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Editor's Introduction

Philip Smith

The 2013 Yale Journal of Sociology is the third volume in our revived series. We continue our tradition of highlighting the thematic strengths of the department and bringing together scholars at various career stages. We also continue our policy requiring lengthy senior thesis work to be cut down to standard journal format rather than published wholesale. This act of compression generates intellectual clarity and makes realistic demands on the reader.

Turning briefly to the contributions this year: Amy Tsang's paper on corporate social responsibility in China makes use of her research conducted during a post-Yale Fox Fellowship. She demonstrates that excellent sociology need not innovate theoretically nor resolve an empirical puzzle. It can simply take the form of a fact-finding mission in which basic but much needed information is brought to the table for the first time using sociological research methods and sensibilities. Deandra Tan's paper pulls off the difficult feat of explaining why a dog did not bark. Drawn from her Senior Thesis this study explains how various modes of damage control enabled the film industry to deflect responsibility for the Aurora cinema shooting. A wider moral panic or regulatory crusade was avoided once this event was pinned down as the unpredictable act of a lone deranged individual. Yale Postdoctoral Fellow Nicholas Wilson provides a systematic review of the concept of 'empire' in sociological work. He shows how this increasingly significant conceptual node renders many customary ways of thinking problematic. These three items reflect departmental interests in economic and organizational sociology, cultural sociology, and comparative

and historical sociology respectively. Our fourth item is by Professor Charles Camic. We reproduce here the text of his eloquent address on the occasion of the Bradford H. Gray collection's arrival at the Beinecke Library. The talk highlights the surprising diversity of early sociology and offers an inspirational vision of the growth of knowledge over time.

As always we thank the Adam R. Rose Fund for financial assistance. Jensen Sass, Thomas Crosbie, and Alison Gerber conducted our copyediting and proofreading this year. Michael Bailey assembled the final document and dealt with technical matters.

Philip Smith
Editor, YJS 2013

From Discipline to World: The Gift of Dual Membership

Charles Camic, Northwestern University

Remarks on the opening of the Bradford H. Gray Collection in the History of Social Thought, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, March 27, 2013.

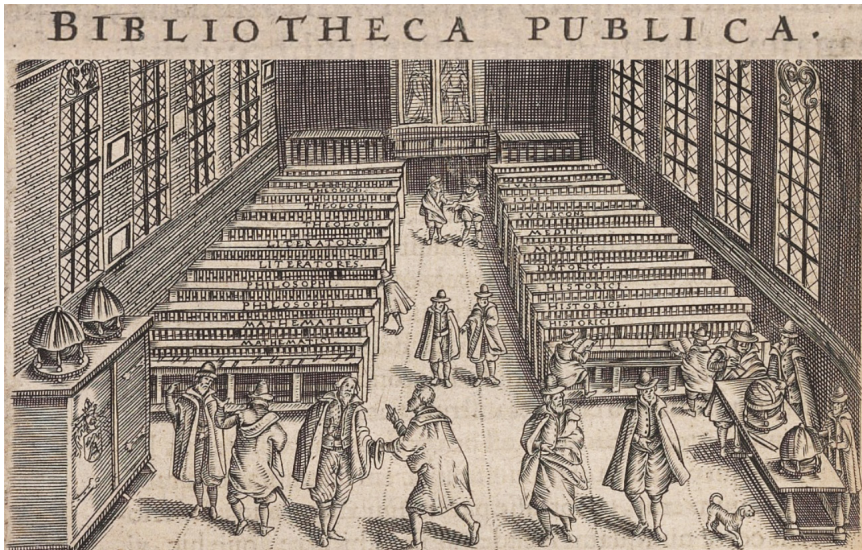
It is a pleasure for me to offer a few remarks at this event in honor of the Bradford H. Gray Collection in the History of Social Thought. And it is a further pleasure to be speaking about this subject in the beautiful physical space of the Beinecke Library in the year of the Beinecke's 50th anniversary.

This is the only time I can remember speaking in a space whose distinctive and renowned architectural features are a subject unto themselves, bringing up on Google nearly a quarter-of-a-million hits. This is a very different result than one gets for the sorts of places sociologists usually speak when they are outside the classroom, such as the “grand ballrooms” of convention centers at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association.

I'd like to begin these remarks by momentarily shifting attention backward in time away from Bradford Gray's book collection and away from the lovely Beinecke setting to another library (see Illustration 1). This illustration is a 17th-century print that approximately depicts the library at Leiden University—the *Bibliotheca Publica*—as it looked during the early modern era of European history. As 21st-century social scientists, our eyes are probably drawn initially to the people situated in the foreground of the print. My interest for the present, however, is not with the *people*, but rather with the 24 bookcases on either side of the central aisle *and* also

with the words inscribed on the tops of the bookcases—words that in some cases are hard to decipher.

Illustration 1



Leiden University Library
From Johannes Meursius, *Athenae Batavae*
Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book Manuscript Library

As we make out the words, however, what becomes apparent is that they are *subject categories*: subject categories that designate the principal domains of human knowledge as it was organized and shelved in the early 17th century. On the left side of the print, we see shelves marked off for mathematics, philosophy, literature, and theology, while on the right side, we find bookcases for works of history, medicine, and law. At this point, however, the subject categories abruptly end: math, philosophy, literature, theology, history, medicine, law—period.

Or so it seems on first glance. But closer inspection shows that, at

the rear of the library, there are bookcases that are still unlabeled – four of these in all. The artist who cut the print included these unmarked bookcases either because the Leiden University Library actually had vacant shelves available to accommodate new volumes as they were added to the existing categories; or, more likely, because the artist realized that *new* categories of knowledge were on the horizon, and that these new categories would, before long, need names and shelves of their own.

Nearly four hundred years later, we know that the artist was prescient in leaving room for this expansion that he (or she) anticipates, although the 16th-century artist could not have anticipated how extensive and varied that development would become during the centuries that followed as one domain of knowledge, after another, after another was welcomed into or (more typically) intruded itself into the fairly orderly and sedate storehouse of early modern knowledge. And we know, too, that social scientists have been among the main beneficiaries of this historical growth process: non-entities in the Leiden library of 1625—apart from occasional foreshadowings in works of philosophy and history—but active intellectual producers in the period ever since, infiltrating those back bookcases with all sorts of new intellectual contributions.

This observation furnishes a segue to the Bradford Gray Collection in the History of Social Thought. For, as soon as one begins to peruse the Beinecke's *Guide* to the Gray Collection, one cannot but be struck by how much of this important historical development—by how much of the *history of social knowledge*—this collection documents and illuminates. The Gray Collection is enormous, consisting of more than 200 boxes that hold close to 4,000 items, the oldest of them a first edition of Edward Hyde's (aka the Earl of Clarendon) 1676 diatribe, *A Brief View and*

Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State in Mr. Hobbes Book, Entitled Leviathan. From 1676, the Gray Collection advances in time, with rare works (some with equally lengthy titles) from nearly every subsequent decade, right up to our own historical era, albeit with particular emphasis on valuable texts from the period from the mid-19th to the mid- 20th century: the great formative period in the development of the modern social sciences.

To give a sense of the important writings found here, I want to comment on a few bodies of work from the sprawling range of the offerings in the Gray Collection. But before I do so, I would like also to acknowledge and express admiration to the Beinecke staff for the indispensable *Guide* it has compiled for users of the Gray Collection. Almost 500 pages long, this (online) *Guide* provides a fascinating, item-by-item commentary on the Collection, highlighting the historical significance of the individual pieces contained therein. As well, the *Guide* describes their physical condition, something that, in most instances, is near-perfect (all the way down to the wrappers covering the items), though occasional blemishes are duly reported with picturesque descriptors such as “sun-fading,” “some wear to the spine,” and “seriously cracking” – descriptors that hint at the past lives that many of these books lived in their time.

For scholars interested in the development of social-scientific ideas, and in the development of ideas foundational to the discipline of sociology in particular, the Gray Collection contains (exactly as one would want) boxes of volumes by those authors to whom later-day sociologists would frequently trace their intellectual roots, including scarce editions, in German, of works by Karl Marx and Max Weber, and, in French, by Emile Durkheim, not to mention various English-language translations of

these works. Further, the Collection contains a trove of work by the early 19th-century forebears of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, holding extensive sub-collections of the writings of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer—in fact, more extensive collections of the writings of these thinkers than exist (to the best of my knowledge) in any other single location.

To mention the names of these old worthies barely scratches the surface, however, for the Gray Collection is amply supplied as well with the writings of major figures whose contributions have only in recent decades begun to receive due recognition within sociology, among them such prolific authors as Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), and Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956). The Du Bois component of the Collection alone is without equal in the enormous range of titles and of variant editions of those titles that it holds.

Moreover, as an aside, it bears notice—not only with regard to Du Bois’s writings but with regard to the work of other social thinkers from the past—how useful it can be for present-day scholars, who study earlier texts from the *sociological* angle of their production and dissemination, to have access to variant editions of what is the “same” text in name only. This is so because a book is obviously much more than words on pages that somehow stand apart from history. To take a single example: a comparison of the 1883 “revised 2nd German edition” of Marx’s *Das Kapital*, with the 1889 “decorative cloth” American edition of *Capital*, the “Students” 4th abridged 1890 edition of the book, the “People’s Popular” 1st edition of 1900, and the 1934 “edition in lithographs”—plus the fact that there *were* so many editions of Marx issued during this 50-year period, by large commercial as well as tiny leftist publishers, and prepared for such different audiences—all of this is “data” that can reveal a great deal

about what historian Anthony Grafton (2009:312) has called the “*social life of information*” [emphasis added]. And most in point here: the Gray Collection contains *all* of these editions of Marx and other editions beside, and the same holds with regard to other pioneering figures whose writings appeared in different editions, in different times and places. But this is not the occasion to elaborate on the sociological value of variant editions.

Instead, by way of briefly taking stock of the items in the Gray Collection that I have mentioned thus far, we might recall the image of the Leiden Library in Illustration 1 and, using the resources of the Gray Collection, easily fill in some of those unmarked back bookcases with works by many of the Pantheon figures in the history of sociology as an intellectual field. What is more, these canonical figures are only part of the story, and if we go no further than I have done so far, we would only be perpetuating sociologists’ long-standing practice of seriously truncating our history. Truncating our history, however, is exactly what the Gray Collection instructs us *not* to do. To the contrary, perhaps above all its other contributions, the Collection invites us to extend ourselves, to cast our historical net far wider than we have been accustomed to do. The Collection conveys this extremely important message in several ways, but here I will mention just two of these.

First, the Gray Collection is rich in writings by leading figures from domains of social thought *other than sociology narrowly-construed*: leading figures, that is to say, from domains that we now partition off from sociology under the rubrics of economics, anthropology, political theory, social psychology, and so on, but which were, until relatively recently, far less differentiated from one another. In this respect, the Collection is especially strong in writings by authors whom we retrospectively classify

as economists and anthropologists: notably (from the economists' proto-domain) Francis Wayland (1796-1865), Henry George (1839-1897), and Scott Nearing (1883-1983); and (from the anthropologists' proto-domain) Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) and W. Lloyd Warner (1898-1970) – types of thinkers with whom earlier sociologists were in close conversation as they formulated their own ideas.

Second, the Gray Collection ranges far *beyond the leading figures* – the Pantheon, the Canon – in any of the social sciences, encouraging us to rethink the established narratives that sociologists (and other social scientists as well) have constructed about their history – and have actually continued to propagate even after acknowledging thinkers like Martineau, Du Bois, Johnson, etc. To briefly illustrate, consider the widely-accepted narrative that characterizes the field of sociology, up to about 1925, mainly as the project of *men*—men occupied with *building abstract theories* which were largely *unconcerned with the practical applications* of social knowledge.

But consider now the contents of just a single dozen among the many boxes in the Gray Collection (see Illustration 2). The listing here shows 20 women authors, writing in the 25-year period from 1898 to 1923: some, like Lida Parce (dates unknown) and Esther Lowenthal (1883-1980), focused on theoretical subjects; but most of the others engaged in empirical research—on women, men, boys, and girls; on families; neighborhoods, communities, workplaces, professions, and cities; and more—empirical studies frequently concerned with the practical applications of the research that they report.

Now it so happens that I myself have been studying the history of American sociology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for a very

Illustration 2

A Glimpse into a Dozen Boxes

Box 11

*Seba Eldridge. *Problems of Community Life: An Outline of Applied Sociology*. 1915.

Box 13

*Mary Chaffee. *Social Work as a Profession in Los Angeles*. 1918.

Box 27

*Joanna C. Colcord. *Broken Homes: A Study of a Family Desertion and its Social Treatment*. 1919.

*Ruth S True. *Two West Side Studies: Boyhood and Lawlessness/The Neglected Girl*. 1914.

*Mary E. Richmond. *The Good Neighbor in the Modern City*. 1908.

*Alice Willard Solenberger. *One Thousand Homeless Men. A Study of Original Records*. 1911.

*Bertha M. Stevens. *Boys and Girls in Commercial Work*. 1916.

*Mary Van Kleeck. *Working Girls in Evening Schools. A Statistical Survey*. 1914.

Box 28

*Elizabeth Beardsley Butler. *Saleswomen in Mercantile Stores*. 1909.

*Josephine Goldmark. *Fatigue and Efficiency. A study in Industry*. 1917.

Box 30

*Ida M. Cannon. *Social Work in Hospitals. A Contribution to Progressive Medicine*. 1913.

*Mary Routzahn. *Traveling Publicity Campaigns: Tours of Railroad and Trains and Motor Vehicles*. 1920.

Box 33

*Frances A. Kellor. *Experimental Sociology: Descriptive and Analytical—Delinquents*. 1901.

Box 34

*Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch. *The City Worker's World in America*. 1917.

*Nora Archibald Smith. *The Children of the Future*. 1898.

Box 36

*Lida Parce. *Economic Determinism, or the Economic Interpretation of History*. 1913.

Box 47

*Clare DeGraffenried. *The Needs of Self-Supporting Women*. 1890.

Box 180

*Esther Lowenthal. *The Ricardian Socialists*. 1911.

