**“We’ll always have Paris”:**

**Thinking through the Current Political Moment on the 20th Anniversary of Adams, Clemens, and Orloff’s *Remaking Modernity***

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*Remaking Modernity* is organized – in a literary sense – around metaphors. Perhaps the most important metaphor for our purposes doubles as a psychoanalytic concept, namely, that of repression. The editors write extensively about the political unconscious of the second wave, which is populated by modernity’s Others: women, people of color, and colonized subjects.

At times, the editors *mix* metaphors and add literary and pop culture references, producing its own set of repressions, tailor made for a 20th anniversary discussant such as myself. My favorite example is on pages 31-32, where the editors explain that their use of waves is not meant to refer to an imperfect past that improves with each passing generation of historical sociologists. Instead of a superhighway of progress, they offer Paris’s jumble of streets as an alternative, quoting Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca. They write,

“And ‘We’ll always have Paris’ – as Bogie said – with its high modernist Haussmann boulevards and its medieval and post-modern byways. So we refrain from organizing our discussion of the current state of historical sociology as a story of progress, with successive waves of scholarship getting closer and closer to the ideal theoretical and methodological approach” (p. 31-32).

That line – “We’ll always have Paris” – is in fact part of a longer scene that anticipates the stakes of our current political moment. I want to suggest that the unspoken lines comprise partial silences in *Remaking Modernity*. Spoken out loud, they illuminate how we might extend and apply the important lessons of the book.

Casablanca is set in colonial Morocco, then chafing under the rule of Vichy France. Humphrey Bogart plays Rick Blaine, a former socialist cadre and gun runner for the French resistance. He meets Ilse Lund, played by Ingrid Bergman, in Paris while he is still politically active. During their steamy affair, Rick and Ilse think that Ilse’s husband, Victor Laszlo (played by Paul Henreid), is dead. Laszlo is a leader in the continental resistance. Ilse, Rick, and the Black musician, Sam (no last name) played by Dooley Wilson, flee Paris when Nazi tanks roll down the Champs Elysees. They are separated in the melee and meet again years later in Casablanca, where Rick has left his political past behind to become a tavern keeper. The tavern, called Rick’s, is the place where European expats eat, drink, and gamble, while they “wait, wait, and wait” to obtain visas to the United States. A sheisty Casablancan named Ugarte (again, no last name) played by Peter Lorre, comes by a rare sort of visa: letters of transit signed by General Charles de Gaulle himself. When he asks Rick to hide the papers in his tavern, Ilse and Victor (apparently back from the dead) arrive to buy them. Much chaos and intrigue ensue, with Rick and Ilse eventually scheming to leave Victor behind. The line that Julia, Lis, and Ann quote is spoken next to a propeller plane, when Rick announces that he has arranged to have Victor and Ilse leave Nazi-occupied Casablanca together, so the work of the resistance may continue.

Cutting across Ilse’s objection, Rick says, “Do you have any idea what you’d have to look forward to if you stayed here? Nine chances out of ten we’d both end up in a concentration camp. Isn’t that true, Louis?” When, Louis, a French colonial official played by Claude Rains, confirms, Ilse objects that Rick is only bringing up the prospect of arrest to get her to leave. But then Rick discloses that there is more at stake and hints that he plans to return to the resistance. He says, “I’ve got a job to do to. And where I’m going you can’t follow. And what I have to do, you can’t be any part of,” adding, “I’m no good about being noble, but it doesn’t take much to see that the lives of three little people don’t add up to a hill of beans in this crazy world.” When Ilse asks, “But what about us?” Rick says, “We’ll always have Paris.”

The first partial silence I want to draw attention to is that “We’ll always have Paris” is not an embrace of the old and the new, as the editors would have it. It is a recognition that the time for spaciousness is over, that the moment for lovers to be self-absorbed and absorbed in each other has passed. As the actors stand on the tarmac in Casablanca, the fascists are consolidating their power, and it is time for all those who oppose them to put the romantic possibilities of the prewar period to the side and lead.

A related partial silence is that not all world historical conjunctures are created equal. There are those like 1989 when spaciousness is *precisely* what is called for: a longtime hegemonic project, Marxism, dies an unexpected death and repressed political alternatives vie for a hearing, as they did in the third wave. But there are also historical conjunctures like 1968 that give way to the articulation of hard lines and coherent terms of engagement. Such is the time for what Laclau and Mouffe called chains of equivalence, when actors wrestle freefloating signifiers to the ground and both the Left and Right claim the mantle of the people in a full frontal war of maneuver.

Now I refer to the foregoing as “partial” silences because in fact, Adams, Clemens, and Orloff advanced two critical insights in 2005 that anticipate 20*25*. The insights that I refer to are (1) the centrality of world historical crisis to successive generations of comparative historical sociologists, and (2) the moral imperative to theorize the past on behalf of building a present and future for nonacademic publics. Still, in 2005, the editors evinced a complicated view of leadership that one might say is an awkward fit with the present moment.

