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# Civilizations or Globalization(s)? Intellectual Rapprochements and Historical World-Visions

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## **Abstract**

Civilizational analysis of the kind propounded by Eisenstadt and globalization theory are apparently wholly incommensurate paradigms, with radically differing visions of the contemporary world order, the former championing the notion of 'multiple modernities' and the latter envisioning a world of trans-national processes and institutions. This article challenges such a dichotomizing view, and seeks to illustrate how in various ways they overlap and can come to inform each other. Particular attention is given to how a focus on inter-civilizational interactions can lead to productive rapprochements between civilizational analysis and globalization theory, as it allows some of the themes of the latter to be analysed through civilization-analytic lenses. The pioneering work in this regard of Benjamin Nelson is shown to provide a basis for future civilizational analyses of globalization, especially in the pre-modern world.

## **Key words**

■ civilizational analysis ■ civilization ■ Eisenstadt ■ globalization ■ multiple modernities ■ Benjamin Nelson ■ Roland Robertson

The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of 'contemporary history' because, however remote in time the events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate. (Croce, 1941: 19)

How can one not speak of civilization today? (Schäfer, 2001: 302)

Taking each at face value, there seems to be no more contradictory and mutually exclusive paradigms in contemporary social thought than civilizational analysis, on the one hand, and globalization theory, on the other. They seem each to stand for radically different interpretations of contemporary world social conditions.

While globalization theory is made up of a number of different, specific analytic positions, these are all united around some basic orientations towards seeing

globalization as involving the increasing salience of world-level structures, institutions, networks, phenomena and forces, these latter having profoundly dislocating effects on previously relatively stable modes of social, political, economic and cultural organization, especially those associated with nation-states (Martell, 2007). Indeed, perhaps *the* central orientation of all theories of globalization, regardless of their more particular claims and formulations, is towards regarding the territories and boundaries of nation-states as having been thoroughly problematized and muddled over time, with the power of national governments to control broader regional-level or world-level forces within their putative territories being put to question or being reconfigured in one way or another. The forces of globalization are also seen to create new forms of trans-national territories, spaces and terrains, both material and at the level of cultural imaginaries. While different theorists of globalization may disagree on when, to put it crudely, globalization processes 'started', there is broad agreement that the period since 1945 has witnessed the most intense and far-reaching phase of globalizing tendencies, with the effect that the last 60 years or so of world history seem particularly qualitatively unlike previous epochs. Widespread talk of the present day as truly the first 'global age' summarizes well the emphasis on the historical uniqueness of the present that one tends to find expressed in the literature on globalization (Albrow, 1996).

By contrast, civilizational analysis – associated today particularly with the pioneering work of S.N. Eisenstadt (e.g. 1986, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003) and those drawing inspiration from it, such as Johann Arnason (2003) – seems to paint a very different picture of contemporary global conditions. In the first place, civilizational analysis tends to delve far further back into the past than does globalization theory in its search to find the roots of present-day social order (and disorder). One of the central aspects of Eisenstadt's *œuvre* is his account of the so-called 'Axial Age' civilizations, that existed from c. 800 to 200 BCE across Eurasia, within which the great religious and philosophical systems that have played massive roles in subsequent world history were first created – these include Judaism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, as well as Greek rationalistic philosophy. Eisenstadt's studies (e.g. Arnason et al., 2005) of these cultural systems, and the modes of social organization they gave rise to – the totality of culture and social structure being dubbed 'civilizational complexes' in his terminology – go far beyond in both detail and breadth of learning any analogous historical studies in globalization theory, where the emphasis tends much more to be on (relatively historically bare) generalizations about the nature of 'modernity' (e.g. Giddens, 1990, as a case in point).

