

World Society and the Nation-State¹

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The authors analyze the nation-state as a worldwide institution constructed by worldwide cultural and associational processes, developing four main topics: (1) properties of nation-states that result from their exogenously driven construction, including isomorphism, decoupling, and expansive structuration; (2) processes by which rationalistic world culture affects national states; (3) characteristics of world society that enhance the impact of world culture on national states and societies, including conditions favoring the diffusion of world models, expansion of world-level associations, and rationalized scientific and professional authority; (4) dynamic features of world culture and society that generate expansion, conflict, and change, especially the statelessness of world society, legitimation of multiple levels of rationalized actors, and internal inconsistencies and contradictions.

This essay reviews arguments and evidence concerning the following proposition: *Many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and*

¹ Work on this article was facilitated by funds provided by the Sovereignty Project of the Institute for International Studies, Stanford University. Helpful comments were provided by many colleagues, including Neil Fligstein, Steve Krasner, Ron Jepperson, Walter Powell, participants in Stanford's Comparative Workshop, and seminar participants at Cornell, Columbia, Northwestern, and Princeton Universities. We also thank several *AJS* referees. Some ideas here are developed from earlier work in Thomas et al. (1987) and Meyer (1994). Direct correspondence to John W. Meyer, Department of Sociology, Stanford University, Building 12, Room 160, Stanford, California 94305-2047.

associational processes. These models and the purposes they reflect (e.g., equality, socioeconomic progress, human development) are highly rationalized, articulated, and often surprisingly consensual. Worldwide models define and legitimate agendas for local action, shaping the structures and policies of nation-states and other national and local actors in virtually all of the domains of rationalized social life—business, politics, education, medicine, science, even the family and religion. The institutionalization of world models helps explain many puzzling features of contemporary national societies, such as structural isomorphism in the face of enormous differences in resources and traditions, ritualized and rather loosely coupled organizational efforts, and elaborate structuration to serve purposes that are largely of exogenous origins. World models have long been in operation as shapers of states and societies, but they have become especially important in the postwar era as the cultural and organizational development of world society has intensified at an unprecedented rate.

The operation of world society through peculiarly cultural and associational processes depends heavily on its statelessness. The almost feudal character of parcelized legal-rational sovereignty in the world (Meyer 1980) has the seemingly paradoxical result of diminishing the causal importance of the organized hierarchies of power and interests celebrated in most “realist” social scientific theories. The statelessness of world society also explains, in good measure, the lack of attention of the social sciences to the coherence and impact of world society’s cultural and associational properties. Despite Tocqueville’s ([1836] 1966) well-known analysis of the importance of cultural and associational life in the nearly stateless American society of the 1830s, the social sciences are more than a little reluctant to acknowledge patterns of influence and conformity that cannot be explained solely as matters of power relations or functional rationality. This reluctance is most acute with respect to global development. Our effort here represents, we hope, a partial corrective for it.

We are trying to account for a world whose societies, organized as nation-states, are structurally similar in many unexpected dimensions and change in unexpectedly similar ways. A hypothetical example may be useful to illustrate our arguments, and we shall carry the example throughout the essay. If an unknown society were “discovered” on a previously unknown island, it is clear that many changes would occur. A government would soon form, looking something like a modern state with many of the usual ministries and agencies. Official recognition by other states and admission to the United Nations would ensue. The society would be analyzed as an economy, with standard types of data, organizations, and policies for domestic and international transactions. Its people would be formally reorganized as citizens with many familiar rights, while certain categories of citizens—children, the elderly, the poor—would be granted

special protection. Standard forms of discrimination, especially ethnic and gender based, would be discovered and decried. The population would be counted and classified in ways specified by world census models. Modern educational, medical, scientific, and family law institutions would be developed. All this would happen more rapidly, and with greater penetration to the level of daily life, in the present day than at any earlier time because world models applicable to the island society are more highly codified and publicized than ever before. Moreover, world-society organizations devoted to educating and advising the islanders about the models' importance and utility are more numerous and active than ever.

What would be unlikely to happen is also clear. Theological disputes about whether the newly discovered *Indios* had souls or were part of the general human moral order would be rare. There would be little by way of an imperial rush to colonize the island. Few would argue that the natives needed only modest citizenship or human rights or that they would best be educated by but a few years of vocational training.

Thus, without knowing anything about the history, culture, practices, or traditions that obtained in this previously unknown society, we could forecast many changes that, upon "discovery," would descend on the island under the general rubric of "development." Our forecast would be imprecise because of the complexity of the interplay among various world models and local traditions, but the likely range of outcomes would be quite limited. We can identify the range of possibilities by using the institutionalist theoretical perspective underlying the analysis in this essay to interpret what has already happened to practically all of the societies of the world after their discovery and incorporation into world society.

Our institutionalist perspective makes predictions somewhat at variance with those of three more established theoretical approaches to world society and the nation-state (for reviews, see Powell and DiMaggio [1991], Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein [1996], and Finnemore [1996b]). In multivariate analyses of properties of nation-states, researchers would inevitably consider hypotheses from all four perspectives. But none of the prevailing theories would effectively predict many of the profound social and organizational changes that would occur on our hypothetical island, not least because they do not adequately consider the cultural processes involved.

Microrealist analyses, dominant in the field of international relations under the banner of neorealism, assume that the nation-state is a natural, purposive, and rational actor in an essentially anarchic world (Waltz 1979; Gilpin 1981). State action reflects inherent needs and interests; culture is largely irrelevant, though it may be invoked to explain particular, often historically rooted patterns of policy or behavior. In any case, culture is only local or national, not global. Much contemporary theory about glob-

alization has this microrealist character, stressing a conception of world society as involving nothing more than dense networks of transactions and interdependence (Jacobson 1979) among autonomous nation-state actors. Variants like neoliberalism (Keohane 1986) and regime theory (Krasner 1983) pay attention to institutional frameworks created by states that, once in place, act as constraints on state action, but they rely on microeconomic realist arguments to explain the emergence of institutions and their durability. Power and interests come first, leaving little room for culture.

Partly in reaction to microrealism, macrorealist arguments such as world-system theory (Wallerstein 1974; Chase-Dunn 1989) and state-competition theory (Tilly 1992; Skocpol 1979) see the nation-state as the creature of worldwide systems of economic or political power, exchange, and competition. The nation-state is less a bounded actor, more the occupant of a role defined by world economic and political/military competition. Culture, most often seen as self-serving hegemonic ideology or repressive false consciousness, is of only marginal interest; money and force, power and interests, are the engines of global change. World-system theory develops this line of thought most consistently: The dynamism of the world economy and state system depend greatly on the absence of centralized world authority (a world state or empire), and global culture is essentially a by-product of hegemony with no causal significance in its own right (Chase-Dunn 1989).

The third perspective, also developed partly in response to microrealism, adopts a microphenomenological approach that conceptualizes the nation-state as the product of national cultural and interpretive systems. The state is embedded in institutions whose cultural character matters, but these institutions reflect world processes only indirectly or not at all. Simple arguments (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963) are content to give a nod to local political culture as background material, while more complex versions (March and Olsen 1989; March 1988) see cultural interpretation and purposive action as simultaneously shaping one another. Application of this perspective to global cultural processes could be fruitful, but most discussions extending this line of thought to the world level (e.g., Sklair 1991; Mattelart 1983) treat culture superficially, as flows of relatively arbitrary, expressive Western tastes in media products, fashion, art, or fast foods (Ritzer 1996). They fail to appreciate sufficiently the substantive significance of culture and its organizational presence in world society.

Our own perspective, macrophenomenological in orientation, builds on contemporary sociological institutionalism (Thomas et al. 1987; Powell and DiMaggio 1991). We see the nation-state as culturally constructed and embedded rather than as the unanalyzed rational actor depicted by realists (Meyer 1997). We find that the culture involved is substantially organized on a worldwide basis, not simply built up from local circum-

stances and history (Thomas et al. 1987; Meyer 1980). We see such transnational forces at work throughout Western history, but we argue that particular features and processes characteristic of world society since World War II have greatly enhanced the impact of world-institutional development on nation-states.

