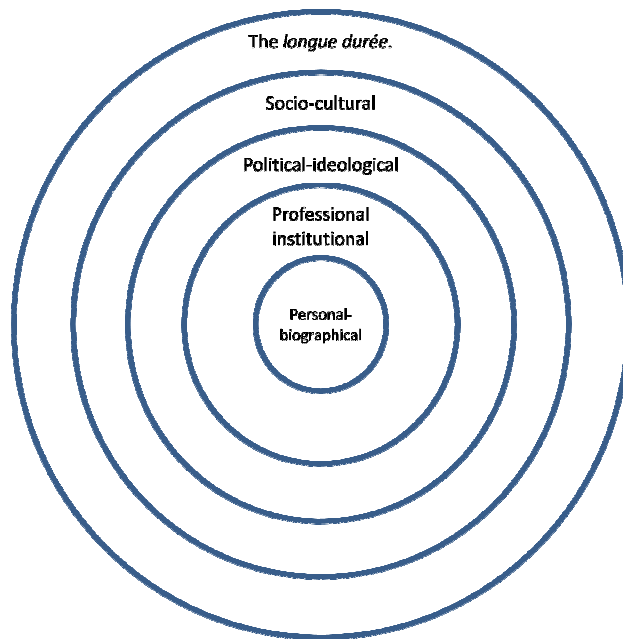


Concentric Circles of Context

Nils Gilman, 4 April 2009 – **DO NOT QUOTE**

This paper sketches a framework for contextualizing and historicizing postwar American social science, illustrating the case with examples from what anthropologist Ben White has called “the main theoretical underpinning [of] post-war North American social science,” namely modernization theory.¹

Here’s the gambit: I believe that there are, quite exactly, five “circles” of context needed to historicize a given social scientific movement, idea, or personage. These five circles are (1) the personal-biographical, (2) the professional-institutional, (3) the political-ideological, (4) the socio-cultural, and (5) the *longue durée*. Each of these modes of contextualization relies on a different evidentiary base, and each typically entails a significantly different mode of narration. A second and more tentative hypothesis is that, considered collectively, these five contextual frames constitute what my fellow management consultants like to call “a MECE framework,” that is, a “mutually exclusive, cumulatively exhaustive” set of contextual frames—which is to say that accounting for all five circles achieves a “complete” historical account of a given social scientific paradigm, process, or personality.



A couple of contextual notes on this text. First, everything here should be considered *du moment*, a preliminary hypothesis intended not for publication but instead as a tool for stoking discussion in the workshop. (The paper’s tactical focus explains why I’ve eschewed producing a consistent scholarly apparatus.) Second, since this is a workshop on Cold War *social science*, I will be focusing my discussion of modernization theory on its status as *theory*, that is, as an intellectual paradigm. This means that I will not address the wider context of modernization as a “global project,”ⁱ involving

ⁱ E.g. the German Historical Institute’s recent workshop on “Modernization as a Global Project”: http://www.ghi-dc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=410&Itemid=252 – and the forthcoming special edition of *Diplomatic History*, which is publishing some of that workshop’s excellent contributions. I note here in passing that the GHI scholarship widens the definition

not just social scientists but everyone from peasants to policemen to policymakers, except insofar as these wider ramifications are necessary to understand *the evolution and significance of the science itself*. Finally, the following reflections also represent a reaction to the reception that my intellectual history of modernization theory, *Mandarins of the Future*, has received in the five years since its publication.

Concentric circles of contextualization

If the historiography of the social sciences, and particularly the historiography of “Cold War social science,” is to accomplish more than an cataloguing of the dead ideas of yesteryear, then the key questions that historians need to answer to are of the following sort: *Why did the scholars who participated in a given social scientific movement ask the questions they did? How did they come up with the theoretical and methodological innovations that they did? What did they assume and take for granted? What caused them to make the “mistakes” that they did? Who were their audiences, and how did they affect them?* Answering these sorts of questions will make our histories of social science relevant not just to us antiquarians, but also to today’s practitioners of these sciences.

Historians deploy five broad analytic frames to answer these sorts of questions, which I will sketch here, with illustrations drawn from the recent historiography of modernization theory:

1. **The personal-biographical frame.** This contextual frame focuses on the biographies of the social scientists in question, asking how their life histories helped to structure the way they thought about the topics they worked on—thematically, substantively, politically, or even epistemologically. What about this scholar’s *personal life experiences* made her make the interventions she did? This historiographical hermeneutic can be more or less theoretically elaborated, ranging from simple observations that provide narrative color to what might otherwise seem like a rarified march of disembodied ideas, to full-blown post-Freudian psychobiography. In terms of evidence, this contextual frame is often best supported by personal papers and correspondence, memoirs and obituaries, as well as interviews with the principals and peers, where possible.

In the case of modernization theory, this mode of contextualization notes the distinctive characteristics that marked the life histories of the leading figures of modernization theory that distinguished them from their peers who chose other paths. One might note for example, that the early American modernization theorists in-

of “modernization” to the point where it is more or less synonymous with “development,” at the risk of losing what was specific about the social scientific and policy discourse of “modernization” at its moment of origin in the 1950s. (Cont. next page...)