Box 197

*Joyce Dramel Hertzier. *The History of Utopian Socialism*. 1923.

long time. Even so, before examining the Gray Collection, I had never heard of any of the non-canonical authors or books listed in Illustration 2 —and the same very likely holds true for the great majority of other present-day scholars whose research deals with the history of the social sciences. This historical myopia on the part of so many contemporary scholars contrasts with Bradford Gray’s keen acumen in collecting these works whose significance has gone unrealized for so long. Not only this, but the 20 examples presented in the illustration are only a few among a large number of books in the Gray Collection that either were authored (around the same time) by other women scholars studying similar topics, or were authored by men as well women researchers pursuing additional lines of empirical work that likewise had clear practical applications.

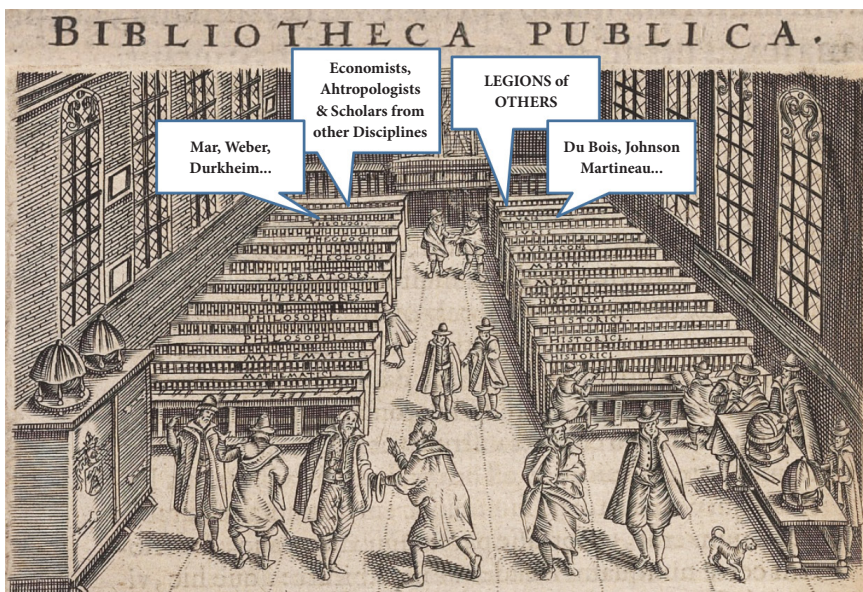
Evidence of this kind is invaluable because it up-ends the received narrative about this critical period in the history of sociology, and, in doing so, cries out for the construction of a new narrative built on answers to a range of previously-neglected questions: questions about the social and educational background of these long-forgotten sociological authors; about their audiences; about their subsequent professional careers; and about their intellectual networks and the social processes that not only shaped them into empirical social researchers, but also enabled them to conduct their research, to find publishers for their monographs, and to pursue the practical agendas that they set for themselves. The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library has often been described as “a laboratory for the humanities,” and so it is. But the Gray Collection now makes Beinecke as well a unique kind of “laboratory for the social sciences,” furnishing a deep source of historical and sociological questions about the development of the knowledge-base of our discipline – and of that of the social sciences

more generally – that have never previously been raised.

Fortunately, however, we need not await answers to questions of this sort in order to update the 1625 print with which I began (see Illustration 3). As my comments so far will suggest, the Gray Collection allows us to fill in, plentifully, the last four rows in the print. Still further, on the basis of the Collection, we might keep going and going, continually enlarging the *Bibliotheca Publica* and filling up more shelves in more and more swelling bookcases — and, at every turn, delighting in the ineffable magic of new discovery: in this case, the magic of discovery about the collective past that brought sociological knowledge to the point that it has now reached.

In Max Weber’s 1918 address “Science as a Vocation”—and the Gray Collection contains a copy of the original German edition of this celebrated speech—Weber famously asserted that the modern growth

Illustration 3



of social-scientific knowledge was among the factors that drove the great historical “process of disenchantment,” dissolving the “magical forces” that had dominated human thought during early historical epochs ([1918] 1946:139). This thesis is a profound one, as I hardly need say, and certainly not one to invoke casually. If I may be permitted simply to gesture in the direction of this thesis, however, what becomes apparent (it seems to me) when one spends even a short time opening up the surprise-packed history of sociological thought, as the Gray Collection urges us to do, is the special wonder, excitement, and intellectual enchantment that one finds in those back rows of the storehouse of knowledge, as they have expanded over time.

As long as I am setting Max Weber up as my foil here, I might mention another, even more memorable, passage from “Science as a Vocation.” In this passage, Weber writes that “scientific work” (*social-scientific work* most definitely included) “is chained to the course of Progress,” such that every scientist “knows that what he [sic] has accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years”—and inevitably so, because “every scientific ‘fulfillment’” – every finished scientific work – “raises new ‘questions’: it *asks* to be ‘surpassed’ and ‘outdated’” ([1918] 1946:137-138 [Weber’s italics]).

This Progressivist outlook, expressed in many different idioms, has long run deep and wide through the social sciences, and it has been highly influential. Out of it has come a strong inclination among social scientists (historians excluded) to adopt an *attitude of caution and reserve* towards books written in the past, an attitude that has exhibited itself to different degrees during different periods in the development of the social sciences. At least among many empirically-oriented sociologists who I myself have known in the recent era, engagement with books from

the past has tended to be slight, involving in some cases no more than a few stylized references to a few old books in the “review of the literature” subsection of a journal article.

This attitude toward the past makes sense when we consider academic disciplines systematically in the light of the conceptual metaphor of a “field,” as sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu ([1984], 1988; [2001] (2004), Randall Collins (1998), and Andrew Abbott (2001) have proposed. In using the field metaphor in reference to the academic world, these scholars seek to conceptualize an academic discipline as a social space that is enclosed by boundaries (symbolic and material), boundaries that admit into the field those persons (and only those persons) with proper specialized credentials. Once admitted, field-members then occupy positions that are arranged in a hierarchy which allocates greater rewards (symbolic and material) to those on its upper rungs and lesser rewards to those on its lower rungs, thereby unleashing a dynamic that impels those in lower positions to try to rise up in the hierarchy. Significantly, this upward movement is an objective that lower-positioned field-members accomplish to the degree their scholarship leads to Progress in the field—where “Progress” means successfully challenging the reigning intellectual claims of those field-members who hold positions atop the disciplinary hierarchy. According the Abbott (2001:15-21), this challenge-the-leader practice prevails even when the rival claims of the challengers do not actually represent new ideas, but only recapitulate —unknowingly—ideas from the more remote past. Hemmed in by their current field-positions, field-members are typically unaware of any recycling from the past because their own focus is on the Display of Intellectual Progress required to achieve field advancement in the present.

I do not want to contest this analysis of academic disciplines as fields. Collins, Bourdieu, and Abbott offer compelling empirical evidence that disciplines possess this field-like structure and dynamic, and their argument accounts effectively for the ubiquity of the Progressivist outlook to which Weber gave early expression and which has remained salient among sociologists in their capacity as members of the discipline to which they belong.

What I do want to emphasize, however, is that these same women and men who are so anchored in their disciplinary field simultaneously hold another group membership as well, although this other membership is ordinarily not a very active one. This other membership is membership in the wider *world of learning* – the world onto which Illustration 1 provides an early snapshot.

Implicitly we know that, as social scientists, we have this other membership; and it is a membership that many sociologists (and other disciplinary specialists) appear to prize, sometimes at least, *over* their field membership. How many sociologists, after all, would decline a review of their latest book in *The New York Review of Books* or the Book Review Section of *The New York Times* in favor of a review in the *Newsletter* of his or her section of the American Sociological Association, even though it is the specialist readers of the *Newsletter* who are more likely to appreciate the disciplinary Progress the book purports to make to its own field. Or, to enlarge the time frame, what sociologist prefers the scenario where the results of his/her research are absorbed into the literature of the field (in 10, 20, or 50 years) and then surpassed, *versus* the scenario under which his/her writings land—as Weber’s invariably do—right at the top of listings of the most influential social-scientific works of all time? Indeed, would

Weber himself really have been crestfallen to learn that legions of scholars, inside and outside of sociology, continue to read *Economy and Society*, when all he was asking was to be surpassed and outdated?

This “world of learning” is rarely discussed among sociologists, and there are very few references to it in the sociological literature. (For exceptions, see Irving Louis Horowitz (1993), Edward Shils (1980), along with Robert Bierstadt as cited below, all of them closer to the old-style “man of letters” than to sociologists of the present day.) Various kinds of impressionistic evidence suggest, however, that this world is configured differently than a disciplinary field: that the boundaries of the world of learning are more porous, more expansive, and more encompassing of writings from the past as well as the present; that the world of learning is less hierarchically organized; and that the world of learning confers rewards more intangible than advancement up a field’s ladder by means of a Display of Progress.

This is not to idealize this world of learning, for it too is a social grouping in which membership can be restricted. Back in the so-called “public library” of University of Leiden (see Illustration 1 again), one sees people who are very homogeneous in terms of age, gender, race, social class—even attire. And while the world of learning has undergone many salutary changes since 1625, by no means have all its exclusionary shortcomings been eradicated.

But while alert to these shortcomings, we should recognize as well *what membership in the world of learning can put at our disposal* – and, in recognizing this, commend the Gray Collection for the access it gives us not only to the history of the field of sociology and of neighboring fields, but also to the world of learning that exceeds the bounds of the

disciplinary field. Still further, the Collection merits attention for making it possible, on the basis of the works that it contains, to carry out empirical research on the *social organization of the world of learning*—research, in other words, on who and what the world has included and excluded, on whether and how the ideas it comprises have circulated (or failed to circulate) across barriers of country and language, on how these attributes have changed over time, and much more.

Returning to main point, however, one does well to ponder the words of the sociologist Robert Bierstedt when he complained of fellow sociologists who, with their eyes trained on Progress, pass quickly over the history of social thought in order to concentrate on more immediate and circumscribed research questions. Bierstedt wrote (1981:457, n.34): “But what an anemic ambition this is! Should we strive for half a victory? Where are the visions”—the inspiring visions—“that enticed us into the world of learning in the first place,” if they do not arise from within the world of learning itself? To go back to “Science as a Vocation” one last time, it was one of Weber’s deep insights that the practice of any science *requires* “inspiration” ([1918] 1946, p. 136 [emphasis italics]). In an uncharacteristic move (or non-move), however, Weber failed to expand upon this comment, offering no elaboration of his insight, thus evading the question of the origins—*the social sources*—of the sociologist’s inspiration.

My own suggestion is that we hear the answer to this question that Bierstedt gave when he pointed to the “world of learning” itself: a world that, in transcending the field of the discipline, furnishes, as the Gray Collection shows, a broader, more varied, more historically encompassing supply of inspiring intellectual resources to nourish and enrich us—and, paradoxically, perhaps even to stimulate some genuine Progress by putting brakes on the

recycling process Abbott describes: viz., the unknowing recapitulation within our disciplinary field of ideas that have long since come and long since gone, superseded after careful deconstruction by our forebears.

For enabling us to reap, at a single bountiful site, the immense benefits of dual membership both in our disciplinary field and in the world of learning, we can be grateful that the Bradford H. Gray Collection in the History of Social Thought is now at our immediate reach in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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Deconstructing Aurora: How Hollywood Averted Cultural Backlash in the Face of National Tragedy

Deandra Tan, Yale University

Abstract

On July 20th, 2012, 24-year-old James Holmes opened fire in a movie theater at the Town Center mall in Aurora, Colorado. The film playing was *The Dark Knight Rises*, the latest Batman superhero movie directed by Christopher Nolan. Although Holmes later identified himself as the Joker to the police, in the months that followed, Hollywood received little backlash from institutional authorities. A study of select media sources reveals that despite Holmes's attempt to create a cultural trauma by indicting Hollywood in an extreme act of violence, Hollywood managed to shape a representation of the event that left them blameless.

Introduction

Since industry censorship was lifted and the movie ratings system established in 1968, Hollywood has frequently been blamed for encouraging adolescent violence. The American public had always been suspicious of the influence of films on its youth since the medium first gained popularity at cheap sideshow theaters at the turn of the century (Ross 1999). While calls for the federal government to impose censorship laws died down over the years, an assumption of causality between movie-watching and real-life violence remained. Many people saw the outbreak of school shootings throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as confirmation that adolescent males were particularly vulnerable to subliminal messaging in action films.

This assumption informed the way in which violent incidents surrounding the 1999 film, *The Matrix*, were discussed. In the aftermath of the Columbine shooting that same year, many compared the two adolescent killers—Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold—to the movie’s protagonist Neo, of whom both were fans. On the day of the shooting, Harris and Klebold wore long, dark trench coats, which concealed a range of firearms that they then turned upon their classmates. Footage of the incident, caught on school cameras, led the media to recall a similar scene in the film in which Neo infiltrates a building with his companion (Choy and Morris 2009). Some journalists went so far as to suggest that the movie “inspired” them.

Almost 10 years later, when student Seung-Hui Cho launched a gunfire attack against his classmates at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 2007, moral authorities turned again to violent movies as a plausible factor. Greg Stier, president and founder of Dare 2 Share Ministries, was quoted in the magazine *Christian Today* as saying, “Movies and video games are getting bloodier and bloodier. And we just hide under the banter that ‘kids will be kids’” (Jackson 2007). Virginia Tech professor Paul Harris saw a more concrete connection between the Virginia Tech massacre and the South Korean hit *Oldboy* and reported it to the authorities. Soon after, an article published by the Associated Press on April 19th 2007 analyzed the events for “clues” linking the Virginia Tech shooting to *Oldboy*. The article wrote, “In the package of materials that Cho Seung-Hui sent to NBC News, one photo shows Cho brandishing a hammer in a pose similar to the movie’s signature image, which was splashed across its promotional poster” (Associated Press Staff 2007).

Nonetheless, pinning the blame onto Hollywood for the long-term has proven a difficult challenge. Despite the substantial amount of academic

research that has been conducted to substantiate claims of causation between violent films and increased aggression, Hollywood has proven largely immune to lawsuits and cultural backlash. The \$20 million negligence lawsuit by a woman shot by a man obsessed with Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* ended up being dismissed, as did the lawsuit from parents of victims of a Kentucky high school shooting who felt that the film *The Basketball Diaries* had desensitized the killer to violence (Gardner 2012). While speculation as to the effects of film violence consistently surfaces, Hollywood has managed to emerge from each new crisis largely unscathed.