Below, we further develop this theoretical background. Then we turn to our causal argument, which is organized in four sections: (1) distinctive properties of the nation-state as constructed in world culture; (2) processes operating at the world-society level that produce and shape nation-states; (3) features of world society that enhance the impact of world culture on national states and societies; and (4) dynamics of world society, especially global cultural processes that promote inconsistency and conflict in the production and modification of world-societal structures and characteristics.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For realist perspectives, the world is either anarchic (actors pursue interests without interference from an overarching authority structure) or networked (actors intentionally construct interdependent systems of economic and political competition from the ground up). Microphenomenological analysts take culture and interpretation more seriously but restrict them to action processes operating at local or national levels.

Our opening proposition suggests, in contrast, that the world level of social reality is culturally transcendent and causally important, in several different senses. First, contemporary constructed "actors," including nation-states, routinely organize and legitimate themselves in terms of universalistic (world) models like citizenship, socioeconomic development, and rationalized justice. Second, such models are quite pervasive at the world level, with a considerable amount of consensus on the nature and value of such matters as citizen and human rights, the natural world and its scientific investigation, socioeconomic development, and education. Third, the models rest on claims to universal world applicability; for example, economic models of development and fiscal policy and medical models of the human body and health care delivery are presumed to be applicable everywhere, not just in some locales or regions.

The authority of these general models, legally nonbinding though it may be, goes far in explaining why our hypothetical discovered island society would rapidly adopt "modern" structures and purposes upon incorporation into world society. Alternative models, including whatever traditional structures were in place, have little legitimacy. The correct modern forms are highly developed and articulated, with elaborate rationalized justifi-

cations. Particularistic or local models find it difficult to compete with these legitimations.

Culture

Realist analyses view culture functionally, as expressive material that integrates collectivities or supports the domination of powerful actors. Microphenomenological analysts give greater heed to culture's meaning-generating properties and cognitive import (Berger and Luckmann 1967) but limit their scope to local situational knowledge and reality construction. These approaches miss the essential elements of the cultural dimension of world society—the cognitive and ontological models of reality that specify the nature, purposes, technology, sovereignty, control, and resources of nation-states and other actors (Meyer 1997). These models, organized in scientific, professional, and legal analyses of the proper functioning of states, societies, and individuals, are more cognitive and instrumental than expressive. The analyses involved are highly rationalized and universalistic, describing integrated, functioning, rational actors. They thus constitute functional theories serving as ideologies of actor-centric rationalization (Thomas et al. 1987).

To avoid misunderstanding on this point, we emphasize that the functionalism of world culture is inscribed in commonsense descriptions and social-scientific theories of “the way things work,” but such theories may not mesh well with practical experience. For example, conventional legitimations for mass schooling insist that formal education is necessary and beneficial for economic growth, technical innovation, citizen loyalty, and democratic institutions, among other things. Such functional justifications of schooling are rarely questioned, even though careful studies of, for example, education's effects on economic growth suggest that this functional relationship is at best weak and highly conditional (Rubinson and Browne 1994).

Diffuse functional models of this sort, about actors, action, and presumed causal relations, are centrally constitutive of world culture. As they are implemented in the furthest corners of the globe, they operate as framing assumptions producing consequences that in no reasonable way can be seen as “functional” for the societies that implement them. For instance, the implementation of standard scripts for educational development in countries of all sorts, without regard to their particular circumstances, produces results that often seem quite bizarre, especially when viewed through the rationalized lenses of the functional theories that justify these scripts. Children who will become agricultural laborers study fractions; villagers in remote regions learn about chemical reactions; members of

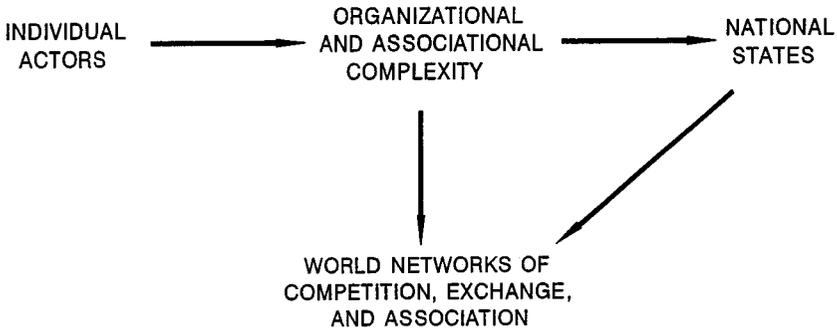


FIG. 1.—The world as aggregated action

marginalized groups who will never see a ballot box study their national constitutions (Meyer, Nagel, and Snyder 1993). Deeming such practices rationally functional requires a breathtaking leap of faith.

In our island society, the implementation of world models embodying “functional” or “modernity” theories of development would be rampant. For example, any economist comes equipped with powerful models with which to interpret the island economy. These can be applied, with considerable authority, without even visiting the place. A few standardized data tables would be sufficient to empower policy proposals. Similarly, any sociologist comes equipped with the capability to propose measures, analyses, diagnoses, and policy prescriptions for the correction of gender inequalities on the island. On a broad range of economic and social indicators, the island would be categorized and compared with other nation-states, in the same way that every newly independent geopolitical entity has been processed in the past several decades. These data collection and comparison processes would greatly enhance the cultural standing and membership of the island society in the nation-state community (McNeely 1995), helping to transform it quickly into a “real” national entity.

Explanatory Models

Most analyses see nation-states as collective actors—as products of their own histories and internal forces. Figure 1 depicts such conventional models. We emphasize instead models of the sort depicted in figure 2.

Figure 2 presents the view that nation-states are more or less exogenously constructed entities—the many individuals both inside and outside the state who engage in state formation and policy formulation are enactors of scripts rather more than they are self-directed actors. The social

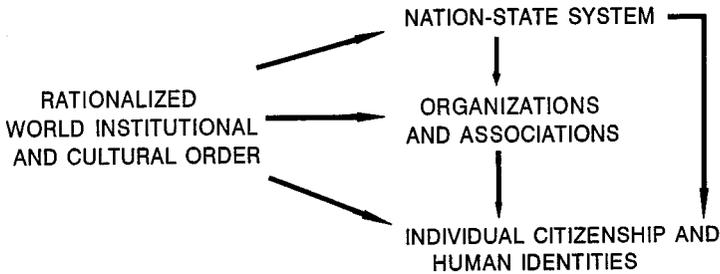


FIG. 2.—The world as enactment of culture

psychology at work here is that of Goffman (1969, 1974) or Snow (Snow and Benford 1992), emphasizing dramaturgical and symbolic processes in place of the hard-boiled calculation of interests assumed by rationalistic actor-centric approaches (see Thomas and Meyer 1984; or cf. Skocpol 1985, pp. 3–20, with pp. 20–28).

We have deliberately oversimplified figure 2 because the proposition we are examining focuses on the enactment dimension of world-societal development. Of course, states, organizations, and individuals also contribute to the content and structure of world culture, and much world-cultural change and elaboration occur within transnational organizations and associations independent of lower-level units. A more complete figure would depict recursive processes among the constituent parts of world society, but here we concentrate on enactment processes. We take up some issues of world-cultural change in the essay's last section, on the dynamics of world culture.

The exogenous cultural construction of the nation-state model makes it easy and “natural” for standard sociopolitical forms to arise in our island society. Models and measures of such national goals as economic progress and social justice are readily available and morally compelling. Also available are model social problems, defined as the failure to realize these goals, that make it easy to identify and decry such failures as inefficient production methods or violations of rights. Alongside these are prescriptions about standardized social actors and policies that are to be engaged in the effort to resolve these newly recognized problems. All this is widely known and ready for implementation.