In a nutshell, the language of “modernization” was first deployed by social scientists (most programmatically by Edward Shils) to challenge the perceived limitations of the more or less exclusively economic understanding of “development” prevalent since the 1930s in European colonial offices, among North Atlantic social scientists, and among local elites in the postcolonial world. This battle to broaden the definition of development to include sociological variables, broadly understood, is one that the modernization theorists decisively won: by the 1970s, official institutions of development (notably the World Bank, but also various national institutions in both the OECD and the “developing” world, as well as NGOs) had embraced modernization theory’s critique of a purely economic conception of development. The institutionalization of this broader definition of “development” can be traced in the World Bank’s embrace of a “Basic Needs” approach in the 1970s, from Robert McNamara’s first use of the term in a 1972 speech [Robert S. McNamara, “Address to the Board of Governors: Washington DC, September 25, 1972,” in *The McNamara Years at the World Bank: Major Policy Addresses of Robert S. McNamara 1968-1981* (Hopkins, 1981)] to the Bank’s landmark publication of its first annual *World Development Report* in 1978, which issued statistics that measured “development” not just in terms of country-level trade and income data, but also country-level data on demography, health, and education. In other words, although the Bank did not use the language of “modernization,” it did internalize modernization theory’s understanding of development as not just an economic but also a social process. Since the 1980s this broad definition of “development” has become the conventional wisdom among virtually all participants in the practice and discourse development, regardless of subject position or political outlook, and indeed since the 1980s the “official definition” of development has only continued to broaden, as the Bank over time has included more and more data categories in its reports, on topics like gender, sanitation, inequality, land use, infrastructure, and even, in the latest *World Development Report* (2009, p. 340-342), access to telecommunications. From this perspective, we may see the broadening of the definition of “development” that the original modernization theorists promoted as but a moment in a more or less continuous creep in the scope of “development discourse” over the past century.

cluded a preponderance of children of missionaries, notably Lucian Pye and David Apter, whose parents were missionaries in the 1920s and 30s in China and Africa, respectively. This experience not only provided them with direct exposure to the soon-to-be-postcolonial world, but may also have informed their sense that the West not only owed a moral obligation but also had the capacity to improve the lot of those outside the West. Likewise, the personal mode of contextualization would note that a number of key modernization theorists were assimilated and post-religious Jews, like Edward Shils and Walt Rostow, whose own familial experience of relatively painless relaxation of religious apartness may have informed their own sense that this was path that others would also regard as desirable if not evitable. In general, the biographical angle might provide interesting openings for exploring the relationship between religion and modernization theory, a hitherto relatively unexplored domain. Looking beyond the United States, it is ironic that while historians have meticulously documented the daily lives of colonial officials, there has been almost no scholarship documenting the life histories of postcolonial development scholars in other countries, whether metropolitan or local.

As a genre, biography obviously focuses on this contextual frame, though the good ones, like David Milne's *America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War*, use biographical detail as merely one element in evaluating how social scientific ideas connected to the larger social and political matters of the day. In general, however, historians of Cold War social science have not relied nearly as heavily on the biographical details of their subjects' lives as have historians of other disciplines, from politics to painting to physics. Of the leading modernization theorists, only Walt Rostow and Talcott Parsons have received monographic-length biographic treatment, though a number of others, notably Edward Shils and Harold Lasswell, would make wonderful biographic subjects.

2. **The professional-institutional frame.** With this contextual frame, the focus is on the specificities of how the crucible of academia (or whatever institution the work was done in) helped to structure the science the scholars produced. This power of this frame proceeds from the obvious notion most scientific publications are, in large measure, specific responses to other and relatively immediate scholarly antecedents. From an evidentiary perspective, this frame will carefully track the footnotes in the social scientists' works, to understand the intellectual context that the scholar herself identified as operative and crucial—as well as what the scholar left out. This frame also includes the slippery question of how the *institutional force field* in which the social scientists were operating—from tenure and promotion pressures to funding sources—helped inform or structure the scholarship that they produced. On these latter issues, spending some time with the institutional paperwork (committee memos, correspondence, mission statements, and so on) can be surprisingly revealing. Carefully reading who thanks whom in the acknowledgements can also be useful for teasing out relevant professional social networks.

Irene Gendzier's work, *Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World*, placed central emphasis on this professional-institutional frame in her account of modernization theory.² My own work, *Mandarins of the Future*, with its focus on the Harvard Department of Social Relations, the SSRC's Committee on Comparative Politics, and the MIT Center for International Studies, also emphasized the institutional context for theoretical innovation.