Then on July 20th, 2012, a young man dressed in combat gear walked into a Colorado movie theater during *The Dark Knight Rises* and opened fire upon the unsuspecting audience. By daybreak, 12 people had died and 58 were wounded, making it the worst shooting in the United States since 2009 (Frosch and Johnson 2012). When it was later revealed that the young man had identified himself to police officers as the Joker—the main villain from the previous Batman film—Hollywood became the center of media attention. Journalists worked to dissect the Batman-violence connections, and entertainment gurus speculated that a lawsuit of some sort was inevitable. Yet, over the following months, there was no lawsuit against Warner Brothers or anyone else involved in making the film, and *The Dark Knight Rises* would go on to become one of the highest grossing films of the summer.

While each case has its own peculiarities, a closer study of the 2012 Aurora shooting might serve as a paradigm case through which we can better understand how a powerful institution like Hollywood manages to leverage its cultural capital to escape blame. Since its formation in the early 20th century, Hollywood has been a largely self-regulated industry,

whose economic survival has depended on its ability to both adapt to and mediate its surrounding environment. This paper will develop a theoretical framework using social performance and cultural trauma theory, with which it will then analyze select media sources to determine where the public representation of the event diverged from the shooter James Holmes's intended direction. While this is a study about Hollywood and film, it is also a study of America and the defense of unexpected root paradigms in the face of national tragedy.

Theoretical Frameworks

The term 'social drama' was first brought into popular usage by anthropologist Victor Turner. The social drama is a "breach of the norm" that suspends society in a state of liminality. Suddenly, all of the things that members of society take for granted are brought into sudden, "frightening prominence" (Eyerman 2008:14). This breach causes controversy and conflict, and if it is not addressed through the appropriate means—whether they be symbolic, political, or legal—the drama will become a crisis. Over time, if the neglect is continued, the crisis might then become a cultural trauma.

There is an important distinction between an "event" and an "occurrence." The occurrence is comprised of the "facts" of the action. In the case of the Aurora shooting, it is known that a masked man entered the theater at midnight and killed 12 people with a gun. However, it is only with the formation of the event that the people come to understand that this occurrence is a tragedy. According to Jason Mast, "Events take shape through a dialectic of action and interpretation" (Eyerman 2008:16). Events are never self-explanatory and can bring to bear quite different implications as various interest groups debate the meaning of the actions.

The perpetrator of the drama can attempt to direct media interpretations by controlling his performance. He will carefully construct the stage, prepare the scripts, and select his audience. When projected successfully upon the right audience, the social performance disinters what sociologist Ron Eyerman calls root paradigms. These are “frameworks of meaning, shared narratives, or traditions embedded in and expressed through social practices” (Eyerman 2008:28). It is these root paradigms that form the core of the collective identity, and without which the group would fall apart. Certain symbolic cues embedded either in the scripts or the setting will call into question different root paradigms; the artful performer knows exactly which symbols he will need to communicate his message.

That does not mean the performance cannot be co-opted by interest groups. Once created, it exists in the public sphere as a cultural object, vulnerable to reinterpretation. Cultural trauma theory provides additional tools to analyze the way in which this struggle to define the event unfolds. Cultural trauma theory, which is primarily concerned with how the collective identity reorganizes itself after a rupture, conceptualizes the idea of “carrier groups” to describe the biased interests that play a powerful role in shaping popular representations of the event (Alexander 2004:11). Carrier groups can be lawyers or politicians, social activists or academic institutions. Often they are motivated by distinct interests that might not be shared by the public at large. Nevertheless, they have the cultural authority to define the performance. The most successful carrier groups are those attuned to the local rules of whichever institutional arena they operate within.

For carrier groups, the key motivation for controlling the representation of an event is to direct the way in which blame and moral responsibility are distributed. Whether a carrier group wants to cast the

blame on a rival carrier group or simply to defend itself, it must take an active role to maintain the boundaries lest another group attempt to define them unfavorably (Alexander 2012:16). Since cultural trauma theory dictates that there must be victims and culprits, competition ensues to determine who lies on which side. Only after the representation of the cultural trauma has crystallized can the carrier groups then make demands for symbolic reparation and reconstitution (Alexander 2004:11). Systems of redress can take the form of a marble memorial or the passing of a new law, but they are almost always concrete actions designed to acknowledge the legitimacy of the trauma.

Cultural trauma theory makes an important contribution to social drama theory by adding another dimension to the process of event crystallization. With a case like the Aurora shooting, there were bound to be lines drawn to distinguish between victims and culprits. For a carrier group like Hollywood to ensure that they didn't end up a culprit, they had to incorporate the symbolic elements of Holmes's performance into their demonstration of collective unity.

Analysis

The Occurrence. On July 20th, 2012, James Holmes walked into Theater 9 at the Century 16 through the emergency exit sometime around 12:35 am. *The Dark Knight Rises* was 20 minutes in, and the theater was full of the sounds of gunfire from the movie. Holmes set off two smoke devices and, in the ensuing confusion, opened fire upon the audience. Some of the rounds penetrated the walls of the adjoining Theater 8, injuring at least one audience member next door (Goertzen 2012). Those who were able to fled the theater.

Starting around 12:39 am, the local Aurora police department

began to receive phone calls from people inside the theater. Within two minutes, policemen arrived at the theater, where they found James Holmes in the parking lot, standing by a white van dressed in police-grade combat gear. After they arrested him, Holmes told policemen that he had explosive devices set up in his apartment (Goertzen 2012). They took him into custody as the ambulances began to arrive. By the end of the night, 10 people had been killed in the theater, and 2 more had died in the hospital. 58 people had been injured.

Policemen identified Holmes's weapons as including an AR-15 assault rifle, a Remington shotgun and a .40-caliber Glock handgun—all legally purchased. At Holmes's apartment, they found 30 homemade grenades and 10 gallons of gasoline, which Holmes had prepared in anticipation of a police investigation (Gray 2013). Other residents around the area were evacuated as bomb squads arrived to dismantle the elaborate booby trap Holmes had constructed (Horwitz and Wilgoren 2012). By the end of the night, Holmes's mother had been contacted by ABC News and media outlets were preparing to make the trip to Colorado.

Timeline of the Aurora Shooting¹:

- 12:05 am (MT): *The Dark Knight Rises* starts to play at the Century 16 in Aurora, Colorado. James Holmes enters as part of the crowd.
- ~12:35 am (MT): Holmes leaves sometime afterward through an emergency door, which he props open for his return.
- 12:38 am (MT): Holmes returns, tosses two smoke devices into the theater, and begins to shoot.
- 12:39 am (MT): Aurora police department begins to receive calls from people in the theater.
- ~12:41 am (MT): Police arrive.
- 12:45 am (MT): Police identify Holmes as the suspect and arrest him in the parking lot behind the theater.
- ~2:00 am (MT): Police, cued by some comments Holmes gave them, arrive at his apartment complex to evacuate residents and begin dismantling the explosives he had prepared.
- ~11:40 am (MT): Two buildings at the medical center where Holmes worked were evacuated and the ventilation system shut down.
- 12:22 pm (MT): President Obama addresses the nation.

¹ Adapted from *ABC News* (2012).

Shooting as Social Performance

The Actor. Born on December 13, 1987 and raised in San Diego, California, James Holmes spent most of his time living with his parents at home. Neighbors and high school classmates would say that he seemed nice, if somewhat quiet and withdrawn (Bello et al 2012). In 2010, he graduated with honors from the University of California with a BS in neuroscience. Only in 2011 did he leave his home state for good, when he matriculated into a PhD neuroscience program at the University of Colorado (Hayden and Mitchell 2012). Within less than a year, in the spring of 2012, Holmes began to make plans to withdraw from the university. While many attribute his failure of the crucial end-of-year oral examination to his actions, it seems more likely that his failure was merely the final fall-out to a prolonged process of mental deterioration (Fender et al 2012). Not long after his matriculation into the program, Holmes was identified by the university's Behavior Evaluation and Threat Assessment team (BETA). He would proceed to meet with at least three different mental health professionals before the year was out (Sallinger 2012).

As far as two months in advance of the shooting, after withdrawing from the University of Colorado, Holmes began purchasing the supplies he needed both online and in-person at various stores. He shopped at different gun stores to avoid incurring suspicion and was careful not to say anything of his purchases to his colleagues and neighbors (Cloud 2012). He chose a time and location that would maximize publicity and damage. There was a lot of hype leading up to *The Dark Knight Rises*, with many expecting the movie to be the biggest box-office hit of the year. The midnight screening at the Century 16 theater complex in the Aurora town mall was crowded with people of all ages. And Holmes was believed to have

entered the theater to prop the emergency exit door open so that he could re-enter with his weapons just when the music was roaring and the air was filled with the recorded sounds of gunshots and violence (Time Staff 2012).

Holmes's timing could not have been better; with the action on-screen, audience members were slow to realize what was actually happening. Even those who saw Holmes in his gas mask and long, dark coat initially thought he was part of a publicity stunt (Muskal 2012). It was only when police apprehended Holmes later that they were able to identify just what exactly he was wearing: police-grade ballistics armor, which included "a vest, leg guards, neck guard, groin guard and helmet (Johansson 2012). In fact, the police officers noted, if not for a few differences in gear, he might easily have been mistaken for another SWAT officer. The functionality of his costume raised questions about his mental state. Was he a crazed Batman fan or an evil terrorist? As details came out in subsequent months about the time he had spent meticulously planning the attack, the media increasingly pointed to the latter. After all, as fans were quick to point out, no real Batman fan would have picked up a gun—that went against the very moral code of the comic character.

The Setting. James Holmes's choice of Theater 9 was partially a strategic one, as he knew that he could easily access the parking lot from one of the emergency exit doors. It was also partially symbolic. The theater was a part of the Cinemark theater duplex at the Aurora mall Town Center. According to its homepage, the Town Center boasts over 150 stores, including Macy's, Dillard's, Express and Victoria's. Once the bustling hub of social and commercial activity back in the 1980s, the mall has since seen a decline in middle-class customers, who have switched to

other outdoor shopping centers nearby.

The Town Center is a testament to Aurora's long struggle to emerge from the shadow of Denver. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when migration into the city was at its highest, the city attempted to turn it around and revive its business districts. Despite some limited success, Aurora has been caught in the grip—like so many other mid-western cities—of gradual economic decline. One of the few things it can boast of: Aurora remains “one of the lowest crime areas for a city this size,” according to State Senator Morgan Carroll (Crawford et al 2012). However, this is a tentative victory at best. Since the recession in 2008, rising incidents of crime in previously residential neighborhoods have raised tensions and slowly begun to alter perceptions. Holmes's shooting does little to inspire confidence, and in fact deals a tough blow to the city's image. As former resident-turned-journalist David Von Drehle put it, after years of struggling to distance itself from Denver, “Aurora gets on the map—but not the way it wanted” (Von Drehle 2012).

With the Town Center losing some of its high-income shoppers, the movie theater offered one of the rare opportunities to bring in a much more rounded, diverse crowd. James Holmes, with his act of violence, proceeded to shatter this in the most bloody and brutal of ways. The shooting becomes not just an act against the movie-going individuals, then, but an act directly against the community and its years of struggle in the face of mounting obstacles.

The Audience. In staging his performance at Aurora's Town Center mall, James Holmes was aiming for the broadest audience he could: the American public. The exact identities of the people in the

theater were irrelevant; they were only props in Holmes's performance. When Holmes entered, he gave no explanation or opening statements, but launched straight into his attack. Eyewitness accounts would later describe the impersonal nature of his killing, as he went after whoever was closest to him and presented an easy target (Associated Press Staff 2012a). Who lived and who died was a matter of chance.

Holmes's plan was to kill as many people as possible. In addition to his plan to attack the theater, Holmes had converted his apartment into a volatile death trap, rigged with tripwires and filled with explosives. Neighbors would attest that around 12 am in the morning, techno music began to blast from the apartment, a good 20 minutes before Holmes opened fire (Paulson 2012). One such neighbor, Kaitlyn Fonzi, eventually banged on the door and threatened to call the police. When no one responded, she went ahead and did just that; however, when the call connected, the police department informed her that the police were busy with a shooting at the movie theater. Had she opened the door or called the police when the music first started, the police would have been preoccupied with the explosives wired to the door at the time that Holmes opened fire.

Certain similarities between Holmes's plan of attack and the mind games the Joker played did not go unnoticed. Journalists pointed out that the dual attack was a particular favorite of the Joker's in *The Dark Knight* (the movie that came before *The Dark Knight Rises* in the series). Again and again, the Joker pushed Batman into making difficult choices, often with fatal consequences (Johnson 2012). Batman fans complained that Holmes had "hijacked" the brilliance of Nolan's work, but regardless, Holmes's performance exposed the contradictions of movie fantasy. In the theater, audiences want to be thrilled with violence; to turn their fantasies

around on them is to “[toxify] the whole experience of moviegoing” (Corliss 2012). The point of going to see a movie is to indulge in danger while remaining safe. There were many different locations that Holmes could have staged his rampage; out of all of the options, he chose a movie theater. Intentionally or not, Holmes ended up thrusting Hollywood into the spotlight as the creators of a sick fantasy brought to life.

Social Crisis. News about what happened in Aurora quickly spread as the local authorities mobilized into action. The Town Center mall was shut down and closed off as police took control of the situation. Later that Friday, President Obama released an official statement through the White House. He vowed that he, with Federal and local law enforcement, would bring whoever was responsible to justice. He urged the American public to “come together as one American family” and to “stand together with them in the challenging hours and days to come” (Chaggaris 2012). His words of authority re-established a sense of control and unity over the public sphere as he and his men looked for a way to proceed.

Hollywood moved swiftly to align themselves with the process of healing that politicians like Obama were beginning to facilitate. Everyone who worked in the industry—from actors to producers and directors—knew that if they wanted to protect themselves against public censure, they needed to demonstrate their solidarity with the American public and re-affirm the value of what they had to offer. In order to achieve this, they utilized what Victor Turner called “systems of redress” (Eyerman 2008).

Systems of Redress

A Note on Media. The process of redress describes the attempts

of various authorities and interest groups to deal with the crisis, either by exacerbating the situation at hand, or by performing various rituals that would allow for social re-integration. In order to develop a base understanding of how Hollywood participated in processes of redress, I chose four distinct news sources: *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *The Aurora Sentinel* and *Time News and Magazine*. When there appeared to be gaps in the information covered, I turned to outside sources for additional information.

What emerges from these sources is how Hollywood identified themselves symbolically with the people of Aurora. Using the cultural structures and symbols Holmes incorporated into his performance, Hollywood took control of the narrative to ensure that they would remain blameless. There are three key aspects to the process: 1) the performance of sympathy; 2) the acceptance of limited responsibility; and 3) the reaffirmation of a national paradigm.