PROPERTIES OF THE CULTURALLY CONSTITUTED NATION-STATE

As we develop our argument, we want to keep in the forefront a number of empirical observations about contemporary nation-states. First, nation-

states exhibit a great deal of isomorphism in their structures and policies. Second, they make valiant efforts to live up to the model of rational actorhood. Third, and partly as a result of the second observation, they are marked by considerable, and sometimes extraordinary, decoupling between purposes and structure, intentions and results. Fourth, they undergo expansive structuration in largely standardized ways. The generality of these observations makes sense only if nation-states are understood as, in part, constructions of a common wider culture, rather than as self-directed actors responding rationally to internal and external contingencies.

Isomorphism and Isomorphic Change

Given other perspectives' emphases on the heterogeneity of economic and political resources (realist theories) or on local cultural origins (microphenomenological theories), most lines of thought anticipate striking diversity in political units around the world and in these units' trajectories of change. Our argument accounts for the similarities researchers often are surprised to find. It explains why our island society, despite all the possible configurations of local economic forces, power relationships, and forms of traditional culture it might contain, would promptly take on standardized forms and soon appear to be similar to a hundred other nation-states around the world.

Take the example of women in higher education. Microrealist or functional actor-centric models, following Harbison and Myers (1964), suggest that female enrollments in universities would increase in developed economies much more than elsewhere. Macrorealist arguments imply that female enrollments would expand in the core much more than the periphery (Clark 1992; Ward 1984), while microphenomenological arguments point to rising female enrollments in Western but not Islamic countries. However, female enrollments have expanded rapidly everywhere, and in about the same time period (Ramirez 1987; Bradley and Ramirez 1996)—a period in which world societal discourse has emphasized female equality (Berkovitch 1997). This finding makes sense only if common world forces are at work.

Isomorphic developments leading to the same conclusion are reported in studies of many other nation-state features: constitutional forms emphasizing both state power and individual rights (Boli 1987), mass schooling systems organized around a fairly standard curriculum (Meyer, Kamens, and Benavot 1992; Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992), rationalized economic and demographic record keeping and data systems (McNeely 1995; Ventresca 1995), antinatalist population control policies intended to enhance national development (Barrett and Frank 1997), formally equal-

ized female status and rights (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan, in press; Ramirez and Weiss 1979; Berkovitch 1997; Charles 1992), expanded human rights in general (Ramirez and Meyer 1992), expansive environmental policies (Frank et al. 1997), development-oriented economic policy (Hall 1989; Finnemore 1996a), universalistic welfare systems (Abbott and Deviney 1992; Thomas and Lauderdale 1987; Strang and Chang 1993; Collier and Messick 1975), standard definitions of disease and health care (Thornton 1992), and even some basic demographic variables (Watkins 1987). Theories reasoning from the obviously large differences among national economies and cultural traditions have great difficulty accounting for these observed isomorphisms, but they are sensible outcomes if nation-states are enactments of the world cultural order.

Rational Actorhood

As we discuss further below, in world culture the nation-state is defined as a fundamental and strongly legitimated unit of action. Because world culture is highly rationalized and universalistic, nation-states form as rationalized actors. Out of all the possible forms political entities might take, one—the model of the rational and responsible actor—is utterly dominant. This is how nation-states routinely present themselves, both internally (e.g., in their constitutions) and externally (e.g., in seeking admission to the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies). They claim all the features of the rational state actor: territorial boundaries and a demarcated population; sovereign authority, self-determination, and responsibility; standardized purposes like collective development, social justice, and the protection of individual rights; authoritative, law-based control systems; clear possession of resources such as natural and mineral wealth and a labor force; and policy technologies for the rational means-ends accomplishment of goals.

Consider this last item—goals. Nation-states are remarkably uniform in defining their goals as the enhancement of collective progress (roughly, gross domestic product [GDP] per capita) and individual rights and development (roughly, citizen enhancement and equality). This occurs in constitutions, which typically emphasize goals of both national and equitable individual development (Boli 1987), in general statements on national education, which frequently follow suit (Fiala and Gordon-Lanford 1987), in depictions of the nation and the individual citizen in educational curricula (Wong 1991), and in vast amounts of formal economic policy (McNeely 1995). Goals outside the standard form (the nation in service to God, a dynasty, an ethnic or religious group, or imperial expansion), while still common enough, are usually suspect unless strongly linked to these basic goals of collective and individual progress.

Nations have traditions of piling up the skulls of their neighbors in war, but these are no longer announced as goals. War is no longer an acceptable “continuation of politics by other means”; war departments have been relabeled departments of defense (Eyre and Suchman 1996). Nation-states present themselves as not simply rational actors but rather nice ones at that.

Thus our island society would likely adopt a purposive nation-state structure almost immediately, with the appropriate goals of economic development, equality, and enhancement of individual opportunity. A purposive nation-state actor would be constructed to take formal responsibility for such matters, even under the most unlikely social and economic circumstances (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Meyer 1980).

Decoupling

Both realist and microphenomenological arguments suggest, for different reasons, that nation-states should be tightly coupled structures—due to functional requirements, the control structures imposed by external powers, or their own domestic cultures and interpretive schemes. This is notoriously not the case. For example, commitments to egalitarian citizenship, which are ubiquitous in constitutions and public discourse, are frequently contradicted by policies that make formal distinctions between genders and among ethnic groups. At the same time, both the claims and the policies are frequently inconsistent with practice.

Decoupling is endemic because nation-states are modeled on an external culture that cannot simply be imported wholesale as a fully functioning system (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Riggs 1964). World culture contains a good many variants of the dominant models, which leads to the eclectic adoption of conflicting principles. Diffusion processes work at several levels and through a variety of linkages, yielding incoherence. Some external elements are easier to copy than others, and many external elements are inconsistent with local practices, requirements, and cost structures. Even more problematic, world cultural models are highly idealized and internally inconsistent, making them in principle impossible to actualize (Strang and Meyer 1993).

Having few rationalized resources, our imagined island society would find it much easier to adopt the latest structural forms than to make them work effectively. It is easier to create a cabinet ministry with appropriate policies for education or for the protection of women than to build schools and organize social services implementing these policies. It is easier to plan for economic development than to generate capital or technical and labor skills that can make development happen.

Hence, the logic of copying externally defined identities promotes pro-

found decoupling. Any rationalized “actor,” whether an individual, organization, or nation-state, reveals much decoupling between formal models and observable practices (for organizations, see Meyer and Rowan [1977] and Weick [1976]; for individuals, see Cancian [1975], Jepperson [1992], Brim and Kagan [1980], and Goffman [1974]). Resource-rich “actors” facing exogenous pressures to assume a given posture may be able to do so convincingly: Core countries often have the resources and organizational capacity to adopt, for example, a curricular innovation in education (Meyer, Kamens, and Benavot 1992), even if, like the United States, they lack a central educational authority structure. Weaker actors, faced with the same imperative, may emphasize formal structuration instead. Peripheral nation-states do a good deal of symbolic educational reform via national policies and control systems (Ramirez and Rubinson 1979), but they have more difficulty bringing change into the classroom.

If formal structuration and centralization are difficult, state managers may retreat simply to planning for future progress. National planning is especially common in the world’s peripheries (Meyer, Boli-Bennett, and Chase-Dunn 1975). If even planning cannot be accomplished, policymakers and bureaucrats may settle for incorporating the required principle in general statements of values and identity. Peripheral countries’ constitutions are especially likely to specify comprehensive principles of rationalized progress, including detailed assertions of state responsibility for both individual welfare and national economic growth (Boli 1987; Boli-Bennett and Meyer 1978), that their states cannot live up to.

We can predict that our island society would likely adopt a rather advanced constitution and engage in formal social and economic planning. Repeated rounds of planning and policy-making would occur as it became clear that the idealized rational models were far from effective implementation. Cynicism would emerge, but its main concrete result would be still more planning and reform.

