**

I now turn, more briefly, to a somewhat different critique of universal-world history. Specifically I refer to the work of Mazlish and his colleagues (Mazlish and Buultjens, 1993). In the volume Conceptualizing Global History the presentism that worries Geyer and Bright to some degree is not thematized as an issue. In his own contributions, Mazlish (1993a, 1993b) draws attention specifically to the way in which global history has to be developed and conceptualized as a new perspective in the context of recent changes and trends: "Perhaps the single most distinguishing feature is that of perspective, awareness, or consciousness (to use a number of overlapping terms), as combined with the lived reality of globalization" (Mazlish, 1993a:6). Mazlish (1993a:1) also maintains that "the conceptualization and practice of global history must start from our present position, where new factors building on the old have given a different intensity and synchronicity to the process of globalization" (emphasis added).

This insistence on starting with the process of globalization is welcome, notwithstanding that -- like Geyer and Bright Mazlish and his colleagues never explicitly define globalization. Like many people in numerous disciplines and across a number of global regions Mazlish frequently invokes the terra "globalization" but never really conceptualizes it. He does not theorize it so as to make it amenable to historical, or sociological-historical, study or application. In other words, in spite of some significant differences between the work of Mazlish, Schäfer (1993, 1996) and other contributors to Conceptualizing Global History, on the one hand, and Bright and Geyer, on the other, there is a common failure to tackle directly globalization as a long-term historical process. As I have previously intimated, the "unfolding" historically of this process and the form that it has taken is a very significant issue. It is surprising that historians should treat it so lightly.

In proposing that global history should be cast as contemporary history, Mazlish makes this argument:

One might...argue that, whether acknowledged or not, all history is contemporary history in the sense that the perspective brought to bear on past events is necessarily rooted in the present. In this light, global history may simply be more conscious of its perspective and interested in focusing it more directly on contemporary happenings, as well as on the past. Serious problems of selectivity or documentation then remain, as they do with any history. (Mazlish, 1993:3).

Mazlish here raises some important historiographical considerations, in which connection it is relevant to point out that precisely such issues were directly addresses during the period of birth of modern sociology, notably by Georg Simmel (1977) and , Max Weber (1958:13-31). In his epistemological essay, The Problems of the Philosophy of History, first published in 1892 and then revised for republication in 1905, Simmel indeed argued that all history is contemporary history in the sense that "the perspective brought to bear on past events is necessarily rooted in the present" (Mazlish, 1993:3), but Simmel did not argue that it followed that consciousness of the present should necessarily lead to a more direct concern with what Mazlish calls "contemporary happenings."

Simmel, in spite of working within the general tradition of German universal history, was critical of both Hegel and Marx. In part this might well be accounted for by the fact that Simmel was one of the major founders of "the sociological perspective" and was well aware of the crucial ramifications of the historian being conscious of and reflexive about the sociological circumstances of doing history as an intellectual project. Thus for Simmel "history" was in the first instance a cognitive orientation and (only) secondarily a form of study of the "real past." Simmel's overall argument in this respect is most certainly not without its problems, but even though he did operate within the broad genre of German universal history, he brought what might be called a sociological-Kantian perspective to bear on the idealist history of Hegel and the materialist history of Marx.

Although they differed on a wide range of issues, Weber's position with respect to universal history has some resemblance to that of Simmel. In his "Authors Introduction" (written in 1920) to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which had in fact been written approximately fifteen years earlier, Weber starts in the following way:

A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask...to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value (Weber, 1958:13; first emphasis added).

It should be specially noted that I have highlighted the words that Weber himself placed in parenthesis: "as we like to think." This phrase is crucial in that it clearly shows that Weber was registering a significant caveat with respect to the nineteenth century tradition of universal history. He was saying that what appeared to his German contemporaries to "lie in a line of development" that had universal significance was just that. It was an appearance; and Weber felt bound to think and write in terms of that "appearance." But unlike previous "universalists" he felt that he was found to register that fact, if only parenthetically. He was thus acknowledging, in a way that parallels Simmel's ideas, that we are sociologically constrained by and that we should openly declare that our historical vision is structured by contemporary trends and contemporary consciousness. Very few historians would deny that our historical interests are thus framed, but there a big difference between mere recognition of this, on the one hand, and treating it matter for reflexive-sociological attention, on the other. At this point, however, it -ould be remarked that, no matter what the virtues of the Simmel-Weber orientation as in this respect, they did not explicitly recognize in their respective works the significance of the rapidly accelerating processes of globalization that were occurring in the very period that they wrote (Robertson, 1992, 1993). That period is what I call the take-off period of modern globalization, lasting from the 1870s until the mid-1920s (Robertson, 1992).

Here it is relevant to note that what I describe as the take-off phase in my "minimal phase model of globalization" (Robertson, 1992:52-60) was precisely the period when modern world history began, with the writings of Wells, Spengier and Toynbee -- to name but three of the most prominent figures. In his very helpful survey of these and more recent writers notably Sorokin, Dawson, Mumford and McNeill Costello (1993:ix) argues that "the writings of the world historians of our century have sought to articulate and answer the crisis of their own civilization by putting it into the context of a universal history." Moreover, Costello sees the kind of world history that has been produced in the West

during the present century largely as what he calls "an interrupted dialogue with providence." Specifically, he regards most of the "metahistorians" with whom he deals in the perspective of exploring "the way in which these paradigms have evolved to digest Spengler's cyclical view to save a progressive movement in history" (Costello, 1993: ix).

I think that Costello is correct to emphasize the efforts on the part of the world historians discussed by him to "save a progressive movement in history." But when we consider the type of global history that is being debated at the present time -- in the declining years of the twentieth century it is possible to discern a new and more sociological turn, one that is not driven by the idea of saving a progressive movement, nor certainly guided directly by teleological concerns. Not that there are no eschatological elements in the contemporary situation. The present cultivation of a kind of Asian triumphalism and a new version of the decline-of-the-West theme are bound to lead to something of a replay of the kind of world history that was undertaken in the first half of the twentieth century (Sorokin, 1950). However, what is different now is that we are becoming much more conscious of the circumstances that produce world history. At this historical juncture our much more developed sense of what has come to be called -- however diffusely or vaguely globalization makes it less likely, although certainly not impossible, that "we" will return precisely to the providential outlook of earlier generations of Western world historians. This is indeed one good reason why we should change nomenclature and speak now of global history.

Mazlish (1993b) encapsulates his claim that we are now entering "a global epoch" in the concept of globalism. This is a very unfortunate concept, for it conveys the idea of a commitment to a particular worldview. It definitely favors that which movements around the world declare to be the most dangerous and damaging trend of the late-twentieth century. Witness only the very pejorative use of this term in US American politics and religious fundamentalism in recent years. Thus to center the new global history on what has now become a very controversial ideological term is not likely to help it gain ground.

As I have intimated on a number of occasions we are not likely to get very far with a new global history without full recognition of the sociological-historical significance of the interplay between universalism and particularism. There appears to be a tendency in one particular strain of new global history to suggest that global history has a *raison d'être* beyond an interest in the particular -- the local and the national (N. Goodwin, 1993). Goodwin (1993:41) argues that "the more human beings recognize their global identity, the more they simultaneously cherish their specific local identities.... The institutional and

intellectual niche for global history will somehow have to take account of this reality." I would, however, insist that this reality has to be built into the very concept of globalization and that although it is a particularly evident feature of modern reflexivity it is an issue that has to be studied historically.

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