When trying to connect the institutional context of modernization theory to the Cold War, the natural tendency has been to follow the money. A variety of scholars, often with polemical intent, have been interested in the funding of the central institutions of modernization, for example by Ford and Rockefeller Foundation moneys, as well as, in some cases, the US national security apparatus.³ Establishing the causal relationship between specific social scientific ideas and the funding sources that allowed them to be developed is notoriously difficult to pin down, however. Often the most that can be said is that even if scholars were not obligated, it would have been unnatural if they were not inclined to try to please their paymasters.ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ Two small methodological points. First, even if one assumes that scholars were trying to please their paymasters, it doesn't necessarily mean they necessarily *succeeded* in doing so. Second, the specific sources of funding are very important to scrutinize. Whether scholars got money from the CIA, the DoD, or DoA or other government entities (and indeed even which particular part of those entities) would

Although the institutional context for modernization theory was certainly deeply shaped by Cold War funding, this should not deceive us into reducing modernization theory to a Cold War screed. For in fact, all of the important intellectual tributaries that flowed into modernization theory arose prior to the advent of the Cold War: development economics, generally considered to have been inaugurated by Paul Rosenstein-Rodan's 1943 essay "Problems of Industrialisation of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe,"⁴ originated in theoretical economic debates from the 1920s, particularly Allyn Young's 1929 essay "Increasing Returns and Economic Progress"⁵; Talcott Parsons's development of structural-functionalism, the intellectual backbone of modernization theory, began as a response to the collapse of institutional economics in the face of the neoclassical revolution in the 1920s; the rise of Gabriel Almond's anti-institutional method of comparative politics must be traced to the University of Chicago's promotion of behavioralism from the 1920s forward; and "The Theory of Demographic Transition," first formally proposed by Frank Notestein in 1945, had originally been bruited as early as 1929.⁶

Although initial efforts to understand modernization theory within a professional-institutional frame tended to have a US-centric focus (for good reason), a major agenda in modernization theory studies over the last few years has been to emphasize the transnational contexts of modernization, understanding how modernization theory was received and reformulated as it "went global" during the last third of the twentieth century.⁷ To date, however, there has been little systematic comparative work done on the different *institutions* that supported different transnational flavors of modernization theory. While Odd Arne Westad's wonderful *The Global Cold War* (2006) is theoretically grounded in the Soviet and American views of modernization, it does not systematically compare the social scientific literatures of the two countries. Thus far, in fact, no one has systematically compared how Soviet and American social scientific theories of development and modernization differed, either foundationally or in terms of their practical policy recommendations. (One lead to follow might be the pioneering work of Johanna Bockman and Michael Bernstein on how Soviet and Western European economists collaborated in the development of linear programming.⁸)

On the other hand, much excellent work is being done on the emergence of local social sciences of "development" and "modernization" in the former colonial countries, in which interesting work was done during Cold War trying to integrate knowledge from the colonial period within a new theoretical language, sometimes but not always drawing on the work of American modernization theorists.⁹ One of the key insights of this scholarship has been to challenge totalizing, "diffusionist" notions of intellectual dissemination. As Jenifer Van Vleck has put it, whereas scholars like Michael Adas, James Scott, Arturo Escobar, and Michael Latham have argued that modernization functioned as an ideology of Western dominance, producing US hegemony over the rest of the world, others like Timothy Mitchell and Nick Cullather have argued that modernizing initiatives in places like Egypt, India, or Afghanistan "were not simply imposed by the US government, but in fact required the collaboration of local elites, who embraced modernization because it served their own national, ethnic, or class interests."¹⁰ A similar point has been made by Brad Simpson in his careful study of the use of modernization discourse by Suharto-era elites in Indonesia.ⁱⁱⁱ

While all the emphasis on the transnational and global discourse of development is providing a rich avenue for scholarly exploration, the professional-institutional frame also forces us to realize just how little the original promulgation of modernization theory in the United States, in the 1950s and 1960s, depended on scholarship or knowledge produced elsewhere. While modernization theory's theoretical framework had roots in transatlantic intellectual debates from the 1920s, the early U.S. modernization theorists appear to have almost willfully ignored the work or experiences of colonial experts who "knew their natives." Although Fred Cooper has recently done pioneering work on precisely the transition from one form of metropolitan knowledge (European colonial) about Africa to another (American modernizers), even his work has underscored how little institutional or personal continuity there was between the two eras of metropolitan knowledge production.¹¹

have created vastly different types of pressures and incentives. One good reason not to assume that scholars were co-opted by "the government" into pursuing "the U.S. agenda" is that the U.S. government itself is obviously not a monolithic entity either from a policy or even an ideological perspective.

ⁱⁱⁱ The emergent consensus appears to be something like this: first, while the U.S. government promulgated policies and programs with the explicit aim of "modernizing" various non-Western nations (in part based on justifications derived from social science), these plans were rarely successful, at least on the terms defined by the Western states; second, the adoption of the language of modernization by locals was often (though not always) less a matter of fervent commitment than simply a way of telling the Americans what they wanted to hear, so as to secure funding to be put to work in favor of local initiatives. To quote Van Vleck again, "Modernization is best understood as a two-way dynamic, in which the exertion of power involved processes of Third World collaboration, adaptation, and resistance even within an overall context of superpower hegemony."

