

1

Civilisations debated: uses and critiques of ‘civilisation’

It is unfeasible for human beings to dwell like animals in solitude and it is a corollary of their nature to at all times seek collectivity in dwelling and abode. Philosophers enthused by this sociality, have defined this circumstance by asserting ‘humans are naturally predisposed to sociality’, and in their terminology, civilisation (*Madaniyyah*) consists in the sociality of mankind [*sic*] on the realm of earth.

(Ibn Khaldun, cited in Sentürk and Nizamuddin, 2009: 67)

Let us bear in mind that our population is neither European nor North American, but are closer to a blend of Africa and America than they are to Europe, for even Spain herself is not strictly European due to its African blood, institutions and character. It is impossible to pinpoint exactly which human family we belong to. Most of the indigenous peoples have been annihilated, the European has mixed with the American and with the African, and the African has mixed with the Indian and the European. We are all children of the same mother but our fathers are strangers and differ in origin, blood, figure and form from each other.

(Simon Bolivar, cited in Bolivar, 2009: 87)

Sailing is a noble thing ... it joins together men [*sic*] from different lands, and makes every inhospitable island a part of the mainland, it brings fresh knowledge to those who sail, it refines manners, it brings concord and civilisation to men [*sic*], it consolidates their nature by bringing together all that is most human in them.

(George Pachymeres, cited in Paine, 2013: 599)

Khaldun, Bolivar and Pachymeres point to specific notions of civilisation. They stress, respectively, the human creation of social cooperation, the mix of humanity and the crucibles of connection. Each casts one particular insight into conditions of human existence as an anthropological universal, which each believes is the essence of social life. Each feature, in fact, can be found

in abundance in a host of societies. In a modest way, each illuminates a small corner of a sociological axiom about humanity's past: human connection and engagement across different social formations and civilisations (including in conflict) are extensive, while the occurrence of isolated societies is less common than is often believed. In a contemporary world context of tensions and conflicts (whether of global inequalities, poverty and increasing ecological calamities, or around violence, war and terrorism), an argument that there is a profusion of webs of social cooperation evident in past societies need not be an indulgence in the innocent pastime of historical curiosity. Instead, it can be a potent argument about a diverse range of social formations and what their connections and conflicts suggest about how to confront the problems that contemporary societies face. In place of perspectives positing a clash of civilisations, such an understanding of the past can better serve the purpose of understanding and responding to the problems of the twenty-first century. Moreover, how the critical social sciences can help to elucidate and explore those problems can be extrapolated if a clear perspective on historical connectivity is adopted.

Within the Western human sciences, debate about questions of connectivity has often taken national societies, rather than civilisations or empires, as the principal unit of research and the main form of human sociality. There is nonetheless also a significant vein of scholarship on civilisations as collectives coursing through the early phases of modern archaeology, anthropology, history, philosophy and sociology. Beginning with Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Max Weber, Oswald Spengler, Pitirim Sorokin, Karl Jaspers, Eric Voegelin and Arnold Toynbee, comparative sociologists, philosophers and world historians have produced theories and inquiries taking civilisations as the main unit of analysis. The advantage of focusing on civilisations is that the scope of analysis expands to formations that are larger and older than nation states and empires while at the same time incorporating them. Strong claims have been made that this corrects the socio-centrism and presentism characteristic of conventional sociology. At the same time, modern scholars of civilisations inherited a legacy of nineteenth-century Eurocentric thought and have only reinterpreted it to a certain degree and in certain ways. They trialled theories that could be no more than incomplete and were based on assumptions open to critique, while the comparative studies that they produced were always open to revision on the basis of new evidence and altered perspectives. The comparative analysis of civilisations would always be a debating point.

'Civilisational analysis' is a late-twentieth-century appellation for this field. The field is defined by its object, which includes both 'civilisation' taken as a

singular object and discourse and multiple ‘civilisations’ taken as a diversity of formations and trajectories. Though it is considered as a single field, civilisational analysis incorporates many traditions and perspectives and is multidisciplinary (Arjomand and Tiryakian, 2004a; Arnason, 2001, 2007; Katzenstein, 2010a). Moreover, it is a retrospective appellation. The phrase appears to be first used in the 1970s by Vytautas Kavolis to refer to a longer tradition (Kavolis, 1995). Many important landmarks in civilisational analysis were published in the 1980s and 1990s by Fernand Braudel (1985, 1993), Benjamin Nelson (2012), William McNeill (1991) and S. N. Eisenstadt and his associates (1986, 1996). But international traction was gained soon after when Edward Tiryakian and Johann Arnason described a whole contemporary field as ‘civilisational analysis’ in special issues of the journals *Thesis Eleven* and *International Sociology* (see Arjomand and Tiryakian, 2004a). Furthermore, the essayists of those issues distinguished contemporary perspectives from the early ones of their forerunners by their critiques of the Eurocentric legacy of social thought and the Eurocentrism of the discourse of civilisations (Hall and Jackson, 2007; Mazlish, 2004). If it seemed that sociology owned the field, then Arnason’s résumé of its theoretical and disciplinary diversity (2003), perspectives from political sciences (Hall and Jackson, 2007; Katzenstein, 2010a; Unay and Senel, 2009) and Felipe Fernández-Armesto’s world history of civilisations (2001) served as reminders of the breadth of interest across the human sciences.

Debating Civilisations focuses on the scholarship produced in this field since the 1970s. As a second major part of this project, I put forward an alternative version of civilisational analysis that critically evaluates and extends key insights of research in the field. In evaluating the field in the first part of this book, and starting with this opening chapter, I use the phrase ‘contemporary civilisational analysis’ in order to highlight the context and stated purpose claimed by its proponents. In regard to context, the field is deeply influenced by the end of Cold War rivalry. With respect to purpose, the phrase distinguishes efforts to self-consciously critique Eurocentric legacies in history and sociology. Civilisational analysis revived through critical reflection on inherited notions of ‘civilisation’ and ‘civilisations’. Considered as ‘uses’ of civilisation, questions can be asked about the extent to which contemporary civilisational analysis has achieved its aim of critical reconstruction of the legacies of the scholarship of civilisations. In this opening chapter, I examine the genealogy of the uses of civilisation in early-twentieth-century sources. Early ventures into civilisational analysis by sociologists, historians and anthropologists produced advances on nineteenth-century conceptions, while experimenting with theories of civilisation and civilisations. One of the most important achievements was the pluralisation of the notion of

civilisation. The end of the genealogy coincides with the outline of the alternative advanced and defended in *Debating Civilisations*, an outline elaborated at length in Part II.