The decoupling of general values from practical action is, of course, quite different from the relationship predicted by realist and microphenomenological lines of argument (Parsons 1951). Realist theories see actor policy and structure as deliberate means of controlling action, not as conformity to exogenous models. Microphenomenological perspectives see policy and structure as constructed in hermeneutic consistency with action. Thus, the prevalence of decoupling has led to much befuddlement (Cancian 1975; for an extended discussion, see Jepperson [1992]): How can values and action be so habitually inconsistent? Such inconsistency is an obvious actor characteristic from an institutional point of view, particularly for actors like nation-states that have broad and diffuse goals (March 1988; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Brunsson 1989).

One should not to be too cynical about decoupling, however. True, for

any set of constructed actors the correlations between policy and practice may be very low (e.g., the correlation between constitutional state authority and government revenue as a proportion of GNP is slightly negative [Boli 1987]). But systemically this relationship is strong: The same time periods and civilizations that foster expanded images of state authority also generate highly elaborated state organizations.

Expansive Structuration

By structuration we mean the formation and spread of explicit, rationalized, differentiated organizational forms. Here we argue that the dependence of the modern nation-state on exogenous models, coupled with the fact that these models are organized as cultural principles and visions not strongly anchored in local circumstances, generates expansive structuration at the nation-state and organizational levels.

The structuration of the nation-state greatly exceeds any functional requirements of society, especially in peripheral countries. Impoverished countries routinely establish universities producing overqualified personnel, national planning agencies writing unrealistic five-year plans, national airlines that require heavy subsidization, and freeways leading nowhere—forms of “development” that are functionally quite irrational. This observation poses a problem for both realist and microphenomenological theories.

One common intellectual response to this decoupled structuration is neglect of its generality. Typically, political and organizational theorists try to explain the apparent irrationalities of specific structural changes as products of local constellations of power and interests—the delusions of a self-aggrandizing leader, perhaps, or the interests of dominant elites. But the process operates everywhere and in many different sectors of social life. Holding constant the functional pressures of size, resources, and complexity, in recent decades nation-states and other organizations have clearly expanded inordinately across many different social domains. This is precisely the period during which world society has been consolidated (Meyer et al. 1975; Strang 1990), making world models universally known and legitimated. Nation-states and organizations may have distinct and complex histories, but they all have expanded structurally in similar ways in the same historical period (Jepperson and Meyer 1991; Soysal 1994; Dobbin 1994; Guillen 1994).

Present-day universities and firms, for instance, have a multitude of offices that an organization of the same size and goals would not have had just a few decades ago: accounting, legal, personnel, safety, environment, and counseling offices, among others. After the fact, all of these seem functionally necessary, and the power coalitions that produced them

can certainly be identified, but this sort of explanation simply does not account for the worldwide simultaneity of the process. So also with nation-states, which undergo structuration to manage the expanding externally defined requirements of rational actorhood. Common evolving world-societal models, not a hundred different national trajectories, have led states to establish ministries and other agencies purporting to manage social and economic planning, education (Ramirez and Ventresca 1992), population control (Barrett and Frank 1997), the environment (Frank et al. 1997), science policy (Finnemore 1996*a*), health, gender equality (Berkovitch 1997), the welfare of the old and the young (Boli-Bennett and Meyer 1978), and much more. This worldwide process affects both core and peripheral countries, though with variable impact depending on local resources and organizational capacities.

The enormous expansion of nation-state structures, bureaucracies, agendas, revenues, and regulatory capacities since World War II indicates that something is very wrong with analyses asserting that globalization diminishes the “sovereignty” of the nation-state (Duchacek et al. 1988; Nordenstreng and Schiller 1979). Globalization certainly poses new problems for states, but it also strengthens the world-cultural principle that nation-states are the primary actors charged with identifying and managing those problems on behalf of their societies. Expansion of the authority and responsibilities of states creates unwieldy and fragmented structures, perhaps, but not weakness. The modern state may have less autonomy than earlier but it clearly has more to do than earlier as well, and most states are capable of doing more now than they ever have been before.

PROCESSES OF WORLD SOCIETY'S IMPACT ON NATION-STATES

So far we have argued that the observable isomorphism among nation-states supports our proposition that these entities derive from models embedded in an overarching world culture. What processes in world society construct and shape these “actors” to produce such isomorphism? The usual approach to answering this question would seek to identify mechanisms whereby actors rationally pursuing their interests make similar choices and decisions. This approach implicitly assumes that actor definitions and interests are largely fixed and independent of culture. We find it more useful and revealing to focus on processes that produce or reconstruct the actors themselves. We identify three processes by which world-societal elements authorize and fashion national states: the construction of identity and purpose, systemic maintenance of actor identity, and legitimation of the actorhood of such subnational units as individuals and organized interests.

Construction of Nation-State Identity and Purpose

World society contains much cultural material authoritatively defining the nation-state as the preferred form of sovereign, responsible actor. The external recognition and construction of sovereign statehood has been a crucial dimension of the Western system for centuries (Krasner 1995–96), with new claimants especially dependent on obtaining formal recognition from dominant powers. With the anticolonial and self-determination movements of the 20th century, all sorts of collectivities have learned to organize their claims around a nation-state identity, and the consolidation of the United Nations system has provided a central forum for identity recognition that diminishes the importance of major states. Entry into the system occurs, essentially, via application forms (to the United Nations and other world bodies) on which the applicant must demonstrate appropriately formulated assertions about sovereignty and control over population and territory, along with appropriate aims and purposes (McNeely 1995; Meyer 1980; Jackson and Rosberg 1982).

More than 130 new nation-state entities have formed since 1945. They consistently proclaim, both internally and externally, their conformity to worldwide models of national identity and state structure. So, too, would our island society. But older states, too, have learned to adapt to changes in these models. Thus, through both selection and adaptation, the system has expanded to something close to universality of the nation-state form. Realist theories, grounding their analyses in each country's particular resources and history, would predict a much wider variety of forms, including the retention of older statuses such as formal dependency or indirect incorporation of small or weak entities (Strang 1990).

World-cultural models of sovereign identity take concrete form in particular state structures, programs, and policies. As described above, worldwide models of the rationalized nation-state actor define appropriate constitutions, goals, data systems, organization charts, ministry structures (Kim and Jang 1996), and policies. Models also specify standard forms for the cultural depiction of national identity. Methods of constructing national culture through traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), museums (Anderson 1991), tourism (MacCannell 1976), and national intellectual culture (Gellner 1983) are highly stylized. Nation-states are theorized or imagined communities drawing on models that are lodged at the world level (Anderson 1991).

Often, copying world models or conventions amounts to simple mimesis (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) that has more to do with knowing how to fill in forms than with managing substantive problems. For instance, to compile comparable educational enrollment data in the 1950s, UNESCO statisticians chose to report enrollments for a six-year primary level and

three-year junior and senior secondary levels. In ensuing decades, many countries structured their mass schooling systems around this six-year/three-year/three-year model, generally without investigating whether it would best meet any of the presumed purposes of schooling.

Strang (1990) shows the extraordinary impact of the legitimized identity system on the survival and stability of states. Throughout modern history, dependent territories have moved to sovereign statehood at a steadily increasing rate that accelerated rapidly in the postwar period. Once sovereign, countries almost never revert to dependence. Even the breakup of the Soviet Union produced not dependent territories but formally sovereign nation-states, unprepared as some of the former republics were for this status. Thus, it is highly unlikely that our island society would be incorporated as a dependent territory of an extant nation-state; this would be too great a violation of the legitimized right to self-determination. Moreover, establishing the island society's sovereign status in the international system would stabilize its new state, though it would not preclude, and might even increase, instability in the state's government (Thomas and Meyer 1980).

Orientation to the identity and purposes of the nation-state model increases the rate at which countries adopt other prescribed institutions of modernity. Having committed themselves to the identity of the rationalizing state, appropriate policies follow—policies for national development, individual citizenship and rights, environmental management, foreign relations. These policies are depicted as if they were autonomous decisions because nation-states are defined as sovereign, responsible, and essentially autonomous actors. Taking into account the larger culture in which states are embedded, however, the policies look more like enactments of conventionalized scripts. Even if a state proclaims its opposition to the dominant world identity models, it will nevertheless pursue many purposes within this model. It will develop bureaucratic authority and attempt to build many modern institutions, ranging from a central bank to an educational system. It will thereby find itself modifying its traditions in the direction of world-cultural forms.