The relationship between historic movements and historical sociology is quite clear throughout their introduction. For example, on page 16, they write, “The radical political movements of the 1960s and 1970s had inspired many students to go on to graduate study, where they linked their political concerns to intellectual questions and found guidance from the historically inclined minority of senior scholars even as they rebelled against their more presentist colleagues.” On page 29, they add, “The paradigm that guided second-wave work proved unable to deal with a whole series of epochal transformations, summed up in the events, or rather the signs, of ‘1968’ and ‘1989,”’ including “the genesis of ‘new’ movements—feminism, gay liberation, ongoing rebellions among post-colonials and racial and ethnic minorities.”

In addition, the editors explicitly reject the presentist conceit of our profession that relegates historical sociology’s significance to the study of the past; for Julia, Lis, and Ann, and I daresay for all of us, our work is meant to illuminate the present and future. Not for nothing do the editors give Philip Abrams pride of place on page 2, when they cite him saying, “Doing justice to the reality of history is not a matter of noting the way in which the past provides a background to the present…it is a matter of treating what people do in the present as a struggle to create a future out of the past.” Nor is our work for the benefit of the subfield only, but society at large. On page 67, the editors write that historical sociologists should “develop better translations of historicized inquiries for broader academic and nonacademic publics. These publics include not just other human science disciplines, of course, but those outside of the academy.”

Despite these very clear statements on the relationship between politics and historical sociology and the injunction to speak directly to nonacademic publics as we struggle to create a future out of our past, the editors evince a discomfort with certain kinds of leadership. On page 45, they call upon the subfield to resist what they call the “hegemonizing impulse.” Later, on page 62, the editors write, “We are convinced that we still stand to gain by struggling to keep ‘the prophet and the demagogue’ off ‘the academic platform’ and otherwise holding by Weber’s injunctions to objectivity in ‘Science as a Vocation.’”

Interestingly they do engage in prophetic language when criticizing backward looking historical sociologists. On page 63, they write, as if standing on a soap box in Union Square, “historical sociology will *die* if left solely to modify the second wave’s answers to Marxist questions generated in the heat of the 1960s and 1970s.” Perhaps more to the point, they ask, “who is to prophesy from whence will come the ‘cultural toolkit’ for the historical sociologists of the third, fourth, or future waves?” (p. 45).

In sum, Julia, Ann, and Lis appear to have less trouble foreclosing a return to the past and leading us to an open horizon, than they do with rallying the troops around a shared standard.

Now I should say on a personal note that I have benefited tremendously, perhaps more than most, from Julia, Ann, and Lis’s call to openness. While others looked askance at my attempt to bring political parties back in, they lifted me up and conferred legitimacy on my research agenda. They have done the same for countless others and put their reasons for doing so down on paper twenty years ago in this volume. One wonders whether the current spate of research on settler colonialism, intersectionality, and racial capitalism would have gained traction if the second wavers had succeeded in putting the kibosh down on the third wave.

But I must ask a question, given the current political climate. To add to the list of horrors already enumerated by Julia, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that many of our colleagues are absent because they were unable to get past the travel restrictions imposed by the Trump administration. In Massachusetts and elsewhere, ICE is kidnapping international students for participating in the Palestine Solidarity Movement. State governments outlaw the teaching of gender, race, and sexuality, while the federal government cancels our colleagues’ NSF grants. Documented immigrants, including F1 visa holders, permanent residents, and naturalized U.S. citizens, are being targeted and their statuses revoked. So here is my question: Is it possible that we are living through a new historical conjuncture, one that does not call for spaciousness in our work and leadership to the open horizon, but the articulation of chains of equivalence, solidarity in difference, and leadership against a common enemy?

I ask this question with the utmost respect for all of us, because as we know so well, it is difficult to discern whether or not one is living through a crisis of hegemony or not. This is to say nothing of the legitimate fear that is spreading throughout our subfield and profession. Moreover, I am well aware that leadership comes in many shapes and sizes: often, leaders do not emerge until the time for them is upon us. Bogey’s Casablanca was a vipers’ nest, a Hobbesian war of all and against all, until Victor Laszlo sang the Marseillaise over the anthem of the Third Reich. And then, the fractiousness yielded to an unanticipated groundswell of support that put Victor and Ilse on that propeller plane. Who is to prophesy whether the current toolkit and reference points emerging out of Far Right ascendancy will incite scholars and nonacademics alike to the barricades? Should we wag our fingers as the second wave partisans did to the feminists and postmoderns or shall we exemplify the openness and generosity of the third wave to a new generation, whose time has come?

Thank you.