Uses of ‘civilisation’

The critical renaissance of civilisational analysis occurred in the context of five sets of transformations. First, the Cold War came to an abrupt end, loosening the constraints imposed on the international order by the balance of superpowers. Despite a short phase of American triumphalism, a new multipolar international order was on the cards. ‘Civilisation’ and ‘civilisations’ became topical in public discourse, particularly with Samuel Huntington’s bellicose vision of clashing civilisations and religions as the main alleged organisational principle of post-Cold War rivalries. Second, in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Bush administration and its willing allies invoked a civilisational enterprise reminiscent of colonial-era civilising missions in wars of occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq and in its ‘War on Terror’. Third, the growth in complexity of migration strained mono-cultural conceptions of nationality previously prevalent in nation-states (Castles *et al.*, 2014). Policies of multiculturalism that have taken their place presuppose a mixed demography and intermingling religions and civilisations. Furthermore, they are premised on continuing diversification. Multiculturalism is fragile and periodically beset by xenophobic reaction. Plurality is undeniable, however, and it is evident not only within states, but in the international arena. The rise, surge and growth of regionalism is a fourth transformation. The sheer number of supranational blocs, agreements and associations is evidence of a reconfigured multipolar order. The dynamics of regionalism go even further. There are other transnational and non-governmental actors that impel regionalisation in other ways also. Finally, revealing a fifth context, the threat of climate change to human survival is frequently couched in terms of a ‘threat to civilisation’, meaning the organised social order in this instance.

In this context, the uses of ‘civilisation’ and ‘civilisations’ have been doubly contested. Kapustin poses the period as one in which a ‘big’ discourse of civilisations is an analytical contrast to a ‘small’ discourse (2009). The former is composed of long-standing debates about civilisations that have accumulated over the last two centuries in the humanities and social sciences. The ‘small’ discourse is a more public and ideologically driven one. The ‘small discourse’ brings about a ‘conceptual and normative impoverishment of the idea of “civilisations”’ and in that state serves a neo-conservative mode of cultural politics (Kapustin,

2009: 151). On the terrain of public discourse the neo-conservative politics of civilisational clash has been rigorously contested. But within the 'big discourse' the uses of the language of civilisation and civilisations were contested in different ways also by civilisational analysis and post-colonial and other radical critics. The critical response involved reconsideration of religion, tradition, nationalism and modernity (Arjomand, 2014b). African, Indian and Asian perspectives rebuffed Huntington, though they did not get due exposure in the larger public controversy. Thus, despite the breadth of critique of the politics of the 'clash thesis' in the humanities and social sciences, the shrill idiom of the small discourse and its ability to capture the Western media has made it the 'louder' of the two discourses.

Contemporary civilisational analysis did not enter the controversy without conceptual traditions. The conceptual pre-history was a background to uses of civilisation in perspectives and debates argued out in sociology, world history and anthropology. Three conceptual images of civilisations are prominent in the field. First, civilisations are conceived as socio-cultural units, entities or blocs in an 'integrationist' image. In 'processual' explanations civilisations emerge out of long-term uneven historical processes. Finally, in a 'relational' image civilisations are believed to gain definition and institute developmental patterns through inter-societal and inter-cultural encounters. A century of perspectives informs all three images. Both contemporary civilisational analysis and early-twentieth-century perspectives in turn have a pre-history in the development of a vocabulary of related terms and a discourse around civilisations bound up with experiences of colonialism. Before illustrating the three kinds of uses of 'civilisation' and 'civilisations', I want to trace the history of semantic developments of the notions of 'civilisation' and 'civilisations' coextensive with the expansion of Europe's empires and consubstantial with colonialism. Through this, we can see how the conceptual apparatus was implicated in colonialism and how it was mobilised in critiques of colonialism.

Terminological equivalents for 'civilisation' existed in Chinese and Arabic long before they emerged in European languages (Aktürk, 2009). Notwithstanding this longer history, etymologies of 'civilisation', 'civilised' and 'civility' suggest that the modern terms had origins in eighteenth-century Western Europe (Febvre, 1973). 'Civilisation' and 'culture' were intertwined in their early discursive development in historically complex ways (Rundell and Mennell, 1998: 6–8). The words were carriers for Western notions of tradition and modernity. Culture and civilisation were, moreover, bound together in the genealogical dispute between French and German intellectuals about the character of social institutions and forms of manners, and then in a nineteenth-century Romantic debate about progress and primitivism (Elias, 1978).

From the outset, the neologism 'civilisation' culturally presupposed 'barbarism' as an opposite. At the height of the Romantic debate about progress and primitivism in the early nineteenth century, 'civilisation' was in common use. In this context the conceptual pairing of civilisation and 'barbarism' was thoroughly conditioned by Europe's historical experiences of the conquest of the Americas, the decline of Islamic civilisation, by colonial encroachment on South-East Asia and growing domination of India and Africa and by intrusion into the Pacific. Throughout the development of the European semantics of civilisation, the range of meanings had accommodated a spectrum of possible connotations, ranging from the most relativist nuance through to schemes of universal societal evolution. In different periods, one current would often dominate. Europe's era of Romanticism was more critical of the idea of civilisation, whereas the progressivist meta-narrative of the second half of the nineteenth century countered Romanticism's relativist critiques with the evolutionism of Lewis Morgan, Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Engels and the early Durkheim (Rundell and Mennell, 1998: 20).