Systemic Maintenance of Nation-State Actor Identity

If a specific nation-state is unable to put proper policies in place (because of costs, incompetence, or resistance), world-society structures will provide help. This process operates more through authoritative external support for the legitimate purposes of states than through authoritarian imposition by dominant powers or interests. For example, world organizations and professionalized ideologies actively encourage countries to adopt population control policies that are justified not as good for the world as a

whole but as necessary for national development (Barrett and Frank 1997). National science policies are also promulgated as crucial to national development; before this link was theorized, UNESCO efforts to encourage countries to promote science failed to diffuse (Finnemore 1996a). As this example illustrates, international organizations often posture as objective disinterested others who help nation-states pursue their exogenously derived goals.

Resistance to world models is difficult because nation-states are formally committed, as a matter of identity, to such self-evident goals as socioeconomic development, citizen rights, individual self-development, and civil international relations. If a particular regime rhetorically resists world models, local actors can rely on legitimacy myths (democracy, freedom, equality) and the ready support of activist external groups to oppose the regime. Nation-state "choices" are thus less likely to conflict with world-cultural prescriptions than realist or microphenomenological theories anticipate because both nation-state choices and world pressures derive from the same overarching institutions.

Legitimation of Subnational Actors and Practices

World-cultural principles license the nation-state not only as a managing central authority but also as an identity-supplying nation. Individual citizenship and the sovereignty of the people are basic tenets of nationhood. So too are the legitimacy and presumed functional necessity of much domestic organizational structure, ranging from financial market structures to organizations promoting individual and collective rights (of labor, ethnic groups, women, and so on). World-society ideology thus directly licenses a variety of organized interests and functions. Moreover, in pursuing their externally legitimated identities and purposes by creating agencies and programs, nation-states also promote the domestic actors involved. Programs and their associated accounting systems increase the number and density of types of actors, as groups come forward to claim newly reified identities and the resources allocated to them (Douglas 1986; Hacking 1986).

A good example is the rise of world discourse legitimating the human rights of gays and lesbians, which has produced both national policy changes and the mobilization of actors claiming these rights (Frank and McEneaney 1994). As nation-states adopt policies embodying the appropriate principles, they institutionalize the identity and political presence of these groups. Of course, all these "internally" generated changes are infused with world-cultural conceptions of the properly behaving nation-state.

Hence, if a nation-state neglects to adopt world-approved policies, domestic elements will try to carry out or enforce conformity. General world pressures favoring environmentalism, for example, have led many states to establish environmental protection agencies, which foster the growth of environmental engineering firms, activist groups, and planning agencies. Where the state has not adopted the appropriate policies, such local units and actors as cities, schools, scout troops, and religious groups are likely to practice environmentalism and call for national action. Thus, world culture influences nation-states not only at their centers, or only in symbolic ways, but also through direct connections between local actors and world culture. Such connections produce many axes of mobilization for the implementation of world-cultural principles and help account for similarities in mobilization agendas and strategies in highly disparate countries (McAdam and Rucht 1993).

Explicit rejection of world-cultural principles sometimes occurs, particularly by nationalist or religious movements whose purported opposition to modernity is seen as a threat to geopolitical stability. While the threat is real enough, the analysis is mistaken because it greatly underestimates the extent to which such movements conform to rationalized models of societal order and purpose. These movements mobilize around principles inscribed in world-cultural scripts, derive their organizing capacity from the legitimacy of these scripts, and edit their supposedly primordial claims to maximize this legitimacy. By and large, they seek an idealized modern community undergoing broad-based social development where citizens (of the right sort) can fully exercise their abstract rights. While they violate some central elements of world-cultural ideology, they nonetheless rely heavily on other elements. For example, religious “fundamentalists” may reject the extreme naturalism of modernity by making individuals accountable to an unchallengeable god, but they nevertheless exhort their people to embrace such key world-cultural elements as nation building, mass schooling, rationalized health care, and professionalization (on the striking case of postrevolutionary Iran, see Rajaei [1993] and Tehranian [1993]). They also are apt to reformulate their religious doctrine in accordance with typical modern conceptions of rational-moral discipline (Thomas 1996; Juergensmeyer 1993). In general, nationalist and religious movements intensify isomorphism more than they resist it (Anderson 1991).

Realist models envision chains of organizational control from major powers downward through national powers and into local arenas. They therefore miss the direct effects of world-cultural models on the creation and sustenance of domestic actors. Microphenomenological and conventional “cultural” models stress the tradition-based resistance of local life-

worlds to the exogenous pressures of modernization. They miss the extent to which, in the contemporary world, the local is itself cosmopolitan (Han-nerz 1987).

ELEMENTS OF COLLECTIVE WORLD SOCIETY

The stateless character of world society has blinded many scholars to the enormous accumulation in recent decades of world social organization and cultural material. The culture involved clearly champions the principle that nation-states, organizations, and individuals are responsible, authorized actors. World-level entities, however, are not conceptualized in the same way. World society is mainly made up of what may, loosely following Mead (1934), be called “rationalized others” (Meyer 1994): social elements such as the sciences and professions (for which the term “actor” hardly seems appropriate) that give advice to nation-state and other actors about their true and responsible natures, purposes, technologies, and so on. Rationalized others are now everywhere, in massive arrays of international associations (Boli and Thomas 1997*b*) and epistemic communities (Haas 1992), generating veritable rivers of universalistic scientific and professional discourse.

In this section, we concentrate on the social structural frame that organizes, carries, and diffuses world cultural models, leaving the content of the models aside. The content is widely discussed in the literature under the heading of “modernization”: well-known, highly abstract, and stylized theories of the “functional requirements” of the modern society, organization, and individual, and the linkages among them. In these theories, the legitimated goals of properly constructed actors center on collective socioeconomic development and comprehensive individual self-development. Society and individuals are bound together by rationalized systems of (imperfectly) egalitarian justice and participatory representation, in the economy, polity, culture, and social interaction. These are global conceptions, not local, expressed as general principles to be applied everywhere (e.g., the World Congress of Comparative Education’s [1996] sweeping affirmation of education’s importance for justice and peace in all countries). Many other international professional associations, and nongovernmental organizations more generally, express similar goals (Chabbot 1997).

In world culture, almost every aspect of social life is discussed, rationalized, and organized, including rules of economic production and consumption, political structure, and education; science, technique, and medicine; family life, sexuality, and interpersonal relations; and religious doctrines and organization. In each arena, the range of legitimately defensible forms is fairly narrow. All the sectors are discussed as if they were functionally integrated and interdependent, and they are expected to conform to gen-

eral principles of progress and justice. The culture of world society serves as a “sacred canopy” for the contemporary world (Berger 1967), a universalized and secularized project developed from older and somewhat parochial religious models. This section shows how this material is structured and rendered authoritative in world society.

Organizational Frame

The development and impact of global sociocultural structuration greatly intensified with the creation of a central world organizational frame at the end of World War II. In place of the League of Nations, which was a limited international security organization, the United Nations system and related bodies (the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT]) established expanded agendas of concern for international society, including economic development, individual rights, and medical, scientific, and educational development (Jones 1992; Donnelly 1986). This framework of global organization and legitimation greatly facilitated the creation and assembly of expansive components of an active and influential world society, as we discuss below. A wide range of social domains became eligible for ideological discussion and global organization. The forces working to mobilize and standardize our island society thus gain strength through their linkage to and support by the United Nations system and the great panoply of nongovernmental organizations clustered around it.

Diffusion among Nation-States

The organization of a Tocquevillian world, made up of formally equal nation-states having similar rationalized identities and purposes, has intensified diffusion processes among nation-states (Strang and Meyer 1993). In the West since at least the 17th century, nation-states have claimed legitimacy in terms of largely common models; this commonality led them to copy each other more freely than is usual in systems of interdependent societies. The institutionalization of common world models similarly stimulates copying among all nation-states, in sharp contrast to traditional segmental societies in which entities jealously guard their secrets of success and regard copying as cultural treason.