1. Performance of Sympathy. Timing proved to be one critical element that Warner Brothers got right. Within hours of the news breaking across the Internet, Warner Brothers acknowledged the event over Twitter: “Warner Bros. and *The Dark Knight Rises* filmmakers are deeply saddened to learn about the shocking incident in Aurora” (Humphrey 2012). Soon after came the official statement, which would become quoted and re-quoted across the media: “We extend our sincere sympathies to the families and loved ones of the victims at this tragic time.” By responding promptly to the unfolding crisis, Warner Brothers was able to define their role in the drama before others did it for them.

The use of “we” demonstrates a sense of solidarity not only

amongst the producers and the filmmakers, but the whole of Hollywood as confronted by a shocked and grieving American public. Ostensibly they are only talking to the “families and loved ones of the victims,” but the message is targeted at an audience much broader than that. It seeks to reassure that the people behind Warner Brothers are capable of setting aside commercial interests in times of tragedy. It is not enough to simply extend their “sympathies”; to make sure the American public really gets it, they add the “sincere” for emphasis. However, by playing into the rhetoric of the press with their description of the situation as a “tragic time,” they both recognize the breach in social norms and ascribe to it a temporal state. There is a time for mourning, but that time will pass, or so the implied message goes.

The sensitive response and the numbers at stake were inextricably linked; failure to demonstrate proper remorse would lead to a public outcry against the insensitive commercialism, which could jeopardize opening box office numbers—traditionally a studio’s largest source of revenue. It was not enough to *feel* remorseful; it had to be performed, so to speak, to the public audiences. To remain silent and wait out the storm was not an option. According to Allan Mayer, a crisis management expert based in Los Angeles, “Institutions like movie studios get in trouble not because they do things they shouldn’t do, but because they don’t do things they should do. On that count, Warners handled themselves beautifully” (Kilday 2012a).

Then on July 24, 2012, Christian Bale, the lead actor in *The Dark Knight Rises*, went to visit Aurora with his wife. He had contacted the Aurora Medical Center ahead of time and asked that the media not be notified (Zakarin 2012). An assistant for the executive vice president of Warner Brothers’ corporate communications told the media that “Mr.

Bale is there as himself, not representing Warner Brothers” (Lee and Parker 2012). He visited with seven of the patients and spent some time with the medical staff who had been treating them. Soon, pictures of him at the hospital made their way onto Twitter. The low quality pictures and the wide smiles of patients and staff alike made the pictures appear more authentic, removing from Bale some of that Hollywood gloss. The visit not only humanized Bale, it also made the film—and the Hollywood industry that produced it—more accessible to the public.

Bale’s visit also worked on a symbolic level, drawing upon the same cultural vocabulary that Holmes had brought into his social performance. If Holmes was the Joker, then Bale was Batman. Just as the figurative character of the Joker manifested in Holmes’s plan for nihilistic destruction, so did the character of Batman manifest in Bale’s willingness to connect with the people of Aurora. And, by not dressing up in costume as fans across Facebook and Twitter had encouraged him to do, Bale emphasized the hard divide between fiction and reality—a divide that Holmes had breached with his attack.

The actions that Warner Brothers and Christian Bale performed shifted the lines of the collective identity. The Aurora victims were no longer the unlucky members of a community to have been singled out for tragedy; this was a tragedy that all of Hollywood shared with them... not as businessmen or hired performers, but as people, and as lovers of cinema. And the words of Warner Brothers and the actions of Christian Bale asked that they stand together against the horror of what Holmes had dared to do.

2. *Acceptance of (Limited) Responsibility.* Meanwhile, in Hollywood, professionals were going through a very public ritual of reflection. On August 3rd, *The Hollywood Reporter* dedicated an entire magazine issue to the exploration of issues relevant to the shooting. The opening article, written by the *Hollywood Reporter's* chief film critic Todd McCarthy, reflects on how the culture of filmmaking today is conducive to increasingly appalling acts of violence. McCarthy writes, "Films can be mightily impactful and persuasive experiences, and so can evil or antisocial characters when played by brilliant actors such as Heath Ledger and Robert De Niro" (McCarthy 2012). While he is careful to acknowledge that the "dark side" movies open to audiences usually doesn't amount to violence, he adds that he doesn't see why this potential "should be denied."

Another article features "legendary director" Peter Bogdanovich criticizing the nature of violence in the film industry. His first film, titled *Targets* and filmed in 1968, tells the fictional story of an angry Vietnam War vet who shoots teenagers at a drive-in movie theater—a situation that bears a slight resemblance to the Aurora shooting. However, Bogdanovich argues, the depiction of the violence itself isn't "pornographic" like films today (Kilday 2012b). Today, "there's a general numbing of the audience. There's too much murder and killing. You make people insensitive by showing it all the time."

In their articles, neither Bogdanovich nor McCarthy proposes any solutions to the violence. McCarthy ends his article with a call for the public to take back the movie theaters as a place for pleasure, a rather odd, haphazard conclusion for an article focused on just why the theaters might incite wild and dark fantasies. Bogdanovich frankly admits that he doesn't have a solution, only that he perceives a widespread problem.

The concluding piece by screenwriter Kurt Sutter appears to sum up the general sentiment amongst the Hollywood professionals:

[T]he truth is, man's inhumanity to man is as old as humanity itself. Some people just do evil things. Most do not. A billion people have seen Batman movies over the past 20 years, and they have been entertained and inspired. One man saw it as a sick entry point for mass murder. The one is tragic. The billion are not. I choose to write for the billion. (Sutter 2012)

On July 26, six days after the Aurora shooting, executive producer Harvey Weinstein called for a filmmaker summit to discuss the role of violence in films. He promoted it as a way to honor the Colorado shootings and acknowledge some degree of responsibility. Weinstein told reporters, "I think as filmmakers we should sit down—the Marty Scorseses, the Quentin Tarantinos and hopefully all of us who deal in violence in movies—and discuss our role in that" (McClintock 2012). However, Weinstein emphasized that the "real culprit" was the lack of gun control. He added, "If we don't get gun-control laws in this country, we are full of beans. To have the National Rifle Association rule the United States is pathetic." In the end, his call for a summit went unanswered.

In the end, very little besides talk of taking responsibility came out of the Hollywood discussion. Within a few months, even that had largely subsided. One journalist writing for *Time* noted the similarities of the conversation post-Aurora to what happened post-Columbine: "One consequence of the Columbine shooting was a national conversation about violence in movies and video games that changed nothing in Hollywood" (Newtown-Small 2012). But the point was never to change, only to perform

on a public platform an appropriate level of sensitivity to the tragedy.

3. *Reaffirmation of a National Paradigm.* The rhetoric of moviegoing as one of the “great American experiences” was first used by Christopher Nolan in the official statement he released. He said, “I believe movies are one of the great American art forms and the shared experience of watching a story unfold on screen is an important and joyful pastime” (Kilday 2012a). A day later, at an exclusive screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* in Hollywood, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences president Tom Sherak added, “The moviegoing experience is one we should be able to enjoy with others, in our community, in an environment that is safe. We should be able to go to our local theatres, leave our problems behind and allow the movie to transport us to a place that entertains us and captures our imagination” (Block 2012). As professionals working in Hollywood, their work was violated, and their words imply that their sense of horror stems as much from the breach of space as the death of the people. For them, the space of the theater is a sacred space. Not only does it “entertain” and “capture” the imagination of the viewer, but it also unites the community in an old and familiar ritual.

The language used by journalists and critics suggest an underlying sense of anxiety toward what they perceive to be a trend toward physical isolation brought on by the development of personal computing technology. *Time's* Corliss writes, “In the computer age, many Americans are approaching the status of hermits and invalids. We stay at home to work, to shop, to have sex (actual and virtual)—and to watch movies” (Corliss 2012). TV critic James Poniewozik writes that the opening night of a summer blockbuster is “one of the few joyous, communal gatherings

left in our society” (Poniewozik 2012). Never mind that audiences watch movies around the world; the temporary gathering of an audience to watch a film has become “one of the last great American communities” (Corliss 2012). Whereas once moviegoing was seen as a trivial pastime, it has since become something fundamental to the social organization of America itself.

After news of Aurora broke, one of the first things political authorities did was reinforce the moviegoing experience. The morning of the shooting, President Obama says in his official statement, “I’m sure many of you who are parents here had the same reaction that I did when I heard this news. My daughters go to the movies. What if Malia and Sasha had been at the theater, as so many of our kids do everyday?” (*New York Times* 2012). By using his children as an entry point into his demonstration of empathy and horror, Obama increases the sense of violation. He positions himself as the quintessential paternal figure, indulgent of his kids’ enjoyment of the movies and appropriately horrified at any implied threat to their safety. What emerges is an immutable connection between families and movies. Even as Obama might appear to downplay the movies by associating them with children, he legitimizes their role in the American family.

The local politicians in Aurora were much more direct. As authorities in the region most affected by the shooting, the task to move the community beyond the sense of crisis fell largely into their hands. Councilman Bob LeGare told the public, “I’d like to ask the citizens across Colorado and the nation to not let the American past time [sic] of going to movies with your kids, don’t let that become a victim of what has happened this past week” (Castellanos 2012). It is practical advice; it turns grief and horror into a command of action, returning a sense of agency

to the citizens. They can do something to fight Holmes; they can watch a movie. The fact that 12 men, women, and children died and 58 more were wounded to watch this film gave the experience a sense of privileged purpose. Suddenly, watching *The Dark Knight Rises* became an act of solidarity, of defiance, and of pride.

The people responded to this call to action. One man, writing from North Carolina, informed Councilman Bob Roth that shortly after the shootings, he went to see *The Dark Knight Rises* (Castellanos 2012). “Aurora,” he wrote in the message, “this is a moment for heroes, and we are all looking at you—a beautiful city, a brilliant people, a community that will rise from the abyss.” Some of the survivors, rising to the challenge, later returned to the theater to finish watching the film. One woman writes, “We refuse to allow this one madman to injure our minds and spirits the way he tried to injure our bodies. If we let fear overtake us and prevent us from living bold, authentic lives, the shooter—and other murderers like him—wins” (Lader and Lader 2012). By sharing her story across popular media channels, she helped strengthen the perception that moviegoing was a way to defy the shooter and honor the victims.

Event Crystallization

Despite Holmes’s intentions to create a performance with maximum impact, Hollywood was able to reassert the fundamental American paradigm of moviegoing. This allowed them to direct the bulk of the blame away from the movie production industry and toward the easy accessibility of guns. In the same breath that Harvey Weinstein admitted some measure of responsibility for violence in media, he called out the lack of gun-control laws as the real issue at hand (McClintock 2012). He

wasn't the only one to deflect blame onto the gun lobbyists; director and screenwriter Tracy Letts joined in with, "Anybody who would point the finger at us and our little fried chicken movie, as opposed to the ability to buy 6000 rounds of ammunition, is out of their goddamn mind" (Zakarin 2012). Hollywood made the clear distinction that what they were doing was for the purpose of harmless entertainment; it was the National Rifle Association's fault that the laws turned fiction into reality.

What made Hollywood's task of defining the tragedy around gun control easier was the fact that the conversation was already there; it only needed to be tapped into. In early 2011, 22-year-old Jared Loughner shot 18 people in Arizona outside a supermarket where Representative Gabrielle Giffords was meeting with her constituents. A year later in the spring of 2012, neighborhood crime watch volunteer George Zimmerman mistakenly killed an unarmed teenager (Lacey and Herszenhorn 2011; Alvarez 2012). Both events became highly discussed news events, and the media was all too ready to re-hash the same arguments they had made before.

"Flash: Movies don't kill people. Guns kill people," ran one blogger's headline for *Time* a couple days after the Aurora incident (Corliss 2012). Another headline read, "Gunman Kills 12 in Colorado, Reviving Gun Debate" (Frosch and Johnson 2012). The conversation shifted gears as the Aurora shooting found its place alongside the more conventional shooting rampages of the past. Hollywood, in successfully aligning themselves symbolically with the people of Aurora, managed to help the event crystallize as a gun-related tragedy rather than a movie-inspired violence. By December, discussion of violence in movies had all but fizzled out.

Conclusion

Today, perhaps it is not so surprising to see the myth of film violence so quickly set aside by major newspapers and magazines. Blaming film violence has become almost a cultural cliché; just as the news was breaking, an opinion editor for *Time* pleaded, “Don’t blame *Batman* for the Aurora shooting” (Ferguson 2012). Nonetheless, Hollywood understood that the speculation about a movie’s influences could still have a significant negative impact on box office revenues for their film. *The Dark Knight Rises*, with a modest rating of PG-13, was relatively tame—especially compared to the psychological horrors of the previous film. But it was important that the audiences discover this for themselves in the movie theaters, rather than putting it off to watch at home later at cheaper costs. To address this, Hollywood moved swiftly to begin the process of symbolic redress: issuing statements, cancelling premieres and press junkets, reinforcing through the voice and presence of its individuals the importance of moviegoing as an American cultural practice.

Analysis of Hollywood’s actions following the Aurora shooting demonstrates how dedicated carrier groups can overturn an actor’s performance. The important distinction between failure and success is how effectively the carrier group is able to manipulate the script of an actor’s performance. Only by reinterpreting the story can a potential offender take control of the trauma formation and choose which collectivity to align himself or herself with. By drawing upon the paradigm of moviegoing that Holmes had exposed, Hollywood was able to define itself as part of the public collectivity and simultaneously expose lax gun control laws as the true culprit.

Future research might continue to explore the complex

relationship between gun control and the portrayal of gun violence in films. For instance, to look beyond Aurora, when 20-year-old Adam Lanza killed 20 elementary school children in Newtown, Connecticut, the National Rifle Association cast some of the blame on film violence (Horn 2012). There is no easy way to categorize the myth of film violence today; it is a faded idea, one that is derided by most academics, and yet it continues to endure. Nevertheless, the public discussion that unfolded in the wake of the Aurora shooting reveals that for many, the battle over the movie theater has been won. There is a special place in the modern American identity for cinema, and as long as Hollywood can tap into the joy and pleasure that the experience recalls, they will thrive.