As the dominant narrative in the second half of the nineteenth century, the progressivist narrative imagined a future of secular dynamics of development based on the impulses of civilisation. The standard of civilisation in international law presumed a European monopoly of civilisation in which quasi-judicial criteria were crafted to determine inclusion of the so-called civilised nations (Gong, 1984). As the standard subsided after the First World War, other constructions and appropriations of 'civilisation' emerged. Pro-independence elites in Japan, Turkey, India, China and Indonesia confronted Western ideas, partly from their own civilisational vantage-points and partly through critique of the intrinsic inconsistencies of the discourse of civilisations. Plural uses gained greater leverage in this context as champions of self-rule and independence in Asia advocated for the worth of other civilisations (Duara, 2001). In countries treated as peripheries by the imperial city centres, intellectual and political elites interrogated the ideas of civilisation and turned them into nationalist devices with which to bring colonialism into question (Morris-Suzuki, 1993). The mantle of 'civilisation' became a contest as the discourse of civilisation blended with a rhetoric of 'nation'. Japanese, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Indian intellectuals and nationalists envisaged alternatives to Western colonialism in Asia that acted as models in the phase of rapid decolonisation (Duara, 2004).

These brief comments on the discourse of civilisations emphasise the external environment of European cultures and societies and the imperialising projects that conditioned Western cultural development. The goal of etymologies of 'civilisations' has been the post-Orientalist reconstruction of the discourse of civilisations (Duara, 2001, 2004; Mazlish, 2004). In the wake of this reconstruction, sharpened cultural sensibilities have nurtured a self-correcting impulse in

contemporary civilisational analysis. Through self-correction, contemporary civilisational analysis has aimed to rethink the relationship of the discourse of civilisation to colonialism through a carefully crafted genealogy of its many conflicting meanings. Critics from post-colonial sociology examining civilisational analysis and the related area of multiple modernities have argued that the field has fallen short of an adequate understanding of colonialism and civilisation due to its abiding Eurocentric assumptions. More specifically, they claim that proponents of contemporary civilisational analysis and multiple modernities have failed to achieve the non-Eurocentric comparative sociology they strive for by presuming the originality of European modernity even as they recognise divergent trajectories and plurality of constellations (Bhambra, 2007: 56–74, 2014: 32–7; Go, 2013; Patel, 2013). The significance of the critique lies in the reminder of the centrality of colonialism in the constitution of forms of modernity and the importance of an encompassing historical sensibility in the exercise of historical comparative sociological analysis.

The arguments in post-colonial sociology are addressed here in Chapter 3. For the moment, I note that as compelling as some of the post-colonial sociologies are, they do little to discern divergent approaches, including efforts to reconstruct the genealogy of the discourse of civilisation. The general benefit of the latter lies in making the risks associated with this contested concept explicit. ‘Civilisation’ is a word with stubborn historical associations with colonialism and a risky analytic for the social sciences. However, as it has been a normative concept, ‘civilisation’ is also elastic and ambiguous. It can be equally the vehicle of critique as well as advocacy, and indeed it has been. More reflective versions of civilisational analysis address established uses of the concept through recovery and further development of a greater plurality of meanings (Aktürk, 2009). The uses of the idioms and discourses themselves are also a component of modern empires and the historical experiences of colonialism and have been the subject of critique in civilisational analysis.

In the first half of the twentieth century, nationalist critiques of imperial sovereignty not only began to undermine colonialism, they also forced a concept of civilisations in the plural to the forefront of the discourse of civilisations. Within sociology and world history, civilisations were in the main cast as endogenously created entities. The focus on entities brings out disagreement over the defining attributes of larger formations. The problem with such a world view surfaces when some societies and cultures are recognised as ‘civilisation’ on the basis of a debated set of attributes and others are not. When all attributes are put together, the list can look long. It can add up to a ‘checklist’, such as that which Fernández-Armesto – writing at the turn of the millennium – urges us to avoid: cities, law, private property, enduring arts, tombs, palaces, temples,

decipherable languages, sacred texts, literature, library, academies, clothes, trade, production, systems of extensive transportation and communication, cartography, armies, institutions of imperial government, class domination and stratification. As Fernández-Armesto observes, when progress is indexed against markers of civilisation like these, the analysis becomes dangerously flawed and implicitly evolutionist (2001: 17–25, 28–30). In this context, the three images of civilisation and civilisations began to coalesce in the early twentieth century.

Integration, process and interaction

There are examples of this first image of civilisations in the works of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee and, indeed, in some of the studies produced by Max Weber. To a degree, the point applies also to Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, though their formulations skirt the boundaries between integrationist and relational images.

Spengler and Toynbee each map a full-blown version of this approach in their own way. They were unique figures in history at that time. No others were attempting to build up a global picture of civilisations on the same scale. Though their writings reached large audiences and had a demonstrable public impact, they were on the fringes of history departments, which were busy with the fortification of national histories. Spengler and Toynbee took aim at macro-historical contexts by indexing the amorphous attributes that seemed to revolve around notions of civilisation. Spengler's trajectory was set in the conflagration of the First World War, and it did not escape the zeitgeist of dejection that descended upon Western societies at the loss of aspiration to a standard of civilisation. According to Spengler, civilisation is the decadence of culture in the mature phase of its life cycle. In the 'organic succession' phase, culture is succeeded by civilisation when it ossifies (Spengler, 1966). His biotic metaphor of civilisations sees a post-historical condition as the end point in the life cycle of a culture where it 'suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes *Civilisation*, the thing which we feel and understand' (1966: 310). Spengler's congealed and stable units – his count is eight – are an abandonment of his otherwise firm grasp of the past as moving history. The schema of cultures flourishing, solidifying as civilisations and entering a phase of slow, but inexorable, atrophy runs up against any appreciation of contingency. Civilisations count when they attain timeless cohesion and you can 'feel and understand' their unity.