What remains to be asked is, Why did these American social scientists, with few exceptions, basically ignore the writings of their colonial predecessors? Dogs-that-don't-bark-in-the-night questions are tough to answer, but I have a twofold hypothesis. First, the Americans probably felt, even if they did not articulate it, that they had nothing to learn from those misguided, racist old Europeans—that their modernizing project was totally different from the European colonial one. Second, since their intellectual project was theory-construction, they had little use for the undertheorized musings of old colonial hands; if parsing that literature became necessary, well, that would make a fine summer project for some area studies graduate student.

3. **The political-ideological frame.** This contextual frame seeks to define how a given body of social science connected to the politics and policy of its day. Most social science is politically engaged, situating itself within a contemporary political debate or policy dilemma, and seeking to make an ideological, policy, or political intervention. Moreover, social scientists also often have implicit political agendas and commitments – implicit either because they are too obvious and commonly shared to seem worth articulating, or (more rarely) because of a desire to obfuscate political commitments. From an evidentiary perspective, this mode of contextualization must take seriously the overt political claims of the scholars being examined, but should also attempt to diagnose hidden political agendas encoded within methodological or substantive choices of the scientists. (The much-documented political implications – documented, indeed, to the point of cliché and caricature – of methodological individualism are a case in point.) Since any history of “Cold War social science” will naturally foreground this particular contextual frame, historians are right to be wary of overemphasizing what we might call the “ColdWar-iness” of Cold War social science. David Engerman is right to scold that we “historians too often let the Cold War create our own intellectual *Stunde Null*—Zero Hour—after which everything started from scratch.”¹²

In the case of modernization theory, the political-ideological is the contextual frame most closely linked to the focal question of our workshop today, namely the Cold War. In general, historiography focused on the policy application of modernization theory has often placed particular emphasis on this explanatory variable, notably the pioneering work of Michael Latham, who named this methodological commitment in his title, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (2000), but since then in the work of Mark Berger, Jonathan Nashel, Nick Cullather, and a variety of others;¹³ and before that in the work of Irene Gendzier. Despite the richness of these works, a great deal remains to be done in documenting just exactly how social scientific theory translated into policy practice, and this work will need to be done by triangulated between the theoretical arguments made by social scientists, the translations of these arguments into policy in Washington, and then their application on the ground in various parts of the developing world, inevitably in ways that were not one-way impositions by American, but rather were the result of negotiation and compromise with locals.

It's worth noting, however, that even as various young scholars throw themselves into the task of documenting the impact of modernization theory on policy, there remains a niggling epistemological problem with the whole exercise. As Bruce Kuklick has argued, it is possible that the theoretical apparatus of the social sciences, as applied to policy making, in fact exercises no causal role, and serves merely to provide a patina of intellectual respectability and scientific legitimacy to policy decisions being made elsewhere for other reasons.¹⁴ To some extent, this is an all but unanswerable charge, but my reply would be to argue that social scientific ideas, while only rarely directly “causal” of policy, are in fact far more as important for the way they can create an ambient sense for what is possible and legitimate, in other words, for their ability to create a “climate of opinion” that frames a range of acceptable policy options.^{iv} Seeing a work of social science cited as a rationale for policy decision does not show that the social science “caused” the policy, but it does show that the social science was part

^{iv} As Milton Friedman recently put it, the “basic function” of policy intellectuals is “to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.” *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. xiv.

of the climate that made the policy possible—and it does not rule out that, in fact, the science may in fact very precisely have “caused” the policy.

In addition to the international political context, one must also take into account the domestic political context, even for a social scientific doctrine as overtly focused on foreign policy as modernization theory. In *Mandarin of the Future*, I warned against reducing modernization theory to “an ideological reflex of the cold war,” and instead broadened the political-ideological frame beyond the Cold War to depict that modernization theory as the social scientific manifestation of a domestically frustrated post-New Deal liberalism.^v A huge source of that frustration, of course, was the result of the malign and chilling impact exercised by the McCarthy episode.

Emerging in the immediate aftermath of that episode, modernization theory proposed a specifically liberal, anti-McCarthyite form of anti-Communism. To understand this context, it’s necessary to go beyond Rostow’s “Non-Communist” Manifesto, and read text like Edward Shils’s passionate *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, written in 1956, just as he was formalizing his theory of modernity. In this book, Shils acknowledged the threat posed by communist “subversion,” but argued that just as severe a risk was the possibility of American domestic overreaction, either in the form of political witch hunts or the temptation to create a vast secret government. In an argument perhaps even more relevant in the 2000s than when it was written, Shils argued that the future of both liberal politics and scientific inquiry demanded openness. Such a reading of Shils complicates our understanding of the modernization theorists as salute-the-flag Cold Warriors; though a Cold Warrior Shils surely was, his Cold War commitments were motivated by a commitment to science and openness, a commitment he rightly felt was better served in the West. In our understanding of “Cold War social science,” in other words, we need to move beyond Colin Leys’s falsely dichotomous claim that while, “some modernization theorists were serious Cold Warriors – Gabriel Almond, Edward Shils, Lucien Pye, and Samuel Huntington, for example – others merely accepted the Cold War and were content to see themselves as the ‘liberal’ wing of American development studies, believing that in any case modernization would in any case bring democracy as well as growth.”^{vi} There was never any *political* contradiction between being a Cold Warrior and being a liberal, even if the desire to be both created all sorts of serious moral and intellectual dilemmas, of precisely the sort that Shils wrestled with in *The Torment of Secrecy*.^{vi}