This is not to say that Eisenstadt and those sympathetic to his position are concerned with only the antiquarian interests of the specialist historical sociologist. The motto of their studies might well be that voiced by Benedetto Croce – that the point of interrogating the (distant) past is to see more clearly the contours of the present and the immediate future. As another pioneer of civilizational analysis in sociology put it:

Sociologists who have taken civilizations rather than nation-states, world systems [and such like] . . . as their units of analysis have all been deeply concerned with contemporary life. Indeed it was through their efforts to explain the distinctive characteristics of contemporary life that they were led to the comparative study of civilizations. (Kavolis, 1988: 1)

There is not only more historical depth and reach in the work of civilizational analysts as opposed to that of most globalization theorists; there is also an alternative vision of modernity which derives from the former group's emphasis on excavating some of the furthest reaches of the historical record. Once the ongoing – although always highly complex and mediated – legacies of the Axial Age civilizations are taken into account in analyses of present-day world conditions, the line of vision changes noticeably from that which mainstream globalization theories work with. Far from seeing 'pre-modern' cultural forms and forces as being either obliterated out of existence or as mere 'inventions of tradition' and ersatz ghosts of their former selves, such forms and forces are seen as playing vital roles in the construction of 'multiple modernities', that is, the highly variable manifestations and instantiations of modernity (at both the level of thinking and of social organization) to be found around the world at the present time (Eisenstadt, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003). For Eisenstadt and others working in the civilizational paradigm, it is the variability and multiplicity of modernities in the plural that particularly characterize contemporary world conditions. This multiplicity derives in large part from the ways in which civilizational legacies have been fused, often by elite groups in particular parts of the world, with quintessentially 'modern' problematics – to do with identity, and modes of social and political organization – with the result that 'modernity' as a set of thought practices and institutional arrangements is both universal at the present time, and yet very much context-bound, the civilizational legacies associated with particular places and groups fusing with the universal to create multiple and distinctive species of the modern condition. The irreducible multiplicity of modernities lies at the heart of civilizational analysis's comprehension of the world today. Conversely, the thrust of at least some of the more influential paradigms in globalization theory – especially of a Marxist orientation – points towards the homogenizing effects of globalization processes at the level of both thought-patterns and institutional arrangements, with some of the more simplistic versions of this account pointing to a world moving towards total Western-led cultural, economic and political homogenization, a position that civilizational analysts would certainly recoil from (Latouche, 1990).<sup>1</sup>

Unitary global modernity versus multiple modernities; continuities versus total discontinuity between modernity and pre-modern social formations; a focus on relatively recent versus very ancient events and institutions – these are some of the major fault-lines that seem to exist between civilizational analysis and globalization theory today. This is certainly how one might characterize their differences in the context of an undergraduate course, where sharp divisions between paradigms can aid understanding. But at a more advanced intellectual level, drawing sharp dividing lines can hide as much as it can reveal. In this article,

I want to get beyond these apparent divisions to see how in fact there exist overlaps between the paradigms, intersections that can be productive for future scholarly work insofar as they point towards how each paradigm can fill in some of the lacunae in the other, and how overall they could work together rather than being seen as mutually exclusive. If Bentley (2006: 18) is correct that today the 'globalization of history and historicization of globalization are two unfinished intellectual projects', the coming together of the *long durée* approach of civilizational analysis with the more present-oriented analyses of globalization theory can certainly help in that regard. To that end, I will first of all examine in more detail the ways in which each paradigm is apparently at odds with the other, and as we will see, this is primarily a function of the relative crudity of some, but certainly not all, positions within globalization theory. I will then turn to look at key overlaps between them, considering both what civilizational analysis can offer accounts of globalization, and what the latter can offer the former. I will stress the notion of inter-civilizational interactions as a plausible basis for intellectual rapprochement between proponents of both 'globalization' and 'civilizations'.

### Civilizations versus Globalizations

The occasional, rather scattered, debates that have occurred between globalization theorists and civilizational analysts have in part given rise to the perceptions of the two paradigms as being mutually exclusive which I depicted above. In the words of Huang (2002: 219), such debates involve consideration of the 'problem of civilizations in the age of globalization'.

For those unsympathetic to civilizational analysis, a focus on contemporary globalization processes can give rise to the suspicion that 'the concept of civilization may simply be outmoded' for present-day analytic purposes (Mazlish, 2004: xiv), and that it should be seen as 'one of those great Stonehenge figures looming over our mental landscape' (p. 160) that would now be best demolished of outmoded concepts. For Huang, an avowed critic of civilizational analysis, it is the case that 'civilizations have long been seen as a primary framework for our understanding of the structure of the world and the dynamism of its evolution' (2002: 219). However, 'the forces of globalization, which seem to be eroding the defining elements of many long-lasting civilizations, would naturally compel us to seriously re-examine many of our fundamental assumptions about human history' in general and about the role of the concept 'civilization' in understanding it (p. 219). For Huang, civilizations are just one kind of the 'old boundaries' which the forces of globalization are undermining or doing away with altogether, and they are 'in fact a relatively weak and insignificant one' if compared to the kinds of boundaries erected by the nation-state (p. 219). If globalization can undermine or eradicate the latter, it surely can do the same to the 'weaker' boundaries associated historically with civilizations. Here we have an echo, common in some of the more extreme globalization theoretical accounts, of the original claims of Marx that the bourgeoisie of an expanding capitalism 'batters down all