Like Spengler, Toynbee had a significant impact on scholarly thinking about civilisation as a material objectification of a spiritual core. His view of instituted religion was more sanguine than Spengler's, and he was more alert to the detection

of crossroads of civilisations. Nonetheless, his enterprise lay in the cataloguing of lasting civilisations. His encyclopaedic catalogue of twenty-one civilisations – or thirty-one on a later count (Toynbee, 1972: 11) – is a product of the great interest he showed in the unities of civilisations as well as contacts between them. He remained true to the proposition that there are unities in world history, and that to discern these one must spurn the fragmenting nationalism of historical specialisms and national histories. While his encompassing frame did help in pinpointing inter-cultural encounters, communication and fusions, his holism risks elaboration of a human history of closed monads (Arnason, 2003: 63).

Early sociological ventures into theorising civilisations were more exploratory and open to further amplification by successive generations. Durkheim and Mauss worked at the interstices of concepts of civilisations as, first, spatial wholes and, second, as constituted in interaction. The imprecise, compact and ambiguous nature of their perspective puts them on the cusp of the two approaches I have posited here. Their early sketches of the characteristics of civilisations coincided with Durkheim's survey of ethnographies of non-stratified cultures in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. They brought recognition of the complexity of so-called primitive cosmologies (Durkheim and Mauss, 1971). Together they linked societies and tribal formations to larger and more durable civilisations as kindred groups of societies (Durkheim and Mauss, 1971). Not all civilisations reflect the same capacity to generate cohesion; the 'unequal coefficient' of the internationalisation of societal logics meant that 'civilisations' would be uneven in their global impact. As a framework, this could be interpreted as a conceptual core amenable to contrasting conclusions. On one hand, the framework buttresses the images of civilisations as cohesive and self-contained forms. On the other, it could be pressed into the service of historical sociologies of intra-civilisational and inter-civilisational encounters and indeed there is a relational accent in their essays. On balance, the relational image looks like it wins out. This vein of theory is openly pluralistic and anthropological and at odds with the proto-functionalist typology of segmentary societies of Durkheim's earlier work. Durkheim and Mauss give recognition to the complexity of indigenous cognitive systems and cosmologies that anthropology had brought to light. Moreover, when considered alongside *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, a version of Durkheim's collective representations is evident.

The anthropological members of the French Durkheimian School gained the most from the multi-civilisational turn. Durkheim and Mauss bestowed legitimacy on the study of stateless social formations qua civilisations for other anthropologists and sociologists including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Dumont, Marshall Sahlins, Marcel Granet and, later, Pierre Clastres and Robert Redfield (Arjomand, 2014b: 24–8). While French anthropology

provided a clear direction, the trajectory in Germany for civilisational thinking was less definitive. Developments in early German social theory focused on comparison of formations and raised questions of comparative methodology (Tiryakian, 2014: 93–4). Weber defined comparative analysis as comparison of ensembles of material and ideal elements. Weber uses the term ‘civilisation’ rarely. However, his work encompasses many collective formations, revealing that he accepted the pluralistic notion of civilisations. Notwithstanding that, he set out in the core of his comparative historical sociology to measure other civilisations against the comprehensive process of Western rationalisation (Wittrock, 2014). The defining question of his comparative historical sociology is the problem of theodicy. For Weber, the world religions produce different rationalities in response to the incongruence of worldly and sacred realms. As a result, different economic ethics emerged to guide variants of economic practice. The core of his sociology of religion can be contrasted with his own sociology of cities that, arguably, produced a second image of civilisational patterns. Weber’s *The City* can be read as a separate line of thinking, which stresses urban imaginaries as conduits of alternative civilisational and democratic-revolutionary potential (see Rundell, 2014). *The City* is an open book in the sense that it lends itself to multiple versions of modernity, including one of a long civilising process. Weber is not seeking to construct a typology of cities, preferring to more actively explore the contingency of urban formations. Cities create particular civilisational thresholds, he finds, but this varies according to the institution of urban imaginaries and the pattern of positive and negative consequences. The alternative reading emphasises radical contingency in the conception of the history of cities.

This remains a minor current of Weber’s thought. Our attention is focused on his core comparative historical sociology. He turned the German social sciences towards civilisations, but with dubious results. Despite extensive exploration of Eastern civilisations, there are problems with his most-developed accounts. The first is the glaring absence of empires in his sociology of Asian civilisations. The limits to his comparative historical methodology are most apparent in the comparison of China and India with the West. Though he did not have reliable and valid data available to him for his comparative historical sociology of China, it is the narrow conceptual presuppositions informing his method that stand out (Weber, 1951). China’s attributes are each held up as deficits of Occidental rationalism in law, economy, religious heterodoxy and ethics. Above all, the Chinese cultural pattern is seen as cognitively deficient compared with the baseline of the West that Weber used. His comparative analysis of India is more substantial and has more sustainable conclusions (Weber, 1958). However, like his comparative historical sociology of China, it is premised on the search for the balance of elements of the

capitalist spirit privileged in the developmental paths of Western countries that may be sourced in religious traditions and which can explain the absence of capitalism. He seems unable to avoid the view that Asian religions are contemplative, while Western capitalist ethics are an exceptional example of the emissary type that favours world transformation. The larger issue at stake is his lack of recognition of the historicity of non-Western civilisations that backgrounds his privileging of the West (Adams and Arnason, 2016: 187–8). In summary, Weber's sociology of religion and comparative methodology privileges the test of aspects of the European constellation in comparative analysis, even if his framework does not preclude exploration of particular cases of inter-civilisational junctures.

The early perspectives of Durkheim, Mauss, Spengler, Toynbee and Weber tend, on the whole, to a nascent integrationist image, though Durkheim, Mauss and Weber remain open to alternative interpretations. The problem lies in the lack of attention to the cross-flows of forces, ideas, influences, customs and people in which civilisations are constituted and indefinitely alter. In the wake of their lives and work, the problem continued to foster a tendency to reduce complex formations – with sophisticated cosmologies and modes and systems of decision-making and conflict resolution, patterns of trade and exchange, and remarkable understandings of the biosphere – to typical objects and practices for the purpose of defining which societies are 'in' and which are 'out' when it comes to stratifying hierarchies of progress. Civilisational analysis between the 1930s and the 1970s did not examine stateless and non-nucleated societies very often. In developing an alternative to the integrationist image, proponents of processual sociologies and approaches endeavour to evade reductionist consequences of this kind. How successful have they been?