4. **The socio-cultural.** In this mode of contextualization, the key question is how a particular kind of social science reflects not so much its overt political agenda, but rather how it connects to the broader cultural and sociological conjuncture. In recent years, the primary focus here has been on RCG (race, class, gender) issues, but it should not be limited to these questions. From an evidentiary perspective, this frame usually depends on intertextual analysis, finding creative ways to bring texts which would appear to have little institutional or formal connection to each other.¹⁶

^v Brad Simpson has recently provided an extra layer of interpretive subtlety here, showing how modernization theory became more militarily focused in the mid-1960s not simply because of theoretical innovations by social scientists, but explicitly as a way for liberals to find common political ground with what we today would refer to as paleo-conservative forces in Washington: *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations* (Stanford University Press, 2008); see also the H-Net forum on Simpson’s book: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-IX-21.pdf>.

^{vi} Colin Leys’s quote raises another thorny point of debate in the political-ideological understanding of modernization theory, namely the place of Samuel Huntington within the paradigm. Some scholars (including me), whose understanding of modernization theory emphasizes its connection to post-New Deal American liberalism, have seen Samuel Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) and “The Change to Change” (1973) as key conservative critiques of modernization theory, and indeed as crucial episodes in the theory’s collapse. On the other hand, those who see modernization theory’s post-New-Deal liberal content as less salient than its general role in promoting or ratifying US or Western geopolitical hegemony, see Huntington’s conservative critique of modernization theory less as a repudiation of modernization theory’s core principles, and more as a honing of its hegemonic function. For example, Tim Jacoby (“Hegemony, Modernisation and Post-war Reconstruction,” *Global Society* 21:4 [2007]) argues that neoliberal structural adjustment programs are “in many ways a continuation of the modernization theories of the 1960s. Both tend to assume the universality of Western values despite the obviously normative nature of judgements regarding workplace association and representation, consumer protection, contractual relationships, legal regulation, child labour and environmental intervention” (p. 531). Likewise, Nehal Bhuta (“Against State-Building,” *Constellations* 15:4 [2008]) argues that, “Yesterday’s modernization theories and today’s ‘transitology’ are both premised on a simplifying homogenization of political and social space that renders the politics of other societies seemingly more tractable to a policy science of governance” (p. 532).

In general, this remains the least-developed contextual frame for the scholarship of modernization. There are at least three broad areas where work remains to be done.

The first and best studied socio-cultural domain has to do with the relationship between modernization theory and contemporary discourses of national identity. In our post-Foucaultian times, few would disagree with the proposition that the production of the postcolonial object of study was always also an effort in the construction of a metropolitan identity, and that certainly appears to have been the case explicitly for the modernization theorists. This explicit desire to construct a “usable” American national identity not only led modernization theorists to work directly on the issue (Rostow wrote a whole unpublished book about the American experience and the American national character), but also into direct dialog with the leading historians of the day. In 1957 Rostow and Millikan organized a conference on “The American Style,” attended not just by a broad assortment of modernization theorists, but also by such worthies as Robert Oppenheimer, Richard Hofstadter, George Kennan, David Potter, and various future senior Kennedy White House officials. In part as a result of confabs like this one, modernization theory ended up internalizing an understanding of U.S. history that mirrored the then-dominant “consensus history” interpretation of American history.¹⁷ Such a reading of American history was of course crucial to the argument that U.S. history that they would soon argue was a template that other nations could follow.^{vii} That “consensus history” collapsed at the same time as the faith in modernization was, as the Soviets used to say, no coincidence.^{viii}

The second major socio-cultural area is race, a topic virtually unexplored in the contemporary literature on modernization theory as a social science.¹⁸ The commonplace is to note that modernization, like other postwar social sciences, transferred the locus of “difference” from race to culture, and while this is true, a more granular analysis can be revealing. Some work in fact has been done to show that the American modernization theorists were in fact racial progressives. Rostow had worked as an assistant to Gunnar Myrdal on the latter’s landmark *The American Dilemma*, and Rostow inherited his mentor’s progressive views on the need for racial reform. Rostow led the development of an installation for the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World Fair—more national-identity-building work—that was frank about the need for racial reform in the United States, so much so that it provoked a firestorm of protest from Southern politicians who successfully petitioned to have the installation yanked.¹⁹ Despite these commitments, modernization theory itself had little to say about racial issues, largely treating it as an issue that would disappear politically as a result of the process of modernization. In this respect, as David Engerman has pointed out, modernization theory reflected the “Family of Man” universalism that was extant in the liberal culture of the period.²⁰