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Corporate Social Responsibility in China: A Snapshot from the Field¹

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Abstract

As a set of ideas and practices, “Corporate Social Responsibility” is a global trend both intellectually intriguing and socially consequential. Continued enrichment of knowledge about CSR development is especially worthwhile with regards to areas where CSR as an institution is still relatively new and rapidly evolving. Academic literature on CSR, though, is populated more heavily by studies on CSR practice in the West than in other world regions and by quantitative studies speaking to broad trends that may not provide in-depth understandings of the processes they result from and relate to. This study therefore presents and compares detailed case studies discussing the origins, nature, and social implications of how two different kinds of corporations operating in Shanghai, China, have been engaging with CSR-related ideas and practices in rather different ways. These cases of a Fortune 500 Multinational and a Sino-Foreign Joint Venture illustrate interesting examples of the local adaptation of the global business ideas and practices. In particular, I discuss how the first organization has been importing what scholars have called an “explicit” model of CSR known to be popular in the West, yet is at the same time localizing it to its China operations, and is not shaping this process alone.

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Fox International Fellowship of Yale University’s MacMillan Center for Area Studies, professor Xin Liu, and the department of sociology, Fudan University, for generous support of this research.

In contrast, the second organization has maintained engagement with an “implicit” model of CSR with distinctly Chinese characteristics. This has been in spite of the firm’s many global ties, for a variety of strategic, cultural, and institutional factors. Meant to be illustrative rather than representative, these case studies are intended to shed light on some important but little-understood organizational processes, actors, and outcomes shaping CSR development in China in the hopes of informing further research and practice.

Introduction

Why is CSR development in China both significant and fascinating? With the wealth and size of many Fortune 500 companies dwarfing the treasuries and populations of many world cities and countries, the idea that corporations have social responsibilities beyond the maximization of their profits² that grounds “CSR” and a host of related management concepts, is particularly powerful and fascinating.³ The same is true of the types of practices enacted by corporations in the name of these ideas, from adopting stricter labor standards to environmental protection efforts and philanthropic giving, which have become increasingly established in the

2 This is generally agreed upon as the most basic common thread among the wide range of CSR definitions that exist and have been debated and reviewed quite a few times over (Garriga and Mele 2004).

3 What is “CSR”? Because this study is interested in the social construction of CSR and the varied ways different organizations are interacting with it, I believe it less productive to offer a single definition CSR but rather view it as a somewhat-coherent-somewhat-negotiable bundle of ideas and set of practices based upon the core notion that “corporations have obligations to society that extend beyond mere profit-making activities” (Godfrey and Hatch 2006:88). See (Carroll 1999) and (Garriga and Mele 2004) for reviews of debated and evolving CSR definitions in academic literature.

West since the anti-sweatshop movement of the 1990s.⁴ The development of Corporate Social Responsibility in China, in particular, is especially consequential because of the scale and significance of economic activity that occurs within the country and its likely impact on shaping our shared global economic future.⁵

The emergence of CSR is also particularly intriguing in China because neither it nor a recognizable capitalist economy itself were present a few short decades ago, that is, prior to market transition reforms launched in the late 1970s. Like China's still-rapidly-evolving economy, the development of the institution of CSR involves social construction by a multitude of actors and an interesting interplay between globalization and local forces. These processes are complex and their outcomes are undeniably powerful. Therefore, attending to the processes through which CSR norms and practices are currently evolving in China provides us with unique insight into a globalizing process of great social significance.

CSR, Globalization, and Institutional Theory in the Chinese Setting

Little academic literature has examined China-based cases in depth from the perspectives mentioned above. Much empirical research on CSR has employed quantitative methodology to make broad generalizations on patterns in firms' CSR practices, such as the relationship between firm characteristics from size and industry to measures of the intensity

4 Explicitly-defined "CSR"- related ideas and practices have emerged and circulated within management discourse and practice before this time (see Carroll 1999, Carroll et al. 2012), though the 1990s anti-sweatshop movement stands out as a frequently-alluded-to watershed (Lin 2010).

5 On this, see Shambaugh, David 2013. *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*. Oxford University Press.

and nature of CSR engagement, such as donation amounts or publication of CSR reports.⁶ By operationalizing the dependent variable through a single dimension, such as charitable donation amounts or whether CSR reports are published, though, they define what CSR is and means *a priori*. In contrast, scholars Matten and Moon (2008:405) have noted the need to capture how CSR, as a bundle of ideas and practices related to business responsibility, fundamentally “varies in terms of its underlying meanings and the issues to which—and modes by which—it is addressed”.

In particular, Matten and Moon (2008:409-10) offer a way to theorize variation in dominant forms of CSR practice in different nations through two CSR categories: “explicit” and “implicit.” Explicit CSR is characterized by “deliberate, voluntary, and often strategic” actions that often “combine social and business value”; it “rests on corporate discretion, rather than reflecting either governmental authority or broader formal or informal institutions.”⁷ In contrast, “implicit” CSR describes a “social consensus” model involving understandings between corporations and society/government that the former is to act for the common good in accordance with the general “values, norms, and rules” of society (Matten and Moon 2008:410).⁸ This is not the only possible CSR typology but it

6 For a review, see Aguinis, Herman and Ante Glavas (2012). On the Chinese context, see studies such as Gao (2009); Tang et al. (2009), Zhang et al. (2010), Zheng and Li (2010), Marquis and Qian (2013).

7 For instance, Intel is well-known for sponsoring a high-profile science competition in the US each year.

8 According to Matten and Moon (2008:411), the explicit model is associated with “national institutions encouraging individualism, discretionary agency, etc” and more American in origin, while the implicit model was originally prevalent in Europe among “national institutions encouraging collectivism,... solidarity [and] partnership government.” However, they argue that an explicit model has been spreading and pushing aside the implicit model more and more across the globe in recent years. Testing this larger

offers a parsimonious way to acknowledge and describe variations in CSR interpretation and practice that appear in the case studies which follow.

Other important contributions, by Matten and Moon (2008) and others, inform the present study. In examining how the prevalence of “explicit” versus “implicit” CSR in different countries and continents relate to larger variations in “the historical institutions of their national business systems” (Matten and Moon 2008:405), Matten and Moon have helped initiate a body of literature on CSR from comparative institutional perspectives that importantly “conceptualiz[e] CSR beyond the firm-level and within wider institutional settings” (Kang and Moon 2012:88) and place the study of CSR in closer dialogue with studies of political economy, comparative capitalism, and economic sociology.⁹

This emerging school of thought offers helpful foundations yet has its own limitations. Much “national business systems” comparative literature paints CSR practices across entire nations with a broadly generalizing brush. In China, regional variations are highly salient to all aspects of the national economy. The variety of organizational forms in the “unique hybrid market economy” (Marquis and Qian 2013:5) of China demands recognition that firms with different ownership structures experience different structural and cultural forces that ostensibly provide variable contexts for their own

hypothesis is well beyond the scope of this paper. I simply use these concepts as the two cases discussed here happened to fall into them, although a Foreign-explicit CSR/ Chinese-implicit CSR divide by no means can be assumed to be a representative trend.

9 They have been joined by a variety of other scholars (Kinderman 2009; Gjørberg 2010; Jackson and Apostolakou 2010; Kang and Moon 2012). In addition to attending to arrangements of political economy, scholars like John Campbell (2006:932) have also acknowledged the importance of a wider range of institutional actors and forces, from NGOs and the press to “institutionalized norms and frames” shaping CSR practice and development.

institutional development and interaction with CSR.

Many comparative studies on CSR variation also attend more to CSR outcome variation and do not provide in-depth views of the processes occurring within individual organizations that are important to the ongoing social construction of an evolving CSR field, and this especially in China, where the globally-popular institution of CSR is relatively new and rapidly evolving. In light of this, this paper aims to offer valuable insight about the way different CSR practices in China are being constructed on the ground within different kinds of individual organizations. Additionally, this study will examine two organizations divergently interacting with explicit and implicit CSR, bearing in mind existing sociological thought on globalization and institutional change and continuity, something that has been done in few if any sociological studies on the Chinese context.

Sociology of Globalization and Institutional Change

Attention to how Chinese economic organizations are interacting with CSR helps us understand the global diffusion of new ideas and practices in business. These are highly complex issues and the subject of an abundant sociological literature. As such they can only be discussed selectively here.¹⁰

One strand of scholarship relevant to these case studies pertains to the extent and limitations of convergence produced by globalization. If we view globalization as “a process fueled by, and resulting in, increasing cross- border flows of goods, services, money, people, information, and culture” (Guillen 2001:236), to what extent does globalization dominate or

¹⁰ Therefore, see Guillen (2001) and Campbell (2004) for more comprehensive reviews.

become limited and adapted by “local” forces, and to what extent does it produce convergence? Some sociologists, including George Ritzer and John Meyer, have placed more emphasis on the power of globalization to create cultural and organizational similarity across the world (Ritzer 1983; Meyer 2002). On the other hand, while not denying that globalization processes exist as reality, other scholars emphasize the way that globalization is often complexly mediated by local actors, cultures, and institutions that can limit convergence (Robertson 1994; Campbell 2004). While not intended primarily to “test” these theories or settle these debates, the case studies in this paper will speak to them.

Another strand of relevant scholarship is work in neo-institutionalism that seeks to understand processes related to institutional change and continuity. On one hand, when organizations adopt new organizational forms and practices, why and how do they do this; what and who shapes this process? Much work has written about this, including research on the topic of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983); diffusion (Strang and Meyer 1993; Strang and Soule 1998; Wejnert 2002); organizational learning (Levitt and March 1988); translation (Boxenbaum 2006); as well as the role of actors, including both institutional entrepreneurs (Batillana et al. 2009), “carriers” (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002), and “brokers” (Campbell 2004:101). Yet why and how might organizations exhibit more continuity than change? Scholars have also written about limits to diffusion and the prevalence of other processes like “path dependence” and “bricolage” (Campbell 2004:65), in which organizations draw from their own pasts equally or more than external sources of influence. One common salient point is that organizational change and continuity are both very much mediated by

human agency and cultural and organizational dynamics in addition to forces of structure and rationality. These ideas should be useful in helping to comprehend this paper's empirical cases in which organizations have adopted different models of CSR.

All in all, in the course of examining the main issue of the origins, nature, and implications of how two different types of locally-influential Shanghai-based corporations have come to engage with explicit and implicit CSR, this paper's two case studies will also speak to two very broadly stated questions: *How is globalization mediated by the local? How can institutional change and/or continuity be mediated by a variety of different processes, forces, and actors?*

Data and Methods

I studied a Fortune-500 European paints and chemicals multinational and a Sino-Foreign joint venture in the third-party logistics industry. These organizations are briefly described in the table below. All interviewees and organizations, as indicated, wished to remain anonymous and I granted them this request to protect their interests and increase response validity.

Table 1. Summary of Organizations Studied

“FOREIGN”	Partly “CHINESE”
<p><u><i>Strategically localizing “CSR” best practices-but not alone:</i></u></p> <p><u>*Multinational Corporation A (MNCA)</u></p> <p>Ownership: European</p> <p>Industry: Paints and Chemicals</p> <p>Business: Both Business-to-Business (B-to-B) and Business-to-Consumer (B-to-C)</p> <p>China headquarters: Shanghai</p>	<p><u><i>Corporate responsibility with Chinese characteristics:</i></u></p> <p><u>*Sino-Foreign Joint Venture (JVA)</u></p> <p>50% by large Chinese State-Owned Enterprise; 50% by leading European Logistics firm</p> <p>Industry: Logistics</p> <p>Business: Business-to- Business (B-to-B)</p> <p>Headquarters: Shanghai</p>

**Interview subjects requested that organization remain anonymous*

The types of cases I selected were guided theoretically, although I made contact with these particular ones through convenience sampling. In studying each organization, I examined relevant publicly-available documentary and online written sources and interviewed at least one member of the organization. Where possible, I interviewed multiple contacts, and obtained additional written materials from interviewees.

The Cases

It is worth re-emphasizing why the following two case studies of CSR engagement in different types of Chinese corporations should be particularly meaningful. A fuller economic history must be left to other sources, but it is worth a reminder that the Chinese market is a fascinating place to examine sub-national variation in economic organizational forms due to its complex institutional setting where rules governing the

market have been so rapidly and constantly shifting since 1978.¹¹ China has a “unique hybrid market economy” (Marquis and Qian 2013:5) where many fully or partially state-owned enterprises (SOEs) still exist alongside the multitude of privately owned, foreign-owned, and joint-venture firms that have increasingly entered the market since reform and opening. Diverse types of firms should experience pressures from the market and institutional environment differently and operate in different nexuses of relationships and with distinct corporate histories and cultures. Therefore, a quest to understand more about ongoing CSR development in China must involve examining different types of firms within its economic sphere and would benefit from comparative study.

The two corporations I examined were quite dissimilar from one another and therefore offer interesting sites to illuminate some of the varied ways corporate responsibility has been viewed and enacted in two influential organizations in Shanghai. The first, “more foreign” company, Multinational Company A (MNC A), is a European-based Fortune 500, Euronext-listed multinational with both business-to-business and business-to-consumer activity in the paints and chemicals industry.¹² Operating in 80 countries, it employs roughly 50,000 people worldwide and around 7400 in China, where it has been there since the 1970s and has intensified its operations more notably since 1994 (according to the company website, which is by necessity withheld).

The second corporation, Joint Venture Company A (JV A), is an equally-held Sino-foreign joint venture company established in 2002 that

11 Naughton (2007) presents the classic overview.

12 I guaranteed interviewees and their firms anonymity.

provides business-to-business services in the logistics industry.¹³ One parent company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of a large Chinese SOE in the auto industry with around 17,000 employees; the other is a leading European logistics firm with a total of around 57,000 employees in its worldwide operations. It is one of the leading players of domestic ground logistics in the Chinese market, which forms the majority of its business, though it is also makes use of its European parent's capacities to provide overseas inbound and outbound export logistics. It serves companies of multiple industries, both Chinese and foreign and operates in three continents and twenty countries.¹⁴ Like all joint-venture companies, its identity is therefore complex.¹⁵ To categorize these firms in broad strokes, though, the first is at heart a foreign company doing business in China while the latter could be called a globalized Chinese company.

