

## Review

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**Ari Sitas et al.**

**Gauging and Engaging Deviance 1600-2000**

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History and sociology have, since Max Weber, gone their separate ways, as each carved out a disciplinary niche under the emerging social science banner. Yet interdisciplinary research has been in vogue for a long time now and historians as well as sociologists borrow generously from each other's work. The Weberian tradition of historical sociology might have lost its intellectual appeal in our post-colonial, globalized world due to its inherent and pervasive Eurocentrism but historical sociology as a methodological synthesis of sorts has more relevance than ever as an increasing number of scholars in the social sciences survey the past for clues to understand the modern world as it was cranked up for the first time into a connected, systemic entity.

In this light, the newly published volume by Ari Sitas (University of Cape Town), Wiebke Keim (University of Strasbourg), Sumangala Damodaran (Ambedkar University Delhi), Nicos Trimikliniotis (University of Nicosia) and Faisal Garba (University of Freiburg) provides a welcome and creative (albeit challenging) contribution that aims to inaugurate a new sociology that is global in scope, historically deep and conceptually innovative.

Drawing on Foucault and echoing the work of Walter Mignolo, the authors are interested in the 'darker side' of modernity and paint a Manichean picture in which the technologies of power and the emerging web of capitalist modernity reshape the world through appropriation, classification, codification and extermination. But as the Manichean metaphor already hinted at: there is resistance! Departing from Foucault who stressed the cyclical return of technologies of power and pessimistically characterized historical 'progress' as moving from domination to domination, the authors allow for more social agency and argue that deviance counter-steered the system occasionally towards greater freedom and more equality. The 'cycles of deviance' identified by the authors follow the logic of Wallersteinian world-system theory and correspond to the A and B (boom and bust) phases of the capitalist economy. An economic downturn combined with perceptions of increased normlessness and subaltern resistance is thus dubbed an anomalic phase (from Durkheim's anomie) and brings new 'fixers' to the fore who inaugurate appropriate institutional responses that deal with deviance and pave the way for a new boom cycle.

The book itself is divided into five thought-provoking and wide-ranging essays that are each impressive in scope and argumentative substance. The argument in each essay revolves around four typologies which distinguishes different forms of deviance: behavioral, articulatory, existential and miasmatic.

The first two chapters by Ari Sitas aim to tease out the historical entanglements of the 17th and 18th centuries by highlighting a number of institutions, law codes and repertoires of power which produced a global system that not only determined order and wealth but also, through

its strictures and exploitation (be it the slave factory, sailing ship or plantation), created new conditions for emancipation. Chapter 3 offers a fine essay by Sumangala Damodaran which provides a fascinating account of deviance in late Mughal India and shows that early attempts by the British East India Company to shape alterity and control deviance via discipline, punishment, incarceration and medical intervention were key to the effort to create a governable colonial society. In the subsequent section (which takes up 1/3 of the book) we move from India to Germany as Wiebke Keim explores the continuities between the existential slaughter of people during the Holocaust and previous colonial experiences of managing deviance. Going beyond metaphorical parallels, Keim traces the continuities between discourses and institutions, and emphasizes – in line with Césaire and Fanon – the feedback mechanisms between colony and metropolis and the boomerang effect of colonial, imperial and scientific racisms. The last, collectively written chapter of the book zooms in on our contemporary world and propounds the argument that we currently witness an extended anomalous phase in which the social construction of moral panics (Stanley Cohen) helps to legitimize various states of exception (Agamben) that allow institutions and power-brokers to handle the deviants of today (terrorists, illegal migrants etc.).

So what are we to make of a work of such scope and ambition? The authors self-proclaimed aim to do sociology that is historically informed, moves away from the Eurocentric sociological canon and takes into account the entangled nature of an emerging global configuration of power (capitalist modernity). This makes for interesting reading and the central deviance typologies give coherence to an argument that might otherwise have exploded in too many directions. Yet the cyclic rhythm of deviance and its correspondence to an economic bust phase seems at times a bit deterministic and mechanical while specialist historians might question the global nature of the trend with powerful counterexamples. As Christopher Bayly showed so well in *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, synchronicity itself does not explain much: in each case the cause of synchronicity needs to be historically established in order to do justice to a complex historical reality in which entanglements and internal dynamics have a role to play in the matrix of change over time. The authors themselves seem to be aware of this as they stress the need for more scholarship which traces the genealogy of rules and institutions as they are transferred from one context and 'fixer' to another.

Another point of contention relates to the authors' notion of deviance and alterity as solely and exclusively conditioned by the system. In that sense the deviant that emerges from this book tends to be slightly reactionary, appearing at predictable intervals during economic B-phases. But what about subaltern movements that do not fit the proposed cyclical straightjacket suggested by the authors? Deviants themselves have no voice in this book and although this subjective dimension is notoriously hard to access, the story of power will only reveal the form of deviant agency produced by the system. The authors offer no way out of this dilemma but their highly original study is recommended as an important call for sociologists and historians alike to work towards a synthesis of their respective research strands and gauge the global configurations of power and institutions that shaped the modern world in efficient and terrible ways.