Process-based approaches take the persistent ambiguities that haunt conceptions of civilisations as a point of departure. Analyses of civilisational processes are well known in comparative sociology. But they have also gained prominence in political science and international relations. A notable exponent of the processual image from sociology is Norbert Elias. The dissemination of his ideas is a contemporary development and therefore subject-matter for the next chapter. One point to note is that his historical sociology presents as a general theory when comparative analyses reveal general variation in civilising processes (Arjomand, 2014b). If this is true, how might other process-focused perspectives handle comparative methodological issues? International relations perspectives show more awareness of inter-regional and global connections, as one might expect them to (Unay and Senel, 2009). In order to make 'civilisations' analytically useful in studies of world politics, Hall and Jackson propose to shift the axis of definition. They argue that civilisations are not essences, but processes (2007). Many critics of crude essentialism,

they observe, end up with softer varieties of reification. 'Considering a civilisation to be composed of a coherent ensemble of values, or a characteristic set of dispositions is no less essentialist than Huntington's approach' (Hall and Jackson, 2007: 2). They distinguish a 'fourth generation' of scholars from the three generations Arjomand and Tiryakian profile in their summary of the field (Arjomand and Tiryakian, 2004a). Hall and Jackson make the distinction on the basis of the fourth generation's ability to transcend essentialism. Whether there is sufficient intellectual cohesion to talk of a fourth generation is a problem that can be put to one side in order to see that there are examples of emergent scholarship focusing on processes and relations. With insights from international relations theory and comparative historical sociology, self-styled constructivists examine the shift in boundaries of civilisations caused by transformations in the relations of power (Hall and Jackson, 2007: 6). There is, in other words, fluidity in the historical and ongoing production of civilisations. Civilisational identities in world politics may be relatively stable, but the undercurrents of process supporting them flow quite freely. Hall and Jackson suggest six theses as an agenda for researching civilisational processes (2007: 7–8). Civilisations are: 'weakly bounded', 'contradictory not coherent', 'loosely integrated', 'heterarchical, not centralised', 'contested, not consensual' and 'states of flux'.

As a prelude to larger analyses, Hall and Jackson's theses are sound lines of inquiry. However, the resulting research into each does not live up to expectations. Perspectives gathered together in collaboration under this banner therefore seem unified less by these specific agenda and more by their general stance of post-essentialism. Thus the exact ideational and material processes producing civilisation and civilisations are not plotted in such a way that gives the reader confidence that the problem of essentialism is indeed being transcended. In the drive to depart decisively from essentialist models of civilisation, post-essentialist strategies may overlook processes of essentialisation in which ideal interests mutate into material forces. Peter Katzenstein makes a valuable observation when he describes the pliability of civilisations as pluralist complexes:

They are both internally highly differentiated and culturally loosely integrated. Because they are differentiated, civilizations transplant selectively, not wholesale. Because they are culturally loosely integrated, they generate debate and contestations. And, as social constructions of primordality, *civilizations can become political reifications especially when encountering other civilizations*. Civilizations constitute a world that is neither a Hobbesian anarchy nor a Habermasian public sphere, neither empire nor

cosmopolis ... Instead, they are *weakly institutionalized social orders* reflected in and shaped by a *variety of practices and processes*. (Katzenstein, 2010b: 5–6, emphasis added)

In his version of a processual perspective, Katzenstein merges Eisenstadt's grasp of civilisation as institutionalised orders with Elias's strong sense of historical movement, process and development. Katzenstein's blend of international relations and comparative historical sociology embraces processes of orientation to place, time and collective identity. Furthermore, his blend pinpoints anthropological constructions of relationships to the world and to divinity. Processes and practices through which these orientations coalesce and change occur in trans-civilisational and inter-civilisational encounters as well as pluralist intra-civilisational contestation and debate (2010b: 32–6). He illustrates this by remarking on the concentration of essentialist convictions in the encounters of Europe's empires that, in late modernisation, erupted into catastrophic and genocidal wars. Katzenstein and his associates are closely in touch with the processual vein of thinking, but also with the scholarship of encounters and contexts (2010a), that is the relational approach. This collaboration is the nearest thing to a fusion of all three approaches. It is the third approach that is the most suggestive of directions for the version of civilisational analysis that I am advocating and the most open to further innovation.

Commenting on Toynbee and Spengler's histories of civilisations, Bruce Mazlish points out that few today follow such uses. Instead, scholars are more 'interested in cross-border and trans-civilisational encounters. In fact, some scholars now prefer to think of such interactions as constituent of civilisation, not peripheral and accidental to them' (2004: xii). Scholars of inter-civilisational encounters epitomise the trend Mazlish throws into relief. The formulation arose out of the work of Benjamin Nelson in the 1960s and 1970s on the emergence of Western 'structures of consciousness'. The path it took to reach its upgraded state in Johann Arnason's civilisational analysis was substantial. Two representative quotations serve to recapitulate Arnason's position and the moves beyond Nelson. Arnason is interested in high-impact interactions between civilisations. His attention is particularly drawn to the 'openness to encounters' as a vital part of civilisational patterns. There is no simple definition of this notion and a lengthy quotation is needed to convey the enlargement of his analytic:

This approach is radically opposed to the models which posit closure as the primary or predominant state of civilisations. Visions of closure and efforts to achieve it are not uncommon, but they are best understood against the background of intrinsic and fundamental exposure to other forms of sociocultural life. By the same token,

however, the comparative analysis of civilisations has to deal with different expressions and levels of this underlying openness. Nelson's interpretations of the structures of consciousness and their involvement in intercivilisational encounters suggest ways of theorising the general connection as well as its variations. But before taking that line of argument further, we must broaden the analytical perspective. Our discussion of civilisational patterns has emphasised the need for a multi-dimensional model, giving more weight to institutional structures and dynamics than Nelson did, and this view must now be extended to the field of intercivilisational relations. If civilisations are to be analysed as interconnected constellations of meaning, power and wealth, the same applies to the processes that unfold across civilisational boundaries. (Arnason, 2003: 288)