A third major social-cultural factor would be gender. As with race, gender was an invisible variable in the calculus of early modernization theory. Despite this overt silence, modernization theory has an undeniably masculinist aspect, emphasizing as it did the combination of a nuclear family as the final evolutionary stage of the transformation of domestic life in the face of urbanization and industrialization, but also the centrality of the workplace to the “modern mentality” (as in Alex Inkeles’s or Daniel Lerner’s work)—a combination which of course implicitly inscribed women as playing a less “modern” role than men – and, incidentally, ignoring the centrality of women’s (and children’s) labor in many historical episodes of industrialization. To date, however, historians have spent little effort exploring the role of gender in modernization theory, the one notable exception being Christina’s Klein’s reading of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical “The King and I” as a story of a Western woman promoting modernization and democratization in a backwards Asian country.²¹

^{vii} The tendency to whitewash the difficult parts of US history was pervasive not just among theorists and scholars but also among practitioners of U.S. foreign policy. Nathan Citino offers a wonderful example of how selective reading was to creating a useable American past: in 1951 the State Department, sponsoring a conference on land reform, had a technical cooperation administrator named Henry G. Bennett deliver a lecture on “America’s Experience” which consisted of “a history of U.S. agriculture that featured Thomas Jefferson, the Homestead Act, and the New Deal, but omitted slavery and sharecropping” (“The Ottoman Legacy in Cold War Modernization,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* [2008]).

^{viii} Citino also points out that the building of modernization theory on a foundation of a tendentious reading of history was not limited to a partial reading of American history. He shows that key modernization theorists such as Lucien Pye, Dankwart Rustow, Daniel Lerner, and Manfred Halperin gained their understanding of Middle Eastern history by reading orientalist Ottomanists such as H.A.R. Gibbs and Bernard Lewis, who provided modernization theorists not just the image of a timeless, motionless traditional society, but also the model of a “modernizing elite,” in the form of the late Ottoman period bureaucratic reformers. Citino, *ibid.*

There’s an active debate about which country was the key “model underdeveloped state” for American modernization theorists: David Engerman made a forceful case for Russia in *Modernization from the Other Shore* (2003), but recently Nathan Citino has made a powerful case that Turkey was the paradigmatic case, and that indeed Turkey’s shift from a democracy to a dictatorship in the early 1960s precisely mirrored the timing of the shift from a democratic-centric modernization theory of the sort Lipset had advocated in *Political Man* to the kind of military modernization theory advocated after 1963.

A final area to consider within the socio-cultural frame is the place of religion within modernization theory. To date, the historical discussion has remained at the stage of broad, high level debate. One view of modernization theory sees it as rigorously secularizing, consigning religion (in particular “oriental” religions) to the domain of backwardness, due to be euthanized by modernizing programs. However, another view of the issue, captured in the title of Gilbert Rist’s survey *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (2002) sees modernization as the latest iteration of the West’s religious obligation to perform conversions, or as J. Nederveen Pieterse puts it, “Developmentalism and its master plan is not merely a matter of reason and logic, it is also, at heart, the performance of a religious duty, the quest of a utopian rendezvous, the pursuit of messianic course.”²² A more modest formulation of the same idea is Jonathan Nashel’s claim that modernization was the “civil religion” of Cold War liberals.²³ However, as of yet, historians have spent little time addressing in detail how modernization theory regarded religion, this despite the fact that two of the institutionally peripheral but best known modernization theorists, Clifford Geertz and Robert Bellah, both wrote their most important early works on precisely this issue.²⁴

5. **The *long durée*.** This last contextual frame is the broadest, but is often most important to grasp. The saying goes that given enough historians and enough time, even the most radical historical break comes to seem a continuity (and there is some justice in the jibe; isn’t the historiographical consensus these days that the French Revolution didn’t really matter politically, it just caused a lot of needless bloodshed?); but it is also true that one should always be wary about claims of novelty, and one should look for the ways in which even the most radical innovators can be placed within a long historical tradition—if nothing else, within a long tradition of self-conscious iconoclasm. For social science discourses of an older vintage, the *long durée* can also be extended forward in time, to ask what the enduring legacy of a given paradigm might be, who its inheritors are today, either genealogically, or directly. From an evidentiary perspective, the frame of the *long durée* obviously looks backward to an older and more classic set of texts, searching for commonalities, and right up to present-day social scientific scholarship, to see how the paradigms from the past continue to resonate in today’s scholarship—perhaps (indeed often) in fields quite different from the ones in which they were originally developed.

Applied to modernization theory, this contextual frame emphasizes the way that modernization was the rearticulation in mid-century social scientific jargon of venerable themes stretching back at least to the Victorian era if not the Enlightenment itself. The themes of social rationalization through the application of scientific ideas, which is at the heart of modernization theory, was also central to the eighteenth century *philosophes* of Paris, Edinburgh, and Königsberg. Seen from this perspective, moreover, the certain flavors of critique of modernization theory that emerged in the 1970s – from E.F. Schumacher’s “Small is Beautiful” philosophy, to the World Bank’s “Basic Needs” development strategy,²⁵ to the celebration of “cultural hybridities” by the anti-developmentalists – can be seen as reenacting the longstanding oscillation between Enlightenment privileging of unsentimental reason and the Romantic era’s preference for sentiment and the body. Placing modernization theory in this broader historical horizon has not been a dominant mode of contextualization, though it usually gets nodded at by all scholars, and was central to the reading of modernization theory proposed first by Ian Weinberg’s 1968 essay, “The Concept of Modernization: An Unfinished Chapter in Sociological Theory,” and more recently in James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State* (1998).