Accordingly, these firms have been viewing and enacting "corporate responsibility" in very different ways. In fact, the two firms appeared to have adopted what management scholars Matten and Moon (2008) have classified as two fundamentally different models of CSR: "explicit" and "implicit." As I will describe, MNC A has been enacting explicit CSR, with practices that resemble those currently in vogue among major Western multinationals, although it has been customizing its initiatives to its China

13 Third party logistics firms provide various forms of operations support functions for their manufacturing clients, including the transport and tracking of both parts and finished goods as well as warehouse management, etc. This firm seeks to provide "end-to-end" solutions for their clients, many in the automotive manufacturing industry (personal interviews at Joint Venture Company A).

14 Company website; company video.

15 The "foreign vs. Chinese" identity of both companies is complex, as is true of many that do business both in China and internationally and that have both Chinese and Western employees and managers.

operations in interesting ways. JV A, on the other hand, despite its various global ties, interestingly does not display the same kind of explicit CSR; the dominant corporate responsibility ideas and practices seem to reflect an “implicit” CSR model with distinct Chinese characteristics suggesting path-dependent institutional continuity. Is this the case despite the fact that the firm has significant global ties and appears to result from a combination of instrumental and cultural forces. In what follows, I discuss origins and implications of how these situations came to be.¹⁶

Multinational Corporation A (MNC A): Strategically Localizing “CSR” Best Practices-But Not Alone

A common narrative has been that multinational companies have played a considerable role in importing global CSR practices to China (Li 2010:89). To the extent that this is true, it is worth understanding what is happening as MNCs introduce these “imports” to the local market. Multinational Corporation A has institutionalized an explicit model of CSR and has replicated much of this framework from its global operations to China. But it has also been customizing CSR to China in particular, a process that other organizations are also playing a role in shaping.

The explicit model of CSR is highly apparent at Multinational Corporation A, which has a well-defined central framework for both corporate responsibility management and communications, one that

16 Here I am concerned not so much with offering definitive causal explanations of *why* the corporations are engaging in CSR the way they do. In these qualitative case studies, I am interested in discussing what we might learn from looking at *how* the organization is managing “CSR.” These cases cannot be representative, but can be illustrative of certain interesting processes related to institutional change and the CSR field’s development.

reflects this model of CSR popular among many Western Fortune 500 firms. It has a centrally-articulated “sustainability” framework with environmental, economic, and social components. Environmental efforts include resource-conservation in production and eco-friendly products; economic efforts include sustainable investment decisions, and social sustainability efforts include employee volunteering and community outreach programs.¹⁷ These efforts are publicized explicitly through multiple channels including the firm’s annual reports, a sustainability section of its webpage, other company publications, and media outreach by the Corporate Communications department. This type of strategically-planned CSR action reflects the “explicit CSR” model in which the firm designs and communicates about its programming, considering “incentives and opportunities” that are “motivated by the perceived expectations of different stakeholders of the corporation” (Matten and Moon 2008:410).¹⁸ Indeed, a corporate communications manager¹⁹ confirms that sustainability programming and communications are planned bearing in mind “stakeholder mapping” exercises in which they are viewed as part of efforts to build relationships with key stakeholders in

17 A note on “Corporate Social Responsibility” (CSR) versus “sustainability” terminology. While the former may seem to connote more socially-oriented practices and the latter more environmental focus, their commonly-accepted definitions in management theory have both broadened such that the actual practices they now refer to overlap quite a bit. Nowadays the terms have come to be used interchangeably by some management scholars (Marquis et al 2011).

18 As defined by management literature, a “stakeholder” is a person or group that affects or is affected by the decisions, policies, and activities of an organization (Donaldson and Preston 1995).

19 My information for this case comes from interviews with and documents shared by a manager in China Corporate Communications as well as the company website and publications.

ways conducive to the organization's performance and growth strategies.²⁰

How, though, has this organization adapted its CSR engagement in China? Observing this process could teach us more about how the organization makes sense of both CSR and stakeholders in China with implications for CSR field development in the country. While much of the firm's sustainability framework has been replicated from its Europe-headquartered operations to China, it has also customized its CSR with some additional China-specific programming too, something not true of its business in all 80 countries around the world. This move makes sense in the context of the firm's recent larger strategic planning of increasing focus on the Chinese market. Indeed, company press releases reveal its ambitions to double its current revenue made in China to \$3 billion by 2015. The firm further signaled these intentions by creating a new position of President of MNC A China in 2011, and centralized China operations into a glittering new office, the largest in the firm's worldwide operations, in 2012.

But even with clear goals of increased attention to key Chinese stakeholders articulated, how did the firm go about deciding precisely how to best reach out to them through CSR efforts? There were several tasks for management in figuring out how to make good investments. The first entailed making the local Chinese stakeholder environment legible and deciding what kinds of CSR activity might be satisfactory. A manager related to me that making these kinds of judgments about CSR is

20 This gives some support to how some management scholars (Weber and Marley 2008) have previously hypothesized that analyzing CSR communications can serve as a way to make inferences about "stakeholder salience," the power, legitimacy, and urgency attributed to stakeholders.

challenging due to its abstract nature. CSR program designers are tasked with making subjective assessments of stakeholder desires and attempting to translate these into value for both society and the firm, a process that is difficult to measure immediately. In confronting these uncertainties it seems that the firm did a number of things that involve applying logics of professionalization and standardization to CSR management.

For one, MNC A looked to other organizations for reference points and borrowed knowledge. Around 2010, this meant expanding its Corporate Communications staff from 1 to 4 with managers headhunted from other leading Western multinationals with further developed Communications and CSR programs in order to bolster MNC A's China Corporate Communications. Drawing from reference points of the best practices at their previous employers, these managers were central in encouraging the company to implement a new flagship CSR program for MNC A China and in managing its design and execution. This resulted in the launch of a sustainability project design competition for student groups in top Chinese universities it co-sponsored with the Chinese Communist Youth League, Ministry of Education, and the prestigious Tsinghua University. Firm leaders were quite pleased with the way this program engaged with so many important Chinese stakeholders, from powerful government and Communist Party entities to elite college students that could be both potential consumers and employees, that synergized with the company's already-existing sustainability framework, and did not involve excessive costs to administer.

In designing and assessing this program, managers also turned to other organizations. They enlisted some external professionalized help from two consulting firms. Managers of course are guided by their

own judgment and discretion when working with consultancies; the consultancies are at their service, after all. But while the managers define and drive the overarching goals for projects, input from the consultants is not insignificant in shaping the specifics of project design. The consultants, after all, have greater expertise particular to CSR, including specialized knowledge of a wide range of relevant international and local regulations, standards, and government policies and insight into political and industry trends.²¹ This is why MNC A turned to a prominent multinational PR agency and a local Chinese firm specializing in CSR solutions. The former provided much input for the project's clever design. The latter firm's strength is in offering networks to make project implementation possible, helping Multinational Company A actually connect with the Chinese Youth League, Ministry of Education, and universities through its staff's government contacts. Its network also supplied local NGO and media representatives that served as judges for the award project. In short, these organizations played quite an influential role in making certain local customizations of MNC A's CSR project likely and possible.

After the project was completed, MNC A managers turned to external organizations to aid evaluation of program outcomes. Namely, they sought feedback and recognition from awards and media in order to latch onto some concrete or standardized metrics of the value of abstract CSR efforts. For instance, the department also applied for a Corporate Social Responsibility Award in an annual competition administered by the

²¹ In this way, CSR management interestingly becomes commoditized management knowledge (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). And through commensuration, a process sociologists (Espeland and Sauder 2009) have written about, CSR is reified as a field.

American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai. Corporate communications managers also collected and counted favorable media reports on the program. Increasingly, Chinese media outlets have also been issuing CSR and sustainability-related awards, and MNC A won several. Evidence of all this favorable recognition was recorded and presented to satisfied company leaders who made plans to renew the program for the following year and perhaps even introduce it to operations in other countries.

Stepping back, a number of lessons emerge from this narrative. For one, it is clear that although Western multinationals may be “importing” explicit CSR practice to their Chinese operations, adaptation to local conditions is also occurring. When doing so, it seems they are not doing so alone but rather under considerable influence from others, including both other firms and other types of organizations. Ostensibly this shows that defining local CSR best practices and trends and the shaping of the CSR field in China might be appreciated as a collective effort. This, if true, has potentially meaningful implications. It suggests that firms like MNC A, even if and actually especially if they are approaching CSR through instrumental and integrative frames, can be encouraged to engage with CSR more and directed to do so in particular ways by external local signals and positive reinforcement. This case study suggests that as multinational firms view the China market with greater strategic attention, they attend closely to the opinions and interpretations of their corporate peers, consulting firms, the media, government, NGOs, and even college students. Indirectly this confirms the power of all these actors to contribute to the collective shaping of the CSR field.

Let us turn, though, to another player in this field who has been engaging with CSR quite differently.

Sino-Foreign Joint Venture (JVA): Corporate Responsibility with Chinese Characteristics

In contrast to MNC A, Joint Venture Company A does not have a centrally-coordinated policy or framework under the name of “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” per se, nor does it issue CSR or sustainability reports.²² Still, managers presented to me a variety of ways in which the company sees itself as an industry leader in responsible corporate practices in a variety of ways and overall a corporation fulfilling certain larger social responsibilities.

Since the firm does not have a central CSR framework managed by any particular department and does not have a corporate communications department, I first spoke with a senior executive responsible for planning and strategy. He shared his view of the major areas of firm responsibility and explained that these areas were managed by the operations department, the Human Resources (HR) department, and the company’s Chinese Communist Party Committee. Senior managers of these departments described the company’s corporate social responsibility from different perspectives. One thing they all conveyed was that the firm would be best described as having an implicit rather than explicit CSR model (Matten and Moon 2008).

In some ways, the firm does engage in certain practices that might at first be difficult to distinguish from those at other firms with explicit CSR. The senior executive explained that due to the firm’s core business needs, some general guidance from its parent companies, and expectations from investors, the company attends to excellence regarding safety, concern for

²² “企业社会责任” in Chinese. Most interviews for this company were conducted in Chinese, which I later translated (see bibliography).

employees, and “green logistics” a great deal (personal interview, June 4, 2013). Regarding the first and third, senior managers in operations explain how the firm strives for standards of safety and energy efficiency that meet international standards and by extension are at the cutting edge of the Chinese market. The firm’s COO traditionally comes from its European parent company and benchmarks the firm’s health and safety measures and efficiency levels against the parent company’s operations around the globe so that taking various international ISO standards into account. For health and safety, the department acknowledges that “there is a lot to do” to bring Chinese operations up towards this level but are making concerted efforts. For reducing the firm’s environmental footprint, they explain that the firm engages in a good deal of active innovation, such as a new more efficient truck design that its R&D team has patented in China. Both health and safety and energy footprint are tracked through various measures, and improvement goals and progress are constantly tracked. However, several managers at the firm still acknowledge that these activities “embedded” in the company’s core activities are not fundamentally theorized under the kind of “explicit CSR” model described by Matten and Moon (2008) (personal interview, June 4, 2013).

These differences are further apparent in the way managers describe the company’s engagement with other areas of stakeholder interaction often associated with explicit “CSR,” such as the external community. For instance, a European manager who was previously posted at the other global offices of the European parent company noted some differences between more explicit CSR models he observed there and at JV Company A in China. Parent company offices in other countries such as in South America and Africa engaged more extensively in community

outreach programs such as donating employee time, company funds, and company logistics services in partnerships with the UN and other NGOs, a type of programming that has become a well-known public face of explicit CSR, so much, he explained, that in places like Brazil, “to even work with some clients you had to first present them your CSR reports.” In the Chinese market, it appears that despite various responsible practices are “embedded in some initiatives of the company,” that type of explicit CSR is “not yet a recognized brand” (personal interview, June 9, 2013).

To borrow that language, a variety of “unbranded” CSR activities and in general an implicit way of presenting CSR is favored instead. How might we understand why the company has not adopted explicit CSR framing and popularly-accompanying practices such as community projects, despite trends in the global market and among its own parent companies?²³ Other managers I spoke with (who happened to be Chinese) presented interesting perspectives on this situation. Some acknowledged the firm may face less external institutional pressure than others to engage with explicit CSR. For instance, one manager speculated that JV Company A’s industry and nature as a business-to-business service provider expose it to less direct pressure from consumers and public opinion than business-to-consumer companies (personal interview, June 4, 2013). Another notes that the firm is not publicly-listed on any stock exchange and therefore is not affected by regulations requiring or encouraging CSR report publication as its Shanghai stock exchange-listed Chinese parent is (personal interview, June 4, 2013).

23 JV firm A’s Chinese parent company has recently adopted some trappings of explicit-CSR, issuing CSR reports and describing various environmental and social responsibility efforts in a dedicated section of its website (company website).

Still, it does appear that the firm's CSR model is the way it is not simply due to a lack of external pressure to "do more" to be socially responsible, but that cultural framing and path dependence may affect how many managers view the company as already doing so much. In keeping with an implicit view of "CSR," several managers emphasize the company's leading role in making social contributions on a broader, more holistic level: Chinese national development.

A senior HR manager emphasizes the way the firm has played an important role in national economic development by fundamentally developing the modern third-party logistics industry in China where there was none before. As a joint-venture with both global ties and local knowledge, the firm collects, translates, and synthesizes general modern management practices from around the world and different industries to the Chinese context and logistics industry. In this way, the firm also plays a role in the development and spread of modern business management in China.²⁴ Finally, he believes that the company plays a role in the development of China's more remote western regions when operations are spread to there (personal interview, June 4, 2013).

The Secretary of the company's Communist Party Committee²⁵ also had much to say about contributions to Chinese society made by the firm and her department. She functions like a bridge between workers and

24 This is especially so, the manager explains, since he has noticed many Chinese industrial firms like JV Company A, still prefer to hire college graduates majoring in the sciences and engineering rather than MBAs or business majors. Therefore much management training occurs inside companies like theirs.

25 A committee of Communist Party members has long been a mainstay organizational feature of Chinese State-Owned Enterprises, and that this firm feature exists in this Sino-foreign joint venture is certainly interesting.

management, a mix of social worker and mediator. She provides social services like family activities and elder care resources for blue collar workers and thereby gains their trust and gratitude. Her office also intervenes with HR decisions like hiring and firing, taking employee personal situations into account. She also channels concerns of workers and managers from one to another and will mediate disputes if necessary. On her watch, she proudly relates, there have been no “incidents” like employee protests or strikes; due to the relationships she carefully maintains with them, “they would be embarrassed to go on strike” and then come to ask her for help. In promoting a work environment in which employees feel cared for and satisfied, she believes this more “holistic” implicit approach to taking responsibility for employees has multiple forms of value. It benefits both employees and stable business operations while contributing to broader national imperatives like former President Hu Jintao’s famous “harmonious society” vision in a concrete way (personal interview, June 9, 2013).