Arnason's multidimensional approach to the creation of civilisations introduces to the field the least reductive theoretical and comparative framework. Indeed, it is non-reductive and thus the analysis can find wider applications than Nelson's original concept. With this analysis, Arnason intends to research historical encounters in context in order to reconstruct civilisational dynamics. The emphasis would be one-sided in his view if the obverse notion of intra-civilisational encounters were not taken into account:

I would speak of intra-civilisational schisms when the shared cultural premises of a civilisational complex are interpreted in radically divergent ways that lead to – or at least point to – conflicts on the level of institutions and power structures and when the dimensions of dissent and struggle are such that they give rise to alternative civilisational patterns. (Arnason, 2006: 50)

This is the most constructive example on offer in the field because it properly expands the scope of interactions and conflicts. Moreover, Arnason calls attention to institutional dynamics of economic and political power alongside cultural and ideological crystallisations without getting tangled up in quasi-evolutionary assumptions. If the aim, however, is a comparative framework for understanding the mutual formation of large complexes, then analysis of only the most decisive examples of interaction will not suffice. A fuller picture of the relational patterns of civilisations must take account of the density of interactions and connections as well as landmark encounters.

Even with this qualification, it is not hard to appreciate that Arnason's synthesis of inter- and intra-civilisational encounters puts his work at the forefront. His position is more extensively and critically treated in the next chapter. For the moment, it will suffice to note that his theoretical and empirical projects help to clarify the range of inter-civilisational encounters and the quality and degrees of aperture and closure that exist within civilisational constellations. It is therefore

a basis for theoretical innovation, provided there is departure around a few gaps. For example, there is little on colonial modernities and what are often known as ‘new world’ settler-colonial societies in the Americas and the Pacific. Moreover, Arnason’s conception of civilisations still precludes indigenous cultures qua civilisational forms. Both of these problematic aspects are raised in the development of a version of civilisational analysis focused on imaginaries, on power and on deep and dense inter-civilisational engagement.

The outline below of a conception of social imaginaries and power relate the problematic aspects to inter-civilisational engagement. Cornelius Castoriadis’s theory of the social imaginary (1987 [1975]) and his specific notion of power helps to stress how imaginaries create engagement, conflicts and dissonance between civilisations. There is potential in his theory for development of a reconceptualisation of civilisations.

Civilisations, imaginaries and inter-civilisational engagement

Castoriadis’s notion of the imaginary institution of society can be located in a larger field of social imaginaries (Adams *et al.*, 2015). Though civilisations did not figure amongst his many interests, his concern with the ontology of creation produced a social theory with vital resonances with contemporary civilisational analysis. He asks fundamental questions about the human creation of an ‘indefinite’ number of societies that should be of interest to civilisational sociologists. The notion of the imaginary that he founded was briefly adopted by Eisenstadt as the *imaginaire* of civilisations qua cultural ontologies (Eisenstadt, 2004). In this phase, civilisations for Eisenstadt denoted formations that furnish themselves with worlds of meaning through which social and political orders are structured. Arnason more actively engages with Castoriadis’s thought. He critically recomposes Castoriadis’s theory of the imaginary as part of a larger reconstruction of civilisational analysis undertaken to underline dimensions of meaning and power. As well as resonating more generally with conceptions of the ontological nature of civilisations, Castoriadis’s theory of the imaginary directly helps elucidate the nature of human collectives, the institution of otherness and the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. In his larger work *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, he theorises the manner in which collectivities in their wholeness construct distinct social and historical modes of life that are meaningful to their subjects. What matters, what counts, what is in and what is out are a series of choices in collective self-representation. ‘Who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we?’ (1987 [1975]: 146–7) are questions of collective identity that go to the problem of distinction and alterity. These are

questions for collectivities that may be tribes, cities, societies, empires or, for that matter, civilisations.

Two criticisms are relevant in considering the relationship of Castoriadis's notion of imaginary to civilisational analysis. First, in implying that the object of analysis is national societies, theories of social imaginaries unnecessarily risk socio-centric assumptions (Adams *et al.*, 2015). In spite of Castoriadis's unequivocal position that an indefinite variety of collective life is always possible, society remains the main institutional creation of the imaginary for him. An exact range of multiple imaginaries – capitalist, imperial, even civilisational – are needed as a starting point. Second, Castoriadis's formulations suppress the phenomenological side of the world as the greater meta-context of all life. If the world is understood as the backdrop to the creation of societies, states, civilisations and empires, then the variety of connections between collective formations can be brought into the frame of analysis. Collective identities and forms of meaning are generated relationally in the interaction of different kinds of formation. In the past, socio-centric explanations of culture common to functionalist theories in sociology and anthropology have suppressed the field of meaning and the range of exogenous impulses on social formations. The constitution of collective identities is confined to internally composed territories when, in fact, collectivities are, as Arnason puts it in his interpretation of Castoriadis's theory, 'relational in a twofold sense ... inseparable from specific ways of locating society in the world, and [dependent] on demarcation from other collectivities' (2003: 60).

To take this further beyond socio-centric assumptions, Castoriadis's notion of the social-historical must be taken into account (1987 [1975]: 170–202). Castoriadis sees history as inseparable from the collective forms instituted by the imaginary (1987 [1975]: 150). Collectivities are engulfed in historical *significance*. Bringing this point into the civilisational framework, we can conclude that all societies, empires and civilisations produce a self-perception of history and how continuous and discontinuous connections to the past are. Because all societies, empires and civilisations are also always bearers of historical meaning in the broadest and deepest sense, the key to understanding lies in elucidating their social-historical conditions. Since all forms of social organisation create institutions of life, economy and polity and images of the world and the modes of knowledge through collective imaginaries, all societies 'have' history. Therefore, following Castoriadis's line of thinking, all human groupings are bearers of historicity – as an abiding sense of continuity or discontinuity – even those supposedly 'without history'. This vision is compatible with an encompassing comprehension of civilisations beyond the regular roll-call of state-based formations. It alludes to other collectivities – ethnic, indigenous,

archaic formations with proto-state and stateless structures, religious communities, trans-national language communities and so forth. This breadth of the collectivities of human existence is the reason I use the term 'imaginaries' only from this point.