Chinese walls . . . It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production . . . [and] to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e. to become bourgeois themselves' (Marx and Engels, [1848] 1968: 38).

On this sort of view, whichever cultural phenomena are associated with a given 'civilization' must perforce be relatively 'weak' and thus unable to resist the forward rush of globalizing processes, which, explicitly in Marx but more implicitly in Huang's account, are primarily 'material' in nature. A tacit, although untheorized, set of materialist assumptions is at work here, and it underpins the kinds of claims made by Huang and similar critics of civilizational analysis that somehow civilizations are primarily 'cultural' in nature and that culture is always susceptible to destruction by the 'harder' material forces of economics and politics. These kinds of assumptions would certainly be rejected by civilizational analysts: not only are civilizations, on Eisenstadt's understanding, always a complex of the cultural and the organizational (and thus by extension, the material), but it is widely accepted in civilizational analytic circles that Marx seriously neglects civilizational elements in his account of the development of globalizing capitalism, precisely because of his excessively narrow conception of materiality on the one side and culture on the other (Arnason, 1988: 100). By contrast, Eisenstadt's account of civilizational complexes asserts the animating role of culture in shaping forms of social organization.<sup>2</sup> In light of these considerations, Huang's claim that civilizational analysis's 'challenge to the visions of globalization [theory] has been mainly ineffective' (2002: 221) seems problematic insofar as it is based on a charge that civilizational analysis has a vague sense of what civilizations 'are', such a claim seeming unconvincing in light of Eisenstadt's detailed and persuasive adumbration of precisely those issues (see especially Eisenstadt, 2000a).

Civilizational analysts can respond to the charges made above by arguing that it is in fact a focus on the very phenomena and forces commonly associated with globalization in the globalization theory literature that has compelled the reintroduction of the terminology of civilizations back into the social scientific arena. As the leading civilizational analysts Arjomand and Tiryakian (2001: 1) put it, until the 1970s, "civilizations" were relegated to the dustbin of the history of social thought as "globalization" and "world system" came into prominence. But changing world demographic, economic and political reality has called for an urgent reconsideration of civilizational analysis.' In 2001, they pointed in this regard to such issues as the spectacular economic success of the 'Asian Tiger' states, large-scale Muslim immigration to Western countries, the problems of so-called 'multi-culturalism', and the September 11 attacks, the latter factors of course having gained even greater global socio-political salience in the years since 2001. Thus far from destroying the analytic relevance of the concept of civilizations, contemporary world events have on this view actually demanded the return, and further development, of civilizational analysis.

From this point of view, a renewed civilizational analysis was a necessary corrective to the overly homogenizing claims of contemporary globalization theory. For Tiryakian (2001: 279–80), all (or at least most) versions of the latter were limited

by the pre-supposition that above the nation-state there is a determining whole, the world as a totality, which is the ultimate determinant of societal parts. Civilizational analysis takes as presupposition that the reality of the world we live in has dynamic and interactive socio-cultural units larger than nation-states and smaller than a single socio-economic totality.

In other words, globalization theory creates a mostly imaginary, ideologically-loaded 'world-level' set of institutions, structures and processes, which conjures away where the real socio-political action lies, that is, at a meso-level of civilizational complexes and civilization-related forces and phenomena. Globalization theory is blind to the ongoing historical relevance of civilizations and the often very powerful modes of thought and activity associated with them, these often driving the very processes that globalization theory too glibly defines as forces of globalization denuded of any civilizational content.