Realist models expect this sort of copying only as a result of direct interdependence, especially domination, or in response to functional requirements imposed by competitive systems. They therefore overlook the broad cultural thrust involved. Microphenomenological models, emphasizing local traditions and interpretive schema, overlook the extent to which the modern actor is a worldwide cultural construction whose identity and

interpretations derive directly from exogenous meanings, which makes the local arena less determinative of actor structuration.

The contemporary world is rife with modeling. Obviously, much of this reflects the main dimensions of world stratification—the poor and weak and peripheral copy the rich and strong and central. The Japanese, on entering the system in the 19th century, self-consciously copied successful Western forms (Westney 1987). Aspiring to core status in the same period, the Germans and Americans paid careful attention to each other's educational successes (Goldschmidt 1992). In the 20th century, there has been a pronounced tendency to copy such American forms as the corporation (Takata 1995) and the liberal educational system. More recently, attention has shifted to Japanese work organization (Cole 1989) and education (Rohlen 1983). The emerging elites of our island society would undoubtedly turn first to American, Japanese, or European models for much of their social restructuring.

The world stratification system, however, is multidimensional; different countries parade distinctive virtues. For planning welfare programs, Sweden is the paragon of virtue. For promoting social equality, such "radical" countries as Maoist China and Cuba have been major models. On the other hand, even economically successful countries, if deemed opprobrious due to their failure to conform to important world principles, are unlikely models for imitation. South Africa is the best example.

Associations, Organizations, and Social Movements

As with any such polity, the decentralized world made up of actors claiming ultimate similarity in design and purpose is filled with associations. Both governmental and nongovernmental voluntary organizations have expanded greatly, particularly since 1945 (Boli and Thomas 1997*a*; Feld 1972). Hundreds of intergovernmental entities cover a broad range of rationalized activity, including science, education, the economy and economic development, human rights, and medicine. Thousands of nongovernmental organizations have even broader concerns, organizing almost every imaginable aspect of social life at the world level. They are concentrated, however, in science, medicine, technical fields, and economic activity—the main arenas of rationalized modernity and, thus, arenas where rationalized nation-states are seen as the principal responsible actors. Less often, they focus on more expressive solidarities, such as religion, ethnicity, one worldism, or regionalism (Boli and Thomas 1997*a*). World organizations are, thus, primarily instruments of shared modernity.

Many of the international nongovernmental organizations have a "social movement" character. Active champions of central elements of world culture, they promote models of human rights (Smith 1995), consumer

rights (Mei 1995), environmental regulation (Frank et al. 1997), social and economic development (Chabbott 1997), and human equality and justice (Berkovitch 1997). They often cast themselves as oppositional grassroots movements, decrying gaps or failures in the implementation of world-cultural principles in particular locales and demanding corrective action by states and other actors. Agents of social problems, they generate further structuration of rationalized systems.

Clearly, our island society would quickly come under the scrutiny of all these international organizations. Its state and people would be expected to join international bodies, and they would find it advantageous to do so, gaining access to leading-edge technologies and ideas and enhancing their legitimacy as participants in the great human endeavor. The organizations themselves would also directly “aid” our island society in “developing.” They would provide models for data, organization, and policy; training programs to help the island’s elites learn the correct high forms of principle, policy, and structuration; consultants to provide hands-on assistance; and evaluation schemes to analyze the results. International organizations would collect data to assess the island’s population, health care, education, economic structure (labor force, production, investment), and political status, all in fully rationalized terms redefining the society as a clear candidate for modernity.

Thus, the whole panoply of external organizations would set in motion efforts to increase social value and development on the island. Eventually, the locals would know how to push the process relatively autonomously, establishing such movements as a green party, women’s organizations, and consumer rights’ bodies to protect the new identities being constructed in the reorganizing society.

Sciences and Professions

Scientists and professionals have become central and prestigious participants in world society. Their authority derives not from their strength as actors—indeed, their legitimated postures are defined as disinterested rationalized others rather than actors—but from their authority to assimilate and develop the rationalized and universalistic knowledge that makes action and actorhood possible. This authority is exceptionally well organized in a plethora of international organizations, most of them nongovernmental. These organizations are usually devoted to specific bodies of knowledge and their dissemination, but their ultimate aims include the broad development of societies (Schofer 1997; Drori 1997).

Especially in the more rationalized and public arenas of social life, the sciences and professions are leading forces; the occupations involved are the most prestigious in stratification systems almost everywhere (Treiman

1977). Sustainable socioeconomic development calls for the knowledge of economists who can advise on production functions, natural scientists and engineers to create and manage technologies, and a variety of scientists to analyze environmental problems and costs. Individual development, rights, and equalities call for the expertise of social scientists, lawyers, psychologists, and medical professionals. These legitimated experts appeal to and further develop transnational accounts and models, yielding a self-reinforcing cycle in which rationalization further institutionalizes professional authority.

Scientific and professional authority is rooted in universal, rationalized ultimate principles of moral and natural law (on the rise of universities along these lines, see Riddle [1993]). Their rationalized knowledge structures constitute the religion of the modern world, replacing in good measure the older "religions" that have been spiritualized and reconstructed as more ordinary organizational actors, and they underlie the other mechanisms of world influence noted above. The models of national development or human rights carried by international associations have their roots in scientific and legal knowledge, such as theories and measures of national economic development or of individual social and economic equality. Similarly, diffusion among nation-states is heavily mediated by scientists and professionals who define virtuous instances, formulate models, and actively support their adoption. The current wave of Japanization in American economic and educational organization is defined and carried not directly by Japanese elites or American managers but by professors of business and education (Smith and O'Day 1990).

Organizations and consultants would flock around our island society, operating almost entirely in terms of scientific and professional (legal, medical, educational) models and methods. Very little would be presented to the island society as a matter of arbitrary cultural imposition; advice would be justified in terms of rational scientific authority. Scientists and professionals carry ultimate, rational, unified, universal truth, by and large shunning the image of self-interested power brokers. Science as authority is much more influential than scientists as an interest group (Meyer and Jepperson 1996).

Summary

The rapidly intensifying structuration of a world society made up of rationalized cultural elements and associational organizations rather than a centralized bureaucratic state is insufficiently appreciated in social research (Robertson 1992; Thomas et al. 1987). To show the coherence of what has happened, Boli and Thomas (1997a) present correlations among longitudinal variables describing many dimensions of world-level devel-

opment. The period covered is the last 80–100 years; variables are world totals, by year, for economic production, energy consumption, foundings of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, educational enrollments, urban population, trade, treaties in force, and so on. The point is not to sort out causal relations among these variables but to show the consistency of the trends involved. Almost all correlations are extremely high (.90 or above). The current period of intensive international organization (more treaties, nongovernmental organizations, intergovernmental bodies, trade, and international scientific and professional discourse) is also a period of intensive national organization and development and individual rationalization and modernization. World society is rationalizing in an extraordinarily comprehensive way.

SOURCES OF DYNAMISM AND CHANGE IN WORLD CULTURE

Few lines of sociological theory entirely discount the existence or impact of world culture. Microrealists may imagine that the world is made up solely of interest-driven national and local actors, but macrorealist perspectives often invoke an influential collective cultural sphere. Usually, though, macrorealists describe the cultural sphere as a matter of hegemony, that is, a function of the resources amassed by dominant actors (capitalists, in world-system theory, or states, in state-competition theory). Expansion and change in stratified structures of interaction thus produce expansion and change in cultural rules, with advantages always accruing to the dominant. Such arguments seem quite reasonable in some respects, and one explanation for the current world-cultural preference for market systems and political democracy is surely a half century of dominance by the United States. Our island society would obviously evolve quite differently in a world with a hegemonic China.