Extending the *longue durée* forward instead of backward in time from the heyday of modernization theory in the 1960s brings us face to face with perhaps the thorniest question in the historiography of modernization theory, namely: why won’t it go away? No matter how many stakes get driven through its conceptual heart, it has repeatedly managed to stagger back out of its intellectual grave, most conspicuously in Tom Inglehart and Christian Welzel’s recent showcase piece in *Foreign Affairs*, the ultimate establishment organ.²⁶ Since the end of the Cold War, modernization theory has been explicitly invoked to justify everything from triumphalist neoliberalism in 1990s to the folly of invading Iraq in 2003. Modernization theory’s ability to draw on a taproot of deep historical prejudices, and to articulate them in a positivist social scientific jargon that lends them a sense of objective truth, is what keeps people coming back to modernization again and again. The paradox of moderniza-

tion theory in the 2000s, then, is that even as an increasingly rich scholarship has documented the historical specificity of its many cultural, political, and ideological limitations and prejudices, it has nonetheless made a comeback as live social science. For me, at least, this has led me to the conclusion that something about those very cultural, political, and ideological limitations and prejudices must be deeply appealing to both a certain sort of social scientist, as well as to American policymakers in search of a justification for a muscular, outward-bound foreign policy framework.^{ix}

Finally, although the framework I propose here conceptually differentiated these five contextual frames, I should hasten to add that any rich (and, insofar as such a thing is possible, a truly complete) understanding of the historical significance of a social scientific movement or concept not only requires addressing all five circles, but also identifying the interconnections and tensions between them.

One final note, on “reception” histories. I believe that these same five contextual frames also structure reception histories. The personal-biographical: why did *this* individual choose to import this social scientific idea at this time? The professional-institutional: how did this importation play in local academic or intellectual circles? The socio-cultural: how did the social scientific ideas in question change in the cultural transplantation process? The political-ideological: how did the social scientific concepts fit into local political struggles? And finally, the *longue durée*: how did this reception fit into a longer history of idea-receptions for that country, and how did it connect to the pre-existing intellectual traditions?

^{ix} Here I will permit myself to answer Joel Isaac’s charge that, “In Gilman’s dizzyingly compressed genealogy of modernization theory... it is hard to think of a modern thinker who could *not* be included” (“The Human Science in Cold War America,” *The Historical Journal*, 2007, p. 743). Let me offer a brief, noncomprehensive list of “modern thinkers” who do not fit into my *longue durée* genealogy of modernization theory: Edmund Burke, Thomas Malthus, Joseph de Maistre, William Blake, Heinrich von Kleist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Henry David Thoreau, Mikhail Bakunin, Novalis, François-René de Chateaubriand, Søren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, John Calhoun, Walter Pater, Charles Baudelaire, Nikolai Danilevsky, Jakob Burckhardt, Arthur de Gobineau, Helena Blavatsky, Wilhelm Dilthey, Franz Hartmann, Henry Adams, Gustav Le Bon, Peter Kropotkin, Paul Lafargue, Johann Joseph Most, Friedrich Nietzsche, August Strindberg, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Oscar Wilde, William Jennings Bryan, Marcel Proust, Rudolf Rocker, G. K. Chesterton, Franz Kafka, Edmund Husserl, Oswald Spengler, Wyndham Lewis, William Butler Yeats, Karl Jung, Martin Heidegger, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Buber, John Crowe Ransom, Walter Benjamin, André Breton, Ezra Pound, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Theodor Adorno, Jean-Paul Sartre, Graham Greene, and Albert Camus. In other words, the tradition I’m describing generally excludes anarchists, populists, existentialists, environmentalists, reactionaries, religious thinkers, agrarians, romantics, cranks, and historical pessimists of all stripes. To reiterate: the long-range intellectual tradition that modernization theory belongs to is a modernism of order, plan and mastery, and it excludes (indeed seeks to repress) those traditions that celebrates resistance, phantasmagoria, or heterocosmic counterworlds.

More broadly, Isaac misses the point when he writes that modernization theory’s “archetypal explanatory power” rested on a foundation of “deep-lying Western conceptual habits, on which modernization theory has no greater claim than numerous other conceptual systems.” On the contrary, as Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* decisively argued, modernization theory *does* have a greater claim on these habits than virtually any other postwar conceptual system, by virtue of its being, at bottom a theory of History, that is, a theory of the most change itself. Ben White is thus absolutely right to say that modernization theory was the “grandest evolutionary scheme” and “the main theoretical underpinning” of postwar American social science. Whether frankly acknowledged or not, modernization theory has provided the meta-historical architecture on which many other major postwar North American social scientific paradigms implicitly relied.