One of the most forceful civilization analytic critics of globalization theory has been Johann Arnason (e.g. 2003, 2004), whose work has developed the Eisenstadt model in various ways, notably through integrating it with Castoriadis's theory of social imaginaries. Arnason construes civilizational analysis to be most hostile to 'the somewhat protean but not indistinct school of thought which combines neo-liberal triumphalism with a more or less refurbished version of modernization theory and strong but often loosely formulated assumptions about globalization' (Arnason, 2003: 335). Arnason has in his sights here the kind of work (sometimes semi-academic, e.g. Friedmann, 1999) that bears strong family resemblances to Fukuyama's 'end of history' prognostications, what Wittrock (2001) refers to as 'liberal historicism', involving claims as to globalization involving the apparently unstoppable global spread of liberal democracy and capitalist market economy.<sup>3</sup> Arnason regards such accounts as remaining too wedded to the crude evolutionism of modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s, whereby 'the vast spectrum of traditional societies was reduced to a stereotyped opposite of modernity' (Arnason, 2004: no pagination). It is from this angle that Arnason also rejects one of the most striking images of globalized modernity, one popularized by Anthony Giddens (1990) among others, which has

gained some currency since the 1980s. Its strongest version, the metaphor of the juggernaut, depicts the modernizing process as an uncontrollable and inescapable onrush, accelerated but never encompassed by social actors in pursuit of their various projects. The accumulation of power is central to this vision, but it is perceived from an angle that enhances its accompanying destructive effects and its unintended consequences. There is an obvious reference to contemporary problems: the threat of an ecological crisis, the geopolitical realignments that might lead to a new round of warfare, and the erosion of social preconditions for democratic government. But the whole cluster of connotations also harks back to the idea of civilization in the singular,<sup>4</sup> with renewed emphasis on the dark sides and self-destructive dynamics emphasized by its critics, and in a way that makes it more difficult to envisage any stable and specific civilizational patterns. On this view, modernity appears as a fundamental shift in the relationship between civilization in the singular and civilizations in the plural, but not so much in the sense of a triumph for the former as with the result that the very possibility of the latter is eliminated. (Arnason, 2004: no pagination)

Thus, the globalized-modernity-as-juggernaut image obfuscates through melodramatic metaphorizing the ongoing relevance of civilizational complexes in the contemporary world. By contrast, the 'civilizational approach has added new arguments to the countercurrent that insists on the diversity and creativity of traditions, and on their continuing presence in the modern world' (Arnason, 2004: no pagination). Here we see the emphasis on the multiplicity of modernities which is one of the hallmarks of contemporary civilizational analysis.

The fundamental problem of globalization theory for Arnason is its naivety. The 'dominance of globalization discourse – often too diffuse to be called theory – reflects a widespread belief in cultural and/or structural unity across the erstwhile (and perhaps always in part imaginary) civilizational boundaries' (2003: xi). If this view were to be accepted, then 'civilizational analysis would at best be applicable to a past phase in the history of human societies, and irrelevant to the task of theorizing modernity' (p. xi). But this is palpably not the case for Arnason, for the kinds of reasons we have seen Arjomand and Tiryakian articulate above. Far from globalization undermining the efficacy of a focus on civilizations, the reverse is true – globalization theory *itself* is ill-equipped to deal with the very phenomena it thinks it is discursive master of:

The concept of globalization seems destined to share the fate of many other sociological constructs: it is now widely used to describe well-known phenomena, but mostly without reference to its original theoretical context and therefore without the appropriate critical distance from the developments it is supposed to highlight. (Arnason, 1995: 36)

To use Alfred Schutz's terminology, what can be implied from Arnason's comments is that the second-order concepts of globalization theory too often reflect in unmediated fashion the first-order concepts of 'globalization discourse' – the murky, ideologically-loaded, and analytically unsatisfactory ideas and attitudes of groups involved in *what they think of as* 'globalization processes' (Inglis and Robertson, 2005). The more distanced and reflective second-order concepts of civilizational analysis avoid the pitfalls of theory reproducing unthinkingly the assumptions of particular groups or a particular generalized *Zeitgeist*, not least because civilizational analysis, of all forms of sociology, can contextualize and relativize such discourses and ideas within very long-term historical processes, thus avoiding the trap of merely reflecting globalized modernity's own imaginaries back to it through the vehicle of a mystified social theory. And even if there were some analytic validity in the claims of a theory that stressed global homogenization, the ensuing world condition would still draw upon, in one way or another, the legacies of past civilizations, and would still have to be compared to them, meaning civilizational analysis would still be a relevant activity (Arnason, 2003).