The sum of collectives bearing different historicities are also given to a variety of relations with other collectives. Collective formations acquire and modify identity, historicity and meaning through interaction in the world. In Castoriadis's terms, collectives are circumscribed by a categorisation of difference, or rather an unpredictable *othering* (1987 [1975]: 150). As collectives, civilisations develop inclinations and aversions to varying degrees to encounters and engagement. Furthermore, dispositions to encounter are generally adjustable. Civilisations in mutual engagement are more affected by the presence of strangers and encounters with other modes of economic organisation, abstractions of knowledge and belief and models of polity. Below I define connectedness of this kind as inter-civilisational engagement. I elaborate on the definition in Chapter 4 and give illustrations of diverging civilisational combinations of inclinations and aversions – the forms of othering – in Part II. Before proceeding to that definition, the relationship of power to imaginaries must be considered.

Just as all human formations are engulfed in historical meaning and institute myriad varieties of relations, they are also embedded in different kinds of power. Castoriadis distinguishes three kinds (1991). First is 'radical ground power', which can be termed an implicit background power. Ground power is not situated in any visible institution alone. It is trans-institutional, the 'power of *outis*, of Nobody' (1991: 150). Ground power permits states and other trans-territorial organisations to advance to places where their concrete institutions are not physically present. In the creation of ground power, symbols stand in for enforcement and can do so beyond the effective reach of coercive and legal institutions. Castoriadis argues that ground power is the power that gives power in the second sense, as the 'explicit power' of state and other institutions. As Castoriadis's notion of power is relational, explicit power refers to the conservation of order in the face of social and class conflict and the mutation of order as the result of conflict. Explicit power addresses itself to the imagination of the legitimacy of order as well as a monopoly of arms, taxation, law-making and administration. It denotes a general capacity to formulate 'sanctionable injunctions' (1991: 151). This is not to be confused with states, which are secondary institutions differentiated from the anonymous collective (which might in turn be imagined as a sovereignty in sacred kingship or an imagined popular will). Explicit power makes possible the separation of the institutional apparatus of states and in turn constrains popular participation in the political operations of those institutions. It also blunts the interrogation of existing conditions and, in

some instances, generates outright exclusion. The asymmetry of the extreme arrangements of the latter ends up as a third kind of power: 'domination'. Castoriadis distinguishes domination as a sub-species of explicit power evident in circumstances of the greatest asymmetry. The imaginaries that create collectivities also generate power and its instantiations. At the same time, imaginaries are irreducible, which includes being irreducible to imagined power and its institutional configurations.

With these points on power in mind, it is time to define inter-civilisational engagement. In defining this via the theory of the imaginary, it is no longer necessary to accept a conception of civilisations as only separated entities or solely as historical processes. Instead, it is contended that the imaginary institution of civilisations occurs in and through their interaction with each other, that is, through movement. Imaginaries structure both the inclinations and limits to engagement and encounters. In other words, they mark the settings of closure and porosity and relational orientations. Through recurring relationships, civilisations become engaged and in that engagement they are meaningful and powerful (in the sense of co-instituting power). Engagement is defined as the regularisation and routinisation of contact and encounter, the myriad, mostly undocumented, untraceable, routine contacts and connections, carried out by anonymous actors, as well as those that stand out as full-scale encounters. Engagement is deeper than encounters due to its regularity and greater continuity. My definition is reiterated and then unpacked in Chapter 4, where the relationships of imaginaries and power are elucidated across four specific dimensions of inter-civilisational engagement. The four dimensions are migration, economic relations, cultural exchange and creation and reconstruction of models of civilisation. They are treated as analytics in Chapter 4 and then throughout Part II.

Prior to that extensive discussion, I profile the intellectual terrain of contemporary civilisational analysis and its key thinkers in Chapter 2. As well as outlining the perspectives of contemporary civilisational analysis, *Debating Civilisations* looks at critical counterpoints. I relate civilisational analysis to its critics by foreshadowing some lines with dialogue with the counter-paradigms of globalisation analysis, Marxism and post-colonial sociology. Through examination of paradigms that are positioned as alternatives, or are explicitly critical of contemporary civilisational analysis, the most salient criticisms are related to the modified version advocated here. Some short comments on how this takes place, and why, are necessary to show how the version of contemporary civilisational analysis that I elucidate in Chapter 4 is arrived at.

Critical perspectives on civilisational analysis

When post-colonial sociological responses are compared with perspectives at the interstices of Marxism and civilisational analysis and then globalisation theory and civilisational analysis, other problematics come to the fore. Perspectives elaborated in globalisation analysis, Marxism and post-colonial sociology reveal 'power' to be a still-troubling problematic for civilisational analysis, which is one other reason for prefixing Castoriadis's notion of power in the passage above. In comparing contemporary civilisational analysis with the competing paradigms of globalisation theory, Marxism and post-colonial sociology, valid theoretical criticisms and substantiated correctives can be found. For instance, post-colonial sociologists underline historical contexts of colonialism and power in the development of Western ideologies of civilisation. Post-colonial sociologists are also sharply critical of the multiple modernities hypothesis. More precisely, they critique the manner in which modern social formations appear sequestered when viewed through the prism of multiple modernities. Their suggested alternative is the methodology of connected histories as a different basis on which to interpret the global hierarchies of power constructed in historical and present formations. As a second example, globalisation theorists have a pre-existing genre of the civilisation of modernity. However, the field is haunted by the kind of presentism that civilisational analysis is critical of. Even so, there are important interlocutors who speak to civilisational analysis from paradigms of globalisation theory and who highlight important forms of power and domination operating on a global plane. They reflect longer and more complex histories of globalisation and tend towards multidimensional analyses of historical civilisations and contemporary modernities. Because those addressing the problematics of civilisations and globalisation demarcate higher levels of connectedness in earlier phases of global history, they are able to produce insights useful for a conception of civilisational engagement. The third counterpoint, Marxism, is at odds with civilisational analysis over a rupture in global history: the advent of modern capitalism. Capitalism is a marginal problematic in civilisational analysis. One way to correct the neglect is through a conception of the imaginary of capitalism. A longer history of capitalism's emergence can be reconstructed through a theory of the imaginary. Though this is a larger task in itself, there are interpretations in Marxism that furnish insights into the imaginary of capitalism. Elements of Marx (in one interpretation) and Antonio Gramsci and the neo-Gramscian civilisational analysis of Robert W. Cox fit a theory of the imaginary of capitalism. Marx's imaginary of capital and money theorised in *The Grundrisse* and elsewhere is one element prescient to early modern forms of dispossession and accumulation. Gramsci's