The foundational centrality of modernization theory to postwar American social science in turn explains why, even after it was explicitly repudiated as an official paradigm in the 1970s, even after the end of the Cold War which birthed it, it has continued to live on as a set of omnipresent if underarticulated assumptions about the interventional imperative to reform non-Western “underdevelopment,” the power of technocratic expertise to achieve the necessary reforms, and the long-term secular trend in toward economic prosperity and democracy. Indeed, I would argue that, to this very day, a more or less explicit belief that “modernization is the direction of history,” however incoherent that concept may be, continues to form the metahistorical baseline for most politically liberal American social scientists (e.g. the large majority of American social scientists), as well as of most of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

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- ¹ Ben White, “Clifford Geertz: Singular Genius of Interpretive Anthropology,” *Development and Change* 38:6 (2007).
- ² Irene Gendzier, *Managing Political Change Social Scientists and the Third World* (Westview Press, 1984).
- ³ Notably the essays in Christopher Simpson, ed., *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences during the Cold War* (New Press, 1999). Less polemically: Stuart W. Leslie and Robert Kargon, “Exporting MIT: Science, Technology, and Nation-Building in India and Iran,” *Oxiris* (2006).
- ⁴ P. N. Rosenstein-Rodan, “Problems of Industrialisation of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe,” *The Economic Journal* 53:210/211 (1943).
- ⁵ Allyn A. Young, “Increasing Returns and Economic Progress,” *The Economic Journal* 38:152 (1928).
- ⁶ Frank W. Notestein, “Population: The Long View,” in Theodore W. Schultz, Ed., *Food for the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1945); Warren S. Thompson, “Population,” *American Journal of Sociology* 34:6 (1929).
- ⁷ David Engerman et al. eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2008) introduced this “global turn” in the historiography of modernization theory.
- ⁸ Johanna Bockman & Michael Bernstein, “Scientific Community in a Divided World: Economists, Planning, and Research Priority during the Cold War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:3 (2008).
- ⁹ Sharad Chari, “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (2009), Corrina Unger & Stephan Malinowski, “Modernizing Missions: Approaches to ‘Developing’ the Non-Western World after 1945,” *Journal for Modern European History* (2009) and “Modernisierungskriege: Militärische Gewalt und koloniale Modernisierung im Algerienkrieg (1954–1962),” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 48 (2008).
- ¹⁰ Jenifer Van Vleck, “An airline at the crossroads of the world: Ariana Afghan Airlines, modernization, and the global Cold War,” *History and Technology* 25:1 (2009), p. 6.
- ¹¹ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (2005).
- ¹² David Engerman, “American Knowledge and Global Power,” *Diplomatic History* 31:4 (2007), p. 603.
- ¹³ Mark T. Berger, *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization* (Routledge, 2003), and “Keeping the World Safe for Primary Colors: Area Studies, Development Studies, International Studies, and the Vicissitudes of Nation-Building,” *Globalizations* 4:4 (2007); Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale’s Cold War* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Nick Cullather, “Development Doctrine and Modernization Theory,” in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy* (2002): <http://www.americanforeignrelations.com/A-D/Development-Doctrine-and-Modernization-Theory.html>
- ¹⁴ Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton, 2006).
- ¹⁵ Colin Leys, *The Rise & Fall of Development Theory* (Indiana University Press, 1996).
- ¹⁶ Robert Griffith, “The Cultural Turn in Cold War Studies,” *Reviews in American History* 29 (2001).
- ¹⁷ *Mandarins of the Future*, p. 206-209.
- ¹⁸ Major recent works on the Cold War transnational politics of race mention modernization theory only in passing, if at all: Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2002), Christopher Shannon, *A World Made Safe for Differences: Cold War Intellectuals and the Politics of Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (UC Press, 2003), Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard UP, 2006).
- ¹⁹ *Mandarins of the Future*, p. 209-214.
- ²⁰ Engerman, op cit., p. 610.
- ²¹ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- ²² Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Dilemmas of Development Discourse: The Crisis of Developmentalism and the Comparative Method,” *Development and Change* 22 (1991), p. 16-17.
- ²³ Jonathan Nashel, “The Road to Vietnam: Modernization Theory in Fact and Fiction,” in *Cold War Constructions*, ed. Christian Appy (U Mass Press, 2004).
- ²⁴ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion* (Free Press, 1970 [1957]); Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (University of Chicago Press, 1976 [1960]).
- ²⁵ See footnote 2, above.
- ²⁶ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, “How Development Leads to Democracy: What We Know About Modernization,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2009): <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64821/ronald-inglehart-and-christian-welzel/how-development-leads-to-democracy>. Even more amazing is political scientist Sheri Berman’s companion piece, “What to Read on Modernization Theory” (March 12, 2009): <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/readinglists/what-to-read-on-modernization-theory> which, while acknowledging that modernization theory has had its critics, simply by existing gives the lie to Nick Cullather’s claim in 2000 that modernization theory could hencefore be safely considered a historical curio, rather than live social science (Cullather, “Development? It’s History,” *Diplomatic History* 24 [2000]).