Beyond the points raised by scholars involved in the debates above, some other issues are germane here. A key difference between civilizational analysis and globalization theory can be seen in terms of their respective orientations towards general issues of time and space. Cox (2002: 14) argues that while globalization theory construes globalization as the triumph of space over time, civilizational analysis reasserts the primacy of time over space. Globalization is generally



understood by globalization theory as the spatial 'shrinking' of the planet – primarily through enhanced means of travel and electronic communications – such that historically unparalleled conditions of global connectivity have been created, suggesting a radical break between the 'global age' (especially since the 1970s) and previous epochs of world history. A radically new configuration of global space suggests that space rather than time (in the form of national and civilizational historical legacies) is crucial within a globalized condition, and that globalized space, structured thoroughly by an electronically-based hyper-flexible capitalism, in turn structures senses of time in the direction of increased chronological rapidity – global time moves to the restless, never-ending beat of electronic flows of capital (ideas deriving from the ur-source of Harvey, 1991).

If according to globalization theory, contemporary globalization seems to involve the triumph of space over time, equally well could it be said that the vision of civilizational analysis sees the ongoing presence of civilizational historical legacies in the present world-condition, especially in the institutions and modes of thought of the varied multiple modernities, albeit that these legacies are put to work and interpreted in characteristically 'modern' ways (Brimnes, 2002: 243). Mutated versions of the past histories of civilizations, especially as these are imagined by social actors, continue very much to structure the spaces, both 'national' and trans-national, that globalization theory sees as mostly devoid of historical content (except, perhaps, as 'invented traditions'). While globalization theory tends to stress the discontinuity between modern and pre-modern (Giddens, 1990), and between earlier phases of modernity and the currently highly globalized phase, historical continuities are given much more analytic room in civilizational analysis. As Sternberg (2001: 79) notes, it is this orientation that fundamentally allows the very idea of 'multiple modernities' to exist, as allowing for some civilizational presence in the contemporary world order enables one to see the *differences* within and between various co-existing modernities, rather than obliterating these in favour of focussing on *similarities* between different national configurations of the modern condition, as globalization theory arguably does due to the lingering presence of 1960s modernization theory within it. Sternberg (2001: 80) also suggests that even within the most radically discontinuist versions of globalization theory, the historical legacies of civilizations are sneaked into the analysis without proper theorization: thus the commonplace phrase 'Western modernity' suggests an entity still somehow 'Western', but the history of the West enters into the terminology without further clarification. For Sternberg, globalization theory tries to have its cake and eat it: while it stresses new and contemporary ideologies and social forces, and while analysis of civilizational legacies is reduced to being mere background to analysis of contemporary phenomena, it still has to smuggle in civilizational matters into its account of the present day. So while the history of civilizations is present tacitly in globalization theory, it goes unacknowledged, existing as a troubling ghost at the feast.<sup>5</sup>

## Civilizations *with* Globalizations

So far we have seen how civilizational analysis and globalization theory can be understood as very uneasy bedfellows. But while civilizational analysis is a relatively coherent research programme, globalization theory is of course a much more scattered and diverse entity. While for heuristic purposes I have so far treated globalization theory as a relatively coherent entity, the main means of showing how civilizational analysis does or could have rapprochements with analyses of globalization involves unpacking this generic category, and considering what types of globalization theory are most conducive to civilizational perspectives.

As Arnason (2004: no pagination) has phrased this matter:

[S]ome accounts of globalizing processes are adaptable to a civilizational framework . . . If the globalizing dynamic is equated with a long-term growth of interdependence and traced back to early beginnings, it is easy to show that both coexisting and successive civilizations relate to it in different ways. Even if a more precisely and literally defined concept of globalization is . . . reserved for the period which began with the European conquest of the Americas, the new constellation can still be analyzed in terms of intercivilizational dynamics and encounters.