Microphenomenological arguments can add some useful ideas here. Power and interests aside, the cultural styles or tastes of dominant actors might readily replicate themselves in global cultural models. Some dimensions of world culture may therefore be relatively gratuitous reflections of American culture as opposed to deeper underlying structures. For example, the more exotic aspects of American individualism, such as its peculiar interest in self-esteem and the inner child, may fade from world culture when the United States has lost its hegemonic position.

It is thus plausible to argue that dominant actors directly shape world culture. It is not plausible to argue, however, that institutionalization and change occur solely through the purposive action of constructed actors. This argument takes the cultural ideology of the modern world at face value, insisting on the exclusive power of humans as actors to give dynamism to the secular world. Much more is at work, however: Contempo-

rary world culture is not passive and inert but highly dynamic in its own right. World-cultural forces for expansion and change are incorporated in people and organizations as constructed and legitimated actors filling roles as agents of great collective goods, universal laws, and broad meaning systems, even though the actors themselves interpret their action as self-interested rationality. Cultural forces defining the nature of the rationalized universe and the agency of human actors operating under rationalized natural laws play a major causal role in social dynamics, interacting with systems of economic and political stratification and exchange to produce a highly expansionist culture (Meyer and Jepperson 1996).

These cultural dynamics appeared early on, in the distinctive culture of Western Christendom (Mann 1986; Hall 1986; McNeill 1963) that provides much of the foundation for modern world culture. In this cultural complex, a demystified, lawful, universalistic nature forms the common frame within which social life is embedded (Weber 1946), and unitary moral laws and spiritual purposes are clearly differentiated from nature (Eisenstadt 1986, 1987). Spiritual obligations and rights originally devolving from an active and interventionist god are now located in humans and their communities, making individuals the ultimate carriers of responsible purposive action. As legitimated actors having agency for themselves and others, individuals orient their action above all toward the pursuit of rationalized progress.

Contemporary world culture thus posits a system of action, in contrast to more ceremonial or status-oriented cultures (including the premodern West, at various periods) that locate actorhood in transcendent entities and depict humans as subject to fate or the gods. Action is initiated and carried out by "actors," who dominate the cultural stage in virtually all current cultural theories (including most social-scientific work). Individuals, organizations, and states are highly legitimated entities whose interests are defined in universalistic terms, and they are both expected and entitled to act as agents of their interests (Meyer and Jepperson 1996). Faithful and energetic enactment of this cultural framework yields collective authority: Proper actors reciprocally legitimate each other.

Intense dynamism inheres in social and cultural arrangements that make human actors the core carriers of universal purposes (Eisenstadt 1987). The distinctive structure of actorhood that characterizes world society pushes the limits in this regard, for several reasons. First, no universal actor (world state) has central control or the repressive capacity to limit lower-level action. Second, the universalistically legitimated actors of world society are defined as having similar goals, so competition for resources is enhanced. Third, legitimated actorhood operates at several levels (national, organizational or group, and individual) that partially compete with one another. Fourth, internal contradictions and inconsistencies

in world-cultural models make certain forms of struggle inevitable in world society. Taken together, these factors generate widespread conflict, mobilization, and change.

The Statelessness of World Society

A powerfully organized and authoritative worldwide actor would obviously lower the dynamism of world society. Wallerstein (1974) makes this point regarding the world economy, but it applies culturally as well. Agents of a world actor responsible for general human welfare would find the invention of new cultural goods and problems costly and disorderly. They would discourage rights-based claims by subunits and the self-righteousness of heteronomous intellectuals challenging central authority on moral grounds (Eisenstadt 1987). Perhaps the best historical example is the well-known pattern of Chinese imperial repression directed at innovative intellectuals (Collins 1986), scientists (Wuthnow 1980), and merchants (Hall 1986). The continuously expanding rationalization of natural and moral law, so characteristic of the sciences and professions, would seem wasteful and destabilizing, not value enhancing.

In present world society, intellectuals who discover new truths (about gender inequality, say, or science's contribution to economic growth, or the probability of asteroid collisions) gain much honor and preferment. They also create many costs by impelling collective action and structuration to deal with their discoveries. These costs are borne not by the cultural innovators themselves, who are pitched as rationalized others, but by responsible actors, especially states.

A centralized world actor might approach our island society like a medieval king, taking steps to protect his peasants from the joys and temptations of urban life by limiting their exposure to the high forms of cultural modernity. Such steps would be interpreted as paternalistic or repressive violations of basic human and social rights—a discriminatory denigration of the islanders as incapable of rational actorhood. Widespread internal and external opposition movements would ensue.

The Structure of Multiple Actors in a Common Frame

Instead of a central actor, the culture of world society allocates responsible and authoritative actorhood to nation-states. They derive their rights and agency from the relatively unified culture of natural and moral law institutionalized by the sciences and professions. Many features of state action and interaction involve the application of general principles and the further elaboration or modification of these principles.

Given actors' common identity and ultimate similarity, competition is

not only the prevailing theory of interaction but a source of collective moral meaning. The successes and failures of particular actors engender extensive theorization, learning, and diffusion (Strang and Meyer 1993). Global depression produced and popularized Keynesian economic models (Hall 1989); more recently, the dislocations and challenges theorized as due to globalization have popularized neoclassical economic models (Biersteker 1992). Similarly, relative ineffectiveness in reducing poverty and inequality promotes welfare-system expansion or reform (Strang and Chang 1993), while scientized measurement of hitherto unsuspected forms of pollution pushes the expansion of environmental ministries (Frank et al. 1997).

In this cultural context, practical problems reflect neither fate nor the gods but crises of action and technical systems, provoking further cultural theorization. The actors involved—for example, the economic clergy charged with advising states on means of dealing with economic downturn—may suffer a modest loss of face, but the proposed solutions do not include burning a few economists at the stake. Instead, more resources go to economics graduate programs and state regulatory agencies.

Study of our island society would reveal an array of social problems. Its traditions, interpreted as prerational culture, might well be stored in museums (as they are elsewhere), but they would also be reinterpreted as problems. World culture is a factory of social problems that are both products of theorization and occasions for further cultural growth. In addition, these problems foster diverse forms of moral entrepreneurship that collide with one another. Diverse responses to problems are guaranteed because of the legitimacy endowed on multiple actors and their interests; collisions are frequent because of the universalism of the definitions and rules of world culture. The greater the number of entities, whether individuals, organizations, or nation-states, that pursue similar interests requiring similar resources, the more the entities will come into conflict with each other and develop theories of one another as sources of social ills.

Local variations in a universalistic society become anomalies or deviations unless they are justified in terms of general cultural principles. Due to their dependence on the wider culture, local actors thus discover that their interests lie in defending local arrangements, not as locally legitimate but as instances of more universal rules. This process fills world society with dynamic ideological conflicts over matters that on the face of it seem inconsequential, including a considerable number of wars fueled partly by clashes over modest variations on shared cultural or religious models.

Thus, if our island society elite wishes to maintain distinctive local patterns of, say, gender differentiation, it would be well advised to invoke universalistic cultural principles of some sort and join with others in generalizing the issue to the world level. African intellectuals have shown the

way here, activating principles of self-determination and cultural autonomy to resist the application of Western feminist scholarship to their societies (Mohatny 1984).

The forces motivating local actors (including states) to incorporate, employ, and legitimate world theorists and theories thereby strengthen the authoritative worldwide network of sciences, professions, and consultants. They also reinforce and modify, in continuing contest, the elements of world culture that undergird them. Global discourse intensifies and becomes ever more complex as the world-societal arena of interaction is ever more routinely activated.

Multiple Levels of Legitimated Actorhood

World society would be a good deal less dynamic if only one type of actor were legitimated, but actors at several levels enjoy appreciable legitimacy. Individuals and states mutually legitimate each other via principles of citizenship, while individuals and international organizations do the same via principles of human rights. Between individuals and nation-states lie any number of interest and functional groups that have standing as legitimated actors due to their connections with individuals and states. These include religious, ethnic, occupational, industrial, class, racial, and gender-based groups and organizations, all of which both depend on and conflict with actors at other levels. For example, individual actors are entitled to demand equality, while collective actors are entitled to promote functionally justified differentiation. Individual actors claim primordial ethnic and familial rights while collective actors impose homogenization. Such dualisms, once peculiarly Western (Eisenstadt 1987), are now common world-cultural features.