In emphasizing the organization’s larger social responsibility contributions in building and maintaining modern and stable national institutions, the firm’s managers speak very much to an implicit model of CSR. To say this tendency to frame “CSR” in more holistic, implicit perspectives arises from an “inherently (collectivist) Chinese mindset” culturally would probably go too far.²⁶ However, it seems certainly to make sense to understand these patterns within the particular historical and institutional contexts these Chinese organizations have found themselves.

To conclude, what can be learned from these observations? One

26 After all, many Chinese firms have fluidly adapted towards adopting more explicit CSR practices as the institutional pressures upon them have changed, as evidenced by Joint Venture Company A’s parent company.

thing is that there can be a lot of culturally and institutionally sticky forces that make it make sense for an organization to develop in a path-dependent manner, maintaining an implicit CSR model even as different trends prevail globally and even among the parent companies the firm has close ties with. This is not to make any normative judgment about the value of it doing so or not doing so; having captured how the firm's European and Chinese managers present the virtues of both explicit and implicit CSR programs, it is clear that a debate over what kind of CSR model actually generates more social value is one that can have no objective answer. However, the issue raised about the diffusion of explicit CSR and of institutional transformation and continuity are interesting to attend to. Will more and more firms like this one, which is an industry leader with considerable local influence, eventually stick with one or eventually converge towards the other? What will be the social consequences? Whatever is the outcome, it should certainly be of consequence to CSR field development in China and attended to closely.

Conclusion

What have we learned from the two case studies presented above? This research project provided detailed views into some of the ways some influential Shanghai-based corporations with different characteristics have been engaging with CSR-related concepts and practices. It has showcased detailed examples of the nature and origins of how CSR has varied and what "explicit" and "implicit" models have looked like in real organizations. Meanwhile, it provided illustrations of the localization of global forces and actors shaping both institutional change and continuity. In sum, it has offered some cases that shed light upon sub-national *variation* in CSR and

processes involved in the *mediation* of these differences.

This paper discussed only two corporations, a multinational and a Sino-Foreign Joint Venture company, that also cannot be taken to represent all firms of these types. Still, what these case studies illustrate can inform both future practice and inquiry because what occurs within these individual organizations will be consequential to the development of CSR in China. Organizations are known to influence the practices of other organizations, especially if they are highly visible, and individual organizations can also significantly influence the overall construction of social fields (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Haveman 1993; DiMaggio 1991; Fligstein and McAdam 2011). Indeed, the case study reports have confirmed how organizations often look towards and learn from others and that it is not just the direct peers of corporations that hold powerful influence. My case studies have suggested that no organization or class of organizations is constructing the CSR field alone – it is a *collective effort* by both Western and Chinese importers, translators, and innovators; by not only firms, but consultants, the media, the public, and others they interact with and are influenced by.

The social significance of these findings is that while some parties might hold greater influence over the intensity and nature of corporate CSR engagement, everyone can make a difference, in that so many organizations and individuals can have some degree of potential to influence the way that the meaning of CSR and CSR trends are being defined. These are weighty implications for us to appreciate as global citizens.

Turning to issues of scholarly concern, this paper's case studies have emphasized how, with regards to globalization, importation of the global is often accompanied by adaptation with the local and that there

can be limits to convergence upon globally-popular explicit models of CSR in China even in organizations with a proliferation of global ties. The case studies of both firms have offered evidence for the side of scholarly debates arguing that while globalization has been an important reality, in the process there has not always been full convergence and is not automatically “making all the same” (Dobbin 2005).

Next, with regards to institutional change and continuity in the CSR field, this paper’s first case has emphasized how the nature of the evolving CSR field in China is being shaped not by corporations alone but also by other significant actors and social forces. Yet its second case has illustrated how at times in addition to strategic concerns, sticky institutional and cultural forces can prevent some organizations from interacting with the field of explicit CSR at all.

Both of these realities may be worthy of further scholarly dissection in dialogue with the literature on institutional change and on the evolution of social fields. Further examination of more case studies of different types of firms could allow us a better chance to more fully comprehend the dynamics of institutional change and continuity operating within them to shape different forms of CSR engagement. At the same time, we would enrich the institutionalist project of “conceptualizing CSR beyond the firm-level and within wider institutional settings” (Kang and Moon 2012:88) by examining the flow and shaping of CSR ideas and practices in other social sectors, from NGOs to institutions of business education to the media and government, beyond only corporations. In fact, it might even be fruitful to examine CSR development in China through the perspective of evolving social *fields* (DiMaggio 1991; Fligstein and McAdam 2011), attending to the “emergence of a collective

definition of a set of organizations” (DiMaggio 1991:267) and how field participants relate to one another. These lines of inquiry could help us better comprehend the complex processes through which concepts and practices of CSR flow from organization to organization, are changed within them, and subsequently affect other organizations in a wider field centered around CSR in China.

Suffice it to say, many puzzles remain about institutional change processes, globalization, and CSR development in China and globally. To conclude, then, my hope is that this project may inspire further research and knowledge expansion at the intersection of theory and practice so that we may continue to learn more about both economy and society, both China and the larger global context of our shared future.

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Sociologies of Empire: Concepts, Continuities and Questions¹

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Abstract

Empires are conceptually important and empirically topical entities, yet have remained peripheral to mainstream sociology. Why? After a conceptual dissection that traces the ambiguity and multiple meanings of the concept through sociology and several adjacent literatures, I contend that if empire is taken seriously as a concept, it troubles many of sociology's central categories—the state, society, the individual, and especially action—and methodologies. Empire is thus a crucial category “to think with.”

The aide [to President Bush] said that guys like [the author] were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality... That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality...” (Suskind 2004:51).

1 Note to Readers: This paper was originally delivered as a lecture to Berkeley's Sociology Graduate Student Association Working Paper Series in 2007. Its subject—sociology's relationship to “empire”—has two motivations. First, when I wrote the lecture, the US' self-understanding and role in the world seemed to be transforming in a way captured in the talk's epigram. Second, in 2007 I was just beginning my dissertation research on the English EastIndia Company and its administrative transformation in the second half of the 18th Century, so I was anxious to understand the analytic utility of thinking about empires.

Introduction

The indistinct form of empire has lurked at the edges of sociology all along, but today it is undeniably important. Despite long effacing its imperial history, the US is an increasingly avowed empire (Go 2007; Mann 2005). For example, while President George W. Bush famously said that the US has “no ambitions to empire” in the middle east, the journal *Foreign Policy*—even before 9/11 and the US presence in Iraq—contains a debate not about *whether* the US is an empire, but rather what kind of empire it should be (Garten 2003; Jervis 2003; Kagan 1998; Maynes 1998; Reinares 2002).

But although empire is manifestly important today, it is surprisingly under-analyzed as a sociological category. Though classical sociologists thought empire influenced the development of early capitalism and the foundation of modern political forms, they usually assigned it only a supporting role (Connell 1997). And aside from a few examples (Adams 1994, 1996; Go 2000, 2004; Harvey 2003; Mann 2005; Steinmetz 2005a, 2006, 2007), the idea of empire today lies almost completely outside of sociology. To give some crude evidence, in *Lessons of Empire* (2006), an effort by the SSRC to inform US actions abroad edited by Craig Calhoun, only four of the 19 contributors were sociologists. Moreover, there are no *Annual Review* pieces on the concept or its cognates (but see Go 2009 2013; Pitts 2010).

So in this paper I want to set out some preliminary thoughts on this subject. I will do two things. First, I will review how scholars from a number of disciplines—sociology, history, political science, economics, and cultural studies—have thought about empire. I will claim that the “family resemblance” of the term clusters in a three-by-three matrix.

Second, I will speculate about why empire might have heretofore

been so peripheral in sociology. Part of the reason, I will argue, is that empire is best taken as a hybrid process, rather than a static entity. By consequence, given American sociology's postwar positivist consensus (Steinmetz 2005b), empire has been comparatively downplayed because it troubles historical-sociological methodology and the categories that found different sociological sub-disciplines: the state, society, identity, and action. In short, if the dominant mode of investigation in US sociology is reductive and analytical, the ambiguity and hybridity of empires (whether modern or not) forces us to take a holistic and processual view.

Empire As a Concept In and Around Sociology

What do people mean when they speak of empire? Let's start with a distinction. Empire is such a politically charged term that three meanings stand in sharp relief:

- what empirical and analytic meaning the term has among scholars;
- what “work” the term does as it leaves the confines of the academy and influences elite and popular opinion and discourse;
- and what meaning the term has in everyday and “popular” usage.

Of course all three of these levels are interlinked—scholarly analysis is deeply influenced by popular use and scholarly understandings are taken up outside of academic walls—but for the purposes of this paper I'd like to concentrate on the first aspect: the analytic and empirical meaning of empire for scholars and in particular sociologists.

Let me also introduce a word of semantic warning: saying “empire” rather than “imperialism” or “colonialism” is clunky. However,

both of the latter terms have technical meanings in the literature. “Empire” (with a capital “E”) has even been claimed (Hardt and Negri 2000). So until something better occurs, I will use “empire” to refer to *the process of domination beyond the boundaries of a given polity*. Thus I distinguish “empire” and “imperial” from “imperialism” and “imperialist.”²

We can usefully divide up analyses of empire based on whether the empire’s “center stage” is located in the metropole (a “metrocentric” view), the colony (a “pericentric” one), or somewhere in between (a “systemic” perspective); and whether analyses of its dynamics use a mainly economic, political, or cultural vocabulary. (See Table 1.)³

Table 1: Sociologies of Empire.

		<u>Analytic Locus</u>		
		<i>Metrocentric</i>	<i>Pericentric</i>	<i>Systemic</i>
	<i>Economic</i>	Hobson, Lenin	Robinson & Gallagher	Arrighi, North
<u>Idiom</u>	<i>Political</i>	Schumpeter	Robinson	Doyle
	<i>Cultural</i>	Colley	Cohn	Go, Stoller

2 This definition roughly follows Cooper’s (though notice I drop the supporting clause): “We can set out a family description of *empire*, if not a precise definition: a political unit that is large, expansionist (or with memories of an expansionist past), and which reproduces differentiation and inequality among people it incorporates” (2005:26–27).

3 The row names in Table 1 are from Doyle (1986:29).

Economic. The economic approach investigates empires' connections to the rise, stabilization, and perpetuation of capitalism. Though empire had been an important concern for many theorists as early as the enlightenment (Semmel 1993),⁴ analyses of the relationship—what critics of this perspective would argue amounts to an identity—between empire and capitalism intensified in the late 19th century as European powers scrambled to partition the rest of the world, and particularly Africa, among themselves (Wolfe 1997:388).

Hobson (1902) mounted an early attempt to deal with the economic causes of imperialism. He thought empires formed primarily because of economic struggles in the metropole. Perturbed by the Boer War, Hobson argued that metropolitan economies required outlets for their surplus capital generated by over-saving. His solution—which marked him as a “liberal socialist” rather than a radical—was to reform the capitalist system by using surplus capital for domestic wages to stimulate consumption. Hobson's views were radicalized by Lenin (1939), however, who argued that empires' efforts to secure territory in particular followed from states' competitive efforts to partition the third world for monopoly capitalism.⁵ By this view, then, empire is an emanation of power for a capitalist core, as economies seek outlets for their investment and politically subordinate other societies to “open” them economically.

4 For one of the classic Enlightenment statements arguing for the disentangling of empire from commerce, see Adam Smith's commentary on Britain's various chartered companies, but especially the English East India Company (1976:Vol. II, Book 5, Ch.1).

5 There is good reason to be very suspicious of the scope conditions of the “Hobson-Lenin” thesis of imperialism and whether it applies substantially any earlier than 1880 or so. There is significant evidence that both Hobson and Lenin were fundamentally concerned with contemporary (i.e., early twentieth century) conditions, and were not analyzing empire *tout court* (Etherington 1982; Stokes 1969).

Shifting from the metrocentric to the pericentric locus of economic arguments, we move from what is happening in the “core” to economic action in the periphery. Robinson and Gallagher contributed a seminal article to this debate and extended its temporal horizon, suggesting a broad continuity for British imperial policy throughout the nineteenth century encompassing both its “anti-imperial,” free trade phases and imperial activities at the close of the 19th century. They suggested that imperialism was not only represented by attempted political acquisition of territory for monopoly capital; it also included efforts to “open up” markets for *informal* imperialism through economic interaction. By this formulation, territorialization occurs only “when and where informal political means failed to provide the framework of security for British enterprise” (1953:13). Empire in the formal, territorial sense is thus a strategy of last resort. Robinson and Gallagher’s approach was *pericentric* in that the economic imperatives that drove territorialization and domination were not necessarily those of the metropole—at least not directly. Instead, concern for stabilizing adjacent colonial markets often drove the expansion of empire. So, in this view, empires are a sort of self-generating mechanism by which local elites—colonial or indigenous—seek to stabilize markets by subordinating surrounding societies first through informal, and if necessary by formal, political and military force.

If Hobson and Lenin treat the economic imperatives for empire as flowing from the metropole, and Robinson and Gallagher treat them as extending from local imperatives, a broad class of economic thinkers have concentrated on the *systemic* qualities of empire. This literature has two major arms: world-systems theory, which explains imperial relationships in terms of societies’ positions in a global division of labor, or world-

system; and neoinstitutional economic history, which emphasizes the relation between organizational forms like Mercantile Trading Companies and lowered “transaction costs.”

Though first advanced by Wallerstein (2011), the most mature world-systems perspective on empire is surely Arrighi’s *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994). The world-systems approach can be summarized by three propositions: (a) relations between different states and actors constitute a variable and dynamic world-system in which the position of a given state largely determines its characteristics; (b) this world system experiences broad phases of accumulation with different hegemonic centers over time; (c) each of these centers is characterized by an overall logic of territorial (regulated) or nonterritorial (deregulated) forms of imperial control. That is, Genoese hegemony was relatively less regulated than medieval guilds; Dutch hegemony was relatively more regulated; British “free-trade” imperialism was comparatively laissez-faire; and the American vertically integrated firm depended again on regulation.