This captures well the general manner in which some globalization theoretical accounts could be calibrated to engage with civilizational analysis more effectively than hitherto, and vice versa. The possible focus on 'intercivilizational dynamics and encounters' by civilizational analysts as a means of theorizing 'globalization' (either in pre-modern or modern conditions) relates to the issue of intellectual genealogies. Both civilizational analysis and globalization theory have complex intellectual roots, and some of those roots are shared. As Mandalios (2004: 392) notes, 'Braudel's *histoire globale* can be seen as forerunner to both civilizational analysis and global sociology.' Consequently, it 'would be misleading to assert that the global frame stands diametrically opposed to what can be called civilizational analysis. The same is also true of Braudelian and Wallersteinian world-systems analysis; both acknowledged the dynamic presence of civilizational relations and heritages within global capitalism' (Mandalios, 2004: 403–4). Thus reflection upon, and partial return to, the Braudelian roots of both civilizational analysis and some versions of globalization theory might compel the productive means of conjoining civilizational and globalization *problématiques*. Given that for Braudel (1994: 8), 'the history of civilizations . . . is the history of mutual borrowings [between them] over many centuries', vistas open up as to how inter-civilizational interactions could be placed on the agenda as a key civilizational analytic means of theorizing what globalization theorists call 'globalizing tendencies'.

One possible rapprochement in this regard that has already been noted by some scholars is that between civilizational analysis and Roland Robertson's version of globalization theory. One of the key affinities between Eisenstadt and Robertson is their shared emphasis on the cultural bases of social life in general, and civilizational complexes more specifically, although Robertson's conception is generally more Durkheimian in nature and Eisenstadt's more Weberian. Nonetheless,

the non-Marxian conceptions of culture held by both scholars place them closer together than is the relationship between Robertson's views on globalization and mainstream Marxian accounts thereof. Robertson (1992: 129) has himself noted 'the closeness of [his version of] globalization theory to civilizational analysis', even to the extent of making the claim that 'globalization theory is an elaboration of civilizational analysis'. What Robertson has in mind is that globalization theory should stress the 'civilizational and societal variety' of the contemporary world condition (p. 129). Like other globalization theorists, Robertson sees globalization as creating conditions whereby the world is, and is seen by diverse groups of actors as, 'a single place'. But that formal singularity is also characterized by substantive multiplicity, in that the single-placeness 'constrains civilizations and societies to be increasingly explicit about . . . their global callings . . . their unique geocultural or geomoral contributions to world history' (p.130). Thus in the present day, both civilizations and nation-states, among other entities, 'are being constrained to frame their particular modes, positive or negative, of global involvement' (p. 132). On Robertson's view, such an approach shows how contemporary global conditions both allow and compel civilizational complexes, as it were, to identify themselves *as* 'civilizations' (p. 137), for 'in an increasingly globalized world – characterized by historically exceptional degrees of civilizational, societal and other modes of interdependence and widespread consciousness thereof – there is an exacerbation of civilizational, societal and ethnic self-consciousness' (p. 131; Robertson and Khondker, 1998).

As a sociologist of religion as well as a globalization theorist, Robertson is very much oriented towards the analysis of revivals of religious sources of meaning in the present day that are both made possible by, and come to affect in complex ways, what he sees as the 'global human circumstance' of present times. As such religious resources are profoundly tied up with civilizational complexes, civilizational legacies are for Robertson as much at work – and put to work – in the present day as they are for Eisenstadt. In his work of the later 1980s and early 1990s, Robertson set out a future research programme that resonates with civilizational analysis, insofar as he suggested that the latter should examine the histories of each civilizational complex's conceptualizations of the 'world as a whole' and the nature of world order. This programme has been in part followed through by work on the 'world visions' characteristic of both the Hellenistic period in Greek and Middle Eastern history (Inglis and Robertson, 2005) and of the Roman Empire (Robertson and Inglis, 2004).