elucidation of the cultural dimensions and geographical inequalities of capitalism are threads of a larger picture of variation of capitalism. The two elements are integrated in Cox's political economy of civilisational variety. Matching Cox's analysis with arguments around the varieties of capitalism, it becomes possible to find common ground between Marxism and civilisational analysis, where otherwise there is critical dissonance. An important point to reinforce is that civilisations diversify capitalism. The differences between the three paradigms and civilisational analysis are quite striking. Yet, as argued in the third chapter, there are criticisms to take on board around the shortfalls and limitations in contemporary civilisational analysis as well as several points of common ground.

Structure of the book

The opening chapter is concerned with contexts of contemporary civilisational analysis. During the course of Chapter 2, context gives way to content. Part I covers theoretical engagements with the problematics of civilisational analysis. Some are within the field, others are outside and represent alternative paradigms. By weaving through a critical survey of the field and elucidating relations with critical paradigmatic alternatives, I highlight gaps that, in turn, can be partly tackled in a model of inter-civilisational engagement. Part II continues that theme with substantive studies of inter-civilisational engagement. Readers interested exclusively in civilisational analysis as a field may elect to focus on the main part of Part I. Should readers wish to be acquainted with my model immediately, skip through to Chapter 4 and then either proceed with Part II or track back to Chapters 2 and 3. The text is amenable to different but equally valid reading strategies.

Chapter 2 launches Part I with a description of how contemporary civilisational analysis is related to the theories of modernisation from which it emerged. This is followed by a straightforward outline and assessment of the main perspectives in the field. Readers not familiar with Elias, Eisenstadt and Arnason can become acquainted with their perspectives, as well as encountering critical comparison and evaluation. This approach lays the groundwork for comparison with competing paradigms in Chapter 3. The method of comparison involves productive use of dissensus between paradigms to identify spaces for potential agonistic debate around common problematics and methodologies. Chapter 4 outlines inter-civilisational engagement as my innovation and basis for an alternative account. In this opening chapter, I have submitted the contention that civilisations are created through openness to engagement and encounters. The contention is further developed in Chapter 4

across dimensions of migration, economic movements and connections, cultural engagement and the political reconstruction of civilisational models. Historical engagement entails dis-engagement also. The non-borrowings, dissonances and conflicts of civilisations are noted alongside cases of fragmentation and the collapse of large empires.

The outline of inter-civilisational engagement in Chapter 4 is broad in scope. I pepper the argument with examples to illustrate key points. One aim of *Debating Civilisations* is to sketch an extension of the comparative analysis of civilisations into its empirical gaps, which takes place in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. A vital gap in contemporary civilisational analysis is the question of how civilisations are shaped by relationships to oceans and seas. With the rise of new perspectives and debates in oceanography and history – particularly maritime history – it is a good time to begin to address this lacuna. Chapter 5 examines inter-civilisational engagement in oceanic and thalassic civilisations. Since the Pacific as a civilisation of the ocean is almost entirely untouched in civilisational analysis, it is analysed in Chapter 6 as a specific substantive case study. Characterising the Pacific, with Epeli Hau'ofa (2008), as Oceanian civilisation, I argue on the basis of critical scholarship for a wider perception of indigenous civilisations and the range of historical experiences of dispossession, survival and revival. Case studies of modern cultural and political engagement and conflicts in the inter-civilisational region of Latin America underscore the context and legacies of colonialism. One of the cases is indigenous revival in the late twentieth century. Chapter 8 looks at the very different region of East Asia. Specifically, the chapter explores Japan's deeper connections with China and the West and how these have influenced cultural and political thought. The Conclusion is a précis of the overall argument with highlights of what is absent from civilisational analysis at large. At the very end I ask questions about the vocation of civilisational analysis in contemporary contexts of creation and transformation, which includes critical global problems of the human condition. I conclude that a scholarship of engagement can aid the critical purpose of elucidating transformations that stimulate lasting improvements to the human condition.

That is a glimpse into what *Debating Civilisations* attempts to articulate. There are several things the work does not do. No attempt is made to comprehensively represent the whole field of civilisational analysis. The critical paradigms engaged for counterpoints and intersections are not fully represented either. They are instead canvassed for what I believe to be the best points for constructive dialogue between different paradigmatic positions. Nor do I, as a sociologist and not a historian, attempt a global history of civilisations on the scale of Toynbee, Braudel or Fernández-Armesto, who perform majestic feats within their realm of expertise. What I leave out may

make the argument vulnerable to criticism. However, I hope that the reader appreciates the inter-disciplinary spirit of bringing research in world history (and occasionally international relations) to problems from social theory and historical and comparative sociology. I favour an agenda of research into more interactive constellations that serve to underline how deep the level of connectedness is. The spirit of inter-disciplinary research is a *sine qua non* of any agenda of this sort. Historical and empirical inquiry has been pushing in this direction amongst numerous scholars who participate in multidisciplinary and inter-disciplinary research around civilisations. By outlining and problematising contemporary civilisational analysis, *Debating Civilisations* pushes the directions the field is tending towards beyond their current limits.