In virtually every contested arena, both sides can rely on the wider cultural canopy for a good deal of legitimation, especially if they imaginatively adapt the general frame to fit local circumstances. A major result of contestation is thus even more expanded cultural modeling and structuration. In our island society, economic, psychological, and biological analysts would discover a variety of purportedly functional inequalities and individual handicaps, while educational and sociological analysts would specify methods of correcting or managing these problems. International organizations would send experts to help mobilize grassroots movements to demand solutions to the problems. The solutions would require structuration and, in the long run, cultural or theoretical elaboration.

Cultural Contradictions

Most social theories, scholarly or not, treat change as the product of actors rightly pursuing their interests. The cultures (if any) in which these actors

are embedded are assumed to be closed, internally consistent, and rather static. This is the dominant interpretation of the work of Parsons (1951), and its obvious inadequacy, given the openness, inconsistencies, and flux of the culture of modernity, readily leads critics to discount the importance of culture in the production of change.

What critics of cultural analysis overlook is the dynamism that is generated by the rampant inconsistencies and conflicts within world culture itself. Beyond conflicts of interests among individuals or among states, beyond the dualistic inconsistencies between individuals and organizations or groups and national collectivities, there are also contradictions inherent in widely valued cultural goods: equality versus liberty, progress versus justice, standardization versus diversity, efficiency versus individuality. Contestation thus often centers on such contradictory pairs as too much state regulation (inhibiting growth) or too little (permitting excessive inequality), too much individual expressiveness (producing profanity) or too little (infringing liberty), too much nationalism (yielding genocide) or too little (producing anomie).

These contradictory elements are integrated in different ways in different variants of world-cultural models—at the world level, within each national society, even locally (Friedland and Alford 1991). Adherents of competing models suspiciously regard others as violators of quasi-sacred definitions and boundaries; they thus are primed to perceive potential and at least partially legitimated dangers, sins, and impurities (Douglas 1966). Economists are primed to perceive legitimate efforts to reduce inequality as threatening equally legitimate economic growth; sociologists are primed to perceive rationalizing technique as a leviathan threatening face-to-face community; ecologists interpret economic and technical development as a threat to the natural base of the entire system. All of these priesthoods preach in terms of ultimate values and with considerable authority, reflecting and reproducing a remarkably dynamic culture.

In summary, analysis of the expanding and changing culture of world society must take into account dynamic properties of world culture as such, not just interaction and power relations among actors. The cultural construction of rational actorhood endows individuals and groups (to a lesser extent, organizations as well) with exalted spiritual properties that justify and motivate mobilization, innovation, and protest. Further, the decentralized and multilevel character of modern actorhood ensures that interests will conflict and meaning structures will develop contradictions, especially in the absence of a stabilizing central world actor.

Ironically, world-cultural structuration produces more mobilization and competition among the various types of similarly constructed actors than would occur in a genuinely segmental world. Increasing consensus on the meaning and value of individuals, organizations, and nation-states

yields more numerous and intense struggles to achieve independence, autonomy, progress, justice, and equality. Greater good becomes possible and likely but so too does greater evil, as good and evil become more derivative of world culture and therefore of greater scale than in earlier times.

CONCLUSION

A considerable body of evidence supports our proposition that world-society models shape nation-state identities, structures, and behavior via worldwide cultural and associational processes. Carried by rationalized others whose scientific and professional authority often exceeds their power and resources, world culture celebrates, expands, and standardizes strong but culturally somewhat tamed national actors. The result is nation-states that are more isomorphic than most theories would predict and change more uniformly than is commonly recognized. As creatures of exogenous world culture, states are ritualized actors marked by extensive internal decoupling and a good deal more structuration than would occur if they were responsive only to local cultural, functional, or power processes.

As the Western world expanded in earlier centuries to dominate and incorporate societies in the larger world, the penetration of a universalized culture proceeded hesitantly. Westerners could imagine that the locals did not have souls, were members of a different species, and could reasonably be enslaved or exploited. Inhabiting a different moral and natural universe, non-Western societies were occasionally celebrated for their noble savagery but more often cast as inferior groups unsuited for true civilization. Westerners promoted religious conversion by somewhat parochial and inconsistent means, but broader incorporation was ruled out on all sorts of grounds. Education and literacy were sometimes prohibited, rarely encouraged, and never generally provided, for the natives were ineducable or prone to rebellion. Rationalized social, political, and economic development (e.g., the state, democracy, urban factory production, modern family law) was inappropriate, even unthinkable. Furthermore, the locals often strongly resisted incorporation by the West. Even Japan maintained strong boundaries against many aspects of modernity until the end of World War II, and Chinese policy continues a long pattern of resistance to external "aid."

The world, however, is greatly changed. Our island society would obviously become a candidate for full membership in the world community of nations and individuals. Human rights, state-protected citizen rights, and democratic forms would become natural entitlements. An economy would emerge, defined and measured in rationalized terms and oriented to

growth under state regulation. A formal national polity would be essential, including a constitution, citizenship laws, educational structures, and open forms of participation and communication. The whole apparatus of rationalized modernity would be mobilized as necessary and applicable; internal and external resistance would be stigmatized as reactionary unless it was couched in universalistic terms. Allowing the islanders to remain imprisoned in their society, under the authority of their old gods and chiefs and entrapped in primitive economic technologies, would be unfair and discriminatory, even though the passing of their traditional society would also occasion nostalgia and regret.

Prevailing social theories account poorly for these changes. Given a dynamic sociocultural system, realist models can account for a world of economic and political absorption, inequality, and domination. They do not well explain a world of formally equal, autonomous, and expansive nation-state actors. Microcultural or phenomenological lines of argument can account for diversity and resistance to homogenization, not a world in which national states, subject to only modest coercion or control, adopt standard identities and structural forms.

We argue for the utility of recognizing that rationalized modernity is a universalistic and inordinately successful form of the earlier Western religious and postreligious system. As a number of commentators have noted, in our time the religious elites of Western Christendom have given up on the belief that there is no salvation outside the church (Shils 1971; Illich 1970). That postulate has been replaced by the belief among almost all elites that salvation lies in rationalized structures grounded in scientific and technical knowledge—states, schools, firms, voluntary associations, and the like. The new religious elites are the professionals, researchers, scientists, and intellectuals who write secularized and unconditionally universalistic versions of the salvation story, along with the managers, legislators, and policymakers who believe the story fervently and pursue it relentlessly. This belief is worldwide and structures the organization of social life almost everywhere.

The colossal disaster of World War II may have been a key factor in the rise of global models of nationally organized progress and justice, and the Cold War may well have intensified the forces pushing human development to the global level. If the present configuration of lowered systemic (if not local) tensions persists, perhaps both the consensuality of the models and their impact on nation-states will decline. On the other hand, the models' rationalized definitions of progress and justice (across an ever broadening front) are rooted in universalistic scientific and professional definitions that have reached a level of deep global institutionalization. These definitions produce a great deal of conflict with regard to their content and application, but their authority is likely to prove quite durable.

Many observers anticipate a variety of failures of world society, citing instances of gross violations of world-cultural principles (e.g., in Bosnia), stagnant development (e.g., in Africa), and evasion of proper responsibility (in many places). In our view, the growing list of perceived “social problems” in the world indicates not the weakness of world-cultural institutions but their strength. Events like political torture, waste dumping, or corruption, which not so long ago were either overlooked entirely or considered routine, local, specific aberrations or tragedies, are now of world-societal significance. They violate strong expectations regarding global integration and propriety and can easily evoke world-societal reactions seeking to put things right. A world with so many widely discussed social problems is a world of Durkheimian and Simmelian integration, however much it may also seem driven by disintegrative tendencies.

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