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Historical Sociology of International Relations

International relations theorists are increasingly turning to historical sociology as a means both of broadening and refining their discipline, and of critiquing mainstream thinking. Nevertheless, there is still only a rudimentary understanding of what historical sociology is and what it can offer the subject. This book acts as a *manifesto* for historical sociology, considering a range of issues, including accounts of the major variants of historical sociology; how they can be applied to international relations; why international relations theorists should engage with these approaches; and how historical sociological insight can enhance and re-configure the study of international relations. In addition to describing the seven major approaches – neo-Weberianism, constructivism, critical historical materialism, critical theory, postmodernism, structural realism and world systems theory – the volume’s introductory and concluding chapters set out in detail an approach and research agenda that revolve around what the editors call ‘world sociology’.

STEPHEN HOBDEN is Lecturer in the Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth. He is the author of *International Relations and Historical Sociology*.

JOHN M. HOBSON is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Sydney. His publications include *The State and International Relations* (2000), *The Wealth of States: A Comparative Sociology of International Economic and Political Change* (1997) and *States and Economic Development* (1995; co-authored with Linda Weiss).

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Contributors

MICHAEL BARNETT is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin.

BARRY BUZAN is Professor of International Relations at the University of Westminster, London.

A. CLAIRE CUTLER is an Associate Professor at the University of Victoria.

BARRY K. GILLS is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Newcastle.

FRED HALLIDAY is Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics.

STEPHEN HOBDEN is a Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

JOHN M. HOBSON is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Sydney.

ANDREW LINKLATER is Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

RICHARD LITTLE is Professor of International Relations at the University of Bristol.

CHRISTIAN REUS-SMIT is a Senior Fellow, Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University.

MARTIN SHAW is Professor of International Relations at the University of Sussex.

STEVE SMITH is Professor of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Preface and acknowledgements

The idea for this book came in 1997, when Steve Hobden and John Hobson were carrying on an e-mail discussion about historical sociology and international relations. We were struck by just how many books were currently emerging, and indeed were about to be published, in this new and exciting area. It seemed that historical sociology was undergoing something of a 'renaissance', with not only new work being undertaken, but also a whole range of genuinely innovative approaches suddenly emerging. Indeed, it was apparent that at least seven major historical sociological approaches of international relations had appeared by the end of the 1990s. And yet, what particularly struck us was that while many international relations scholars were beginning to talk and think about drawing on historical sociology, not only was there little appreciation in the wider international relations community of just *how far* this renaissance had come, but equally, there was, in general, little understanding of what historical sociology has to offer international relations. It seemed to us that this was not a function of a lack of interest, given that references to historical sociology are frequently made in the general literature. Rather, it was due in part to the fact that an adequate summary did not then exist of the various approaches on offer; a summary which also needed to explain how they could be applied to international relations, and with what effects. In the light of this, it seemed to us a particularly opportune time to take stock of this 'renaissance'. We, therefore, planned to produce an edited volume which would showcase to a wider audience not only what these new approaches comprise, but equally, what they have to offer, how they can be applied to the study of international relations, and why we believe that international relations theorists can benefit from such an engagement. Additionally we hoped to demonstrate how such insights could not only enhance, but also reconfigure, the discipline. The immediate question then was: how best to achieve this?

We decided that it would be best to hold a conference, in which we would ask some of the leading scholars who are working at the interface of these two disciplines to contribute to this project in a single forum.

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All but one of the chapters in this volume were first presented at that conference, which was held in Aberystwyth in the summer of 1999. We were particularly fortunate that the majority of the people whom we had singled out as potential contributors agreed to come along and contribute a paper.

We were to find that we would be involved in no less than four intensive stages of intellectual and organisational planning. First, having constructed an intellectual outline of the whole project, we wrote to each of our contributors and specified a particular area that we wanted them to write on, in order to ensure consistency. We also specified the purpose of the conference, and asked them to think about this when writing their papers. Second, we specified a strict deadline for the ‘first-draft’ papers to arrive, so that we could then circulate them to all the other paper-givers in advance of the conference. We then carefully read each of the papers and made fairly detailed comments that we wanted them to consider when rewriting them after the conference (all of which were discussed individually with each of the paper-givers at the conference). Third, of course, was the conference itself, which was, we believe, very successful, not just in terms of the quality of discussion, but also for its intellectually constructive atmosphere. We were also particularly pleased that all of the paper-givers had kept to our requested specifications. We then specified a strict deadline for the final versions to be submitted. Finally we entered a fourth stage in which we spent almost six months both formatting and editing the papers to make them into one fluent book, as well as writing our introductions and conclusion – with the latter drawing all of the approaches laid out in this volume into one single school, that we label ‘world sociology’.

In agreeing to host and fund the bulk of the conference we owe a considerable debt both to the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth and to Professor Steve Smith (who was then head of department, and is now the university’s Pro-Vice Chancellor). We would like in particular, therefore, to thank Steve Smith for all the support, which, with his usual unceasing enthusiasm, he has given to the project. For all their assistance and advice during the planning phases of the conference, we would also like to express our gratitude to Caroline Haste, the department’s administrator, Elaine Lowe, the departmental secretary, and Professor Colin McInnes, the Director of Research.

This is also our opportunity to thank all the contributors to the volume, both for agreeing to take part in the conference and for providing their papers and subsequent chapters in such a timely fashion. We would also like to say a special ‘thank you’ to Claire Cutler who agreed subsequently to the conference to contribute a chapter on neo-Gramscian historical

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sociology. We thank the various members of staff and graduate students both from Aberystwyth and from elsewhere who attended the conference; their input added enormously to the intellectual success of the meeting, as well as to its conviviality.

We also would like to thank the team at Cambridge University Press for their involvement in getting the manuscript into print. The extensive comments and constructive suggestions from the two CUP reviewers contributed enormously to strengthening the volume, and we have sought to accommodate their suggestions wherever possible. Finally, we would like to acknowledge our debt to John Haslam, our commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press, for all his support, advice and characteristic efficiency throughout.

Aberystwyth and Sydney

STEPHEN HOBDEN AND
JOHN M. HOBSON