But while world-systems theory concentrates on systemic relations of the global economy as exploitative relations of power, another extensive literature explores the economic institutions of empire—minus the empire! That is to say, these systemic economic approaches attempt to explain the “rise of the west” to economic (and consequently political, military, and social) hegemony through the development of organizations—like mercantile trading companies—and institutions—like contract law—which lowered “transaction costs,” hence making economic exchange over long distances more efficient. Note that this literature has a different object of explanation than the world-systems approach (or, for that matter, the rest of the economic approaches to empire). Instead of asking about why

empire takes a particular form, this approach investigates the reasons for rapid economic growth in Europe. There is still an economic system which different states and societies participate in, but the question of how political and economic power are amalgamated together into another form of cost to be accounted for; gaining and managing an empire intervenes—in terms of “fixed costs”—as only an exogenous condition for the growth of the economy (North 1991:34–5; see also Erikson and Bearman 2006).

Political. If the economic study of empire emphasizes the development of capitalism and commerce, political approaches concentrate on empire’s interactions with the state and polity. In this school of thought, imperialism is defined as “the objectless disposition on the part of a state to unlimited forcible expansion” (Schumpeter 1991:143).

In the *metropolitan* genre of this approach, imperialism—again, with the main focus being on the late 19th and 20th centuries—is an expression of “extreme nationalism” and an atavistic response by displaced metropolitan political elites (Mommsen 1980:83; Schumpeter 1991). That is, domestically threatened aristocratic hold-overs used the colonies as areas to rejuvenate eclipsed forms of domination. Empire, by this view, is also an attempt to stabilize core class relations by extruding conflict, and is therefore densely linked to nationalism. (We might call this approach the “sandbox” theory: since metropolitan rulers can no longer exploit and dominate subordinate classes at home, they do so in the colonies. European classes, meanwhile, are duped—through jingoism and nationalism—into coming along for the ride.)

This focus, of course, is much more on explaining “metropolitan” outcomes than talking about what happens in the colonies *per se*. But

there is another genre of political thinking which tries to explain empire in a very similar way to the pericentric economic approach. By this view, offered by Robinson, the only way to account for changes that take place in particular colonies is to construct a framework that equally emphasizes metropolitan imperatives *and* local political exigencies (Robinson 1986:273). Thus the force of empire's expansion and form is located firmly in the local politics of peripheral states (see, e.g., Comaroff 1989; Wilson 2011). (Note also how this approach breaks down the notion that there is a single, "national" form of empire, as in a "British," "French," or "Japanese" way of dominating other societies.)

If the metrocentric political perspective emphasizes the struggles of metropolitan elites, and the pericentric perspective concentrates on the collaboration and struggle between colonial administrators and local elites, the systemic version of the political view explains imperial expansion and the form it takes in terms of international relations among states. In this perspective, which treats states as more or less rational actors, imperial expansion occurs as the competition among strong states begins to spill into peripheral, weak states, where political domination is seen as a necessary condition for the perpetuation of political survival. By this view, then, empires territorialize as they view strategic threats in the periphery and attempt to monopolize resources in colonies to the detriment of their rivals (Doyle 1986:26–30).

So, in sum, in the political view empire is (surprise!) about politics. But it differs in its account of *which* politics: between metropolitan elites and their subordinate classes at home, between colonial administrators and indigenous elites, or among states in a system of international relations.

Cultural. Perhaps the most diffuse school—and the one where the distinctions between metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic are least clear—attempts to understand colonialism broadly as a project about meaning and knowledge. The emphasis is on how imperialism refashioned the categories of possible being and action throughout the world. Within empire’s ambit, the discourses of law, statecraft, and scientific knowledge reformed the material world in the image of western rationalism and positive science while extruding and opposing the “colonial other” as a dark, perverse, and contrapuntal figure.⁶

Most of the studies that focuses on the epistemic or discursive aspects of empire are thus resolutely systemic in their empirical emphasis. Empires constituted a set of symbols and practices that spanned metropole and colony and linked the two. For example, Stoler (2002) explores the ways that sexuality and intimacy in a colonial context was a point of struggle in maintaining a European identity for Dutch colonists in Java.⁷ And yet, there are many studies in this genre which tend to focus more on colony or metropole, depending on the outcomes they are trying to explain. For example, Colley (1992) emphasizes how imperial imagery and concerns were crucial for the forging of the metropolitan British nation, while Goswami (2004) discusses how British colonial practices in India, linked to broad shifts in the world economy, were a crucial precondition for integrating the nascent Indian nation.⁸

6 For a good overview of this terrain, see Cooper and Stoler (1997).

7 See also Hall (2002) for a study of British colonialism with similar stakes.

8 Of course, Goswami’s focus on the world economy means that she could be legitimately placed in the “economic” section of this review, but her focus on the imagination of an Indian national space makes her placement here equally appropriate.

This literature, as we can well see, is vast. Let me close this review by making an observation that I will flesh out in the rest of the paper: the empirical and analytic focus of most of these literatures is on the “high” imperial period—spanning, roughly, the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th. (It is instructive that the principal exception—the “transaction costs” literature from economic history—is the least “imperial” of all!) But the high imperial moment was and is actually an exceptional moment for empire. Indeed, its early modern versions were far more hybrid, ambiguous, and multiplex than they became as hierarchies of racial exclusion and economic exploitation hardened in the modern era.⁹ I think that if we do this—if we really take seriously not just the moments of imperial hegemony that we easily recognize today, but also the moments when empire was a far more ambiguous and chaotic process—then empire itself becomes something more than just one political form to be considered among others. What happens to sociological concepts and methods if we do this?

Empire as a Method: Process, Comparison and Depth Realism

Now, before turning from what people have thought empire is to how it specifically poses challenges for sociological categories, let me draw a distinction that I hope will be helpful. Let’s distinguish between two kinds of concepts: types and processes. *Types* are variables with attributes (Abbott 1988); they are things that categorize empirical reality into different sorts. Using concepts as *types* in analysis means thinking about how two types correlate or not, and then trying to suggest a plausible mechanism to

⁹ Barkey (2008) offers a good—and exceptional—take on this point in her analysis of the Ottoman empire.

account for that correlation. A good example—that I will discuss at greater length below—is “the state”; states are an overall type, and then take on different attributes, like being modern or pre-modern, bureaucratic or patrimonial, capitalist or socialist. *Processes*, on the other hand, are modes of acting over time. Using concepts as *processes* means analytically tracing sequences of events over time and through social space. A good example of a process is class or group formation (see, e.g., Thompson (1966:11) and his classic formulation of the contrast).

How does this distinction challenge the methods sociologists—and historical sociologists in particular—like to use? The problem presented by the sheer number of different things that the term empire captures is that it becomes difficult to compare different manifestations of empire. In other words, in what sense is the Roman Empire, or, say, modern Dutch colonialism in Java similar to the US’s presence in Iraq? This kind of comparison wouldn’t make much sense given Millian analysis, the standby of marcosociology in general, and historical sociology in particular. In short, how do you study something that seems to crop up everywhere, but whose manifestations often look radically different from one another?

The first step is one I have already implied by my distinction above: stop thinking of empire as a thing and start thinking of it as a process. The second step is to talk about how this process might be drawn into social-scientific, empirical analysis. Luckily, this next step has already been taken for me by Gorski (2004), Steinmetz (1998, 2004), and Somers (1998), each of whom develop Bhaskar’s “critical realism” (Bhaskar 2008; Collier 1994). This mode of analysis sees causal processes as “real” in the sense that they’re not just analytic abstractions, but they generate empirical manifestations that depend on how they interact with other processes and conjunctions of

events. The work of empirical analysis, therefore, is to determine whether a particular process is salient—whether it affects a given outcome—and if so how the outcome was causally affected by the process in question. These processes, moreover, can exist at different “depths” and manifest outcomes at different rates, which means that the same process operating in two different places can have radically different outcomes.¹⁰

So, in short, empires issue methodological challenges to the ways sociologists are used comparing things and thinking about causality. Instead of privileging an empiricist concern with obvious manifestations and assuming that they are similar “types,” the study of empire—which, remember, I have defined as *the process of domination beyond the boundaries of a given polity*—emphasizes the ways empire touches or does not touch different aspects of social life and manifests in different empirical outcomes.

Empire as a Troubling Category for Sociology

Now, having talked a little about modes of analysis, let me try to show how empire challenges some of the categories sociologists—and particularly macro- and historical sociologists—frequently use. How do empires, empirically throughout history, but especially their early modern, hybrid, ambiguous manifestations, and conceptually, as causal processes rather than static types, force us to rethink sociological concepts?

10 Interestingly, a variant of this perspective has been adopted most prominently in some kinds of heterodox comparative politics under the rubric of “historical institutionalism” and under the methodological labels of “multi-” and “equifinal” outcomes (see George and Bennett 2005:esp Ch. 8; Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Pierson 2011). For an excellent recent example of this mode of analysis applied to early modern European patrimonialism, see Adams (2007).

The State. Focusing on empires shows the muddled, polyglot, and organizationally multiplex nature of the state. The macrosociological orthodoxy is to assume the modern, centralized, bureaucratic state and then asked how it emerged—or, in some cases, failed to emerge—in the cloistered confines of western Europe.

Taking empires as a serious empirical part of the story of state formation would mean studying how the reach of states beyond their borders and imperial activities during the period of intense interstate competition in western Europe affected their trajectories and survival. As states were developing, they were, of course, embedded in networks of accumulation, cost, information, and power that spanned far beyond their territorial borders. And yet Tilly devotes only four pages of attention to this problem and dismisses it out of hand (Tilly 1992:91–94).

Bet even *within* their nominal territorial borders, the analytic focus on empire helps us rethink the state. After all, empires can attempt domination over social, and not just physical, space. This helps us makes sense of Skocpol's intriguing description of old regime, pre-revolutionary states as "imperial" (1979:47–48). What does she mean? I think she means that old regime states sat "on top of societies" and had limited infrastructural reaches "downwards" into everyday life (Mann 1986). States, in short, had to (and still must) compete with other organizations, even in the territory they controlled. But the setup of *States and Social Revolutions* avoids the problem of accounting for this transformation; modern states are coherent, so modernity means coherence, and hence becoming modern means becoming centralized and coherent.

Thus, thinking "imperially" about states means asking a different set of questions than how a given type of state emerged: (1) how do states

exert power over societies (Weber 1976)?; (2) how do states project their symbolic coherence (Loveman 2005)?; (3) why did the form of the coherent, national state emerge as an option to be replicated and fostered in the contemporary world (Meyer et al. 1997)? How does the state change—as an organization or organizations—from one player among many to the predominant “caging” of forces in the modern world (Mann 1993)?

Society. Through the manifest importance of hybridity, assimilation, migration, and the gap between symbolic and practical boundaries for empires, just what a “society” is also becomes problematic. This is a somewhat more abstract point than about states, but put most simply: studying empires means we cannot reify “society.” Instead we must take hybridity and the “rule of difference” seriously, as Go, Cooper and Steinmetz do, while holding the full temporal scope of empire in view—that is, taking seriously all the different kinds of empires that have existed over time. If we do so, we see that the boundaries between colony and metropolitan societies were not always hard-and-fast, and that making them even *appear* to be so took herculean institutional work.

As with the state, one can envision the kinds of questions generated by thinking imperially about society: (1) what are the practical effects of the imagery of a bounded, coherent “society” (Mitchell 1988, 1999)?; (2) what are the actual, empirical boundaries of a society—when, if at all, is the term of analytic use (Wyrzten 2011)?; (3) how does hybridity—being between two “societies”—become politically, culturally, and socially contentious, rather than existing simply the natural state of things (Bhabha 1984)?

Identity. Empire as a process also troubles identity. Here I am mostly

thinking of Cooper and Brubaker's work on the subject (2000), wherein they criticize the conflation of "identitarian" politics with analytic categories, resulting in an often reified and essentialized conception of identity—thought of as something people possess or are inscribed with—even when qualified with obligatory constructionist gestures. Of course, identities appear to have been quite solid indeed in empire when highly crystallized during the late 19th to mid 20th centuries. But the key, once again, is to take seriously the full scope of empire; this means that you have to explain not only the period of highly salient, meaningful identities, but how they arose from seemingly blurred, inchoate structures. Further, the closer we look, even at the "high" imperial period, the more it appears that identity was an accomplishment, something that was constantly being activated, reinforced, and reinvented, rather than a quality that groups possessed. "Hard" identities, by this view, were a possibility in empires, but actually fairly rare.

Action. Finally, in discussing each of these three concepts, I have repeatedly stressed the uncertainty of the environments in which empires operate and the contingency of their organizational structures, the fuzziness of their boundaries, and the fluidity of the identities of the people in them. But if we are to take this set of questions seriously, we need an account of how action takes place in such a set of structures.

In sociology, action is generally understood in two ways. Either people behave in terms of some kind of universal model—they are rational, whether in bounded, limited, or partial form—or they follow a deductive model of cultural action (as criticized by Swidler in *Talk of Love* (2003)) whereby their action can be deduced by their personal beliefs, the

norms of an organization, or some other source. (This latter model is often referred to as executing “scripts.”)

In either of these two models, people are striving for goals—whether universal and “rational” or cultural—that don’t change much over time. Following Biernacki (2005) and Joas (1996), I think this is an understanding that needs to be reversed to properly understand the emergence of “modern” empires. Essentially, the early imperial period especially was one of intense uncertainty and “creative” action—in the sense that people’s and organizations’ goals sometimes changed quite radically as a result of their actions. It may sound somewhat tautological, but basically what I am trying to say is that empire gives us a massive empirical source to understand how goals and means to achieving them emerged together out of uncertain and ambiguous situations. Rather than assuming political, cultural, or economic goals before we begin study—that is, instead of assuming an end and then accounting for our arrival at it—we need to forefront how the ends of empire emerged from the process of people and organizations undertaking—and resisting—imperial action.

For the Sociology of Empire

My central argument can be summarized simply: if you are interested in investigating the processual nature of social life, the paradoxical nature of the state, the fuzzy boundaries of “society,” the ways that action takes place under conditions of uncertainty, or the methodological problems inherent in sociological comparison, studying empire is a good place to start. Empires are troubling empirically and theoretically—how can something that seems like the same thing have had such radically divergent manifestations and consequences? How

can empires have been, at different times, fluid and static; territorial and diffuse; differentiating and assimilating; seemingly monolithic and organizationally incoherent? Instead of shoehorning them into other sociological types that are more comfortable, perhaps we ought to revel in empires' slipperiness and ambiguity, especially considering their renewed contemporary importance.

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