While this programme remains to be pursued for other times and places, it is clear that for analyses of present-day conditions, there are no obvious reasons why analogous conceptions of cultural globalization could not be pursued by civilizational analysts. As Arnason has phrased a similar outlook, because of the kinds of globalizing forces examined by globalization theorists – such as exponentially increasing technological forms of mastery over nature and the consequent minimization of geographical distances – 'different visions of the human condition now have to co-exist and communicate in a way never known before' in human history (Arnason, 2006b: 299). Related to this conception of different

world-visions co-existing as never before is Arnason's own civilization-analytic view of globalization:

a multi-secular and multi-dimensional process . . . contemporaneous, but not co-extensive with Western expansion; the globalizing process involves the more or less transformative encounters between Western and non-Western civilizations and the more or less innovative responses by the latter that have shaped the course of world history since the beginning of sustained European expansion in the sixteenth century . . . concrete analyses of globalization must take note of different patterns and directions as well as the conflicts that can arise between them. (Arnason, 1995: 37)

In agreement with Arnason's vision here is Eisenstadt's view that the 'civilization of modernity' has 'unprecedented globalizing thrust and potential' (Arnason, 1995: 37). Although the term 'globalization' is not a central plank of his intellectual apparatus, Eisenstadt's focus on today's overall global configuration as highly pluralistic and multi-centric, with its various different dimensions – the economic, political and cultural – being intertwined in complex ways, has close affinities with Robertson's views on the manifold complexity of the 'global field' (1992: 26–9; Tiryakian, 2001: 289)

### **Towards Inter-Civilizational Encounters**

If the contemporary world order can be viewed as in part embodying the co-presence of a number of world-visions connected in various ways to civilizational legacies – a situation both Robertsonian theory (and positions close to it) globalization theories and civilizational analysis can generally agree on – then such a view opens up a research programme that these paradigms could jointly pursue. This programme crystallizes around the shared orientation towards analysing 'intercivilizational encounters', which Robertson has argued 'have now come to constitute an almost globally institutionalized and thematized phenomenon' (1992: 137). If this analysis was applied not just to modern conditions but also to pre-modern modes of interaction between civilizational complexes, then this would constitute a significant contribution to the projects of 'the globalization of history and historicization of globalization' mentioned above by Bentley. To my mind, Bentley's (2006: 28–9) illustration of the outlines of such a project also depicts a shared orientation for both civilizational analysis and a more genuinely historically-aware set of globalization theories: world-historical factors such as

rising human population, expanding technological capacity, and increasing interaction between peoples of different societies have profoundly shaped the experiences of almost all human societies and . . . have worked collectively like a triple helix to reinforce one another with powerful effects throughout history.

The study of 'historical globalization' thus involves depicting 'shifting patterns of cross-cultural [and we might add, especially cross-civilizational] connections, relationships, networks, interactions and exchanges' (Bentley, 2006: 28–9).

As Arnason has noted (2006c), the analysis of pre-modern inter-civilizational interactions remains one of the least explored areas of civilizational analysis. Although some work has been carried out in this area by civilizational analysts (e.g. (Tiryakian, 1974; Arjomand, 2001; Collins, 2001), the theme has mostly been analysed by world-historians, such as Bentley (1993) and Curtin (1998), whose work can be seen as a potential bridging point between the historical-sociological scholarship of civilizational analysis and globalization theory's focus on connectivity. Indeed, bringing the latter's *problématiques* – appropriately cleansed of analytic anachronisms – to bear on civilizational analysis's accounts of pre-modern civilizations seems to me crucial as a way of moving both domains forward. Eisenstadt's work has focused over the years on the ideational disputes and variant modes of social organization 'internal' to pre-modern civilizational complexes.<sup>6</sup> But there seems to be no reason why inter-civilizational interactions could not be more fully accommodated within his general framework. After all, the notion of 'civilizational complex' is intended to get beyond the (Spenglerian) notion of civilizations as closed monads, emphasizing instead their relative internal plurality. Such plurality can be conceived of as being at least potentially open to 'external' inputs from other civilizational complexes, in various ways that would have to be empirically documented. Arnason himself points to these possibilities when he says that future research in this area will have to connect specific instances and types of inter-civilizational contact to schisms and disputes going on *within* the civilizational complexes involved in the interaction (Arnason, 2006c). If seen in this way, inter-civilizational encounters can be regarded as being as multi-dimensional as civilizational complexes themselves, the former ranging from commercial integration, religious expansion, and imperial conquests, through to different civilizational complexes providing both models for others to emulate (also a key focus for Robertson) and negative exemplars for others to avoid and to define themselves against (Arnason, 2006a: 237; 2006c: 40).

Such an investigative programme is intriguing, and in this regard both civilization analysts and globalization theorists can draw upon, and go beyond, the pioneering works of world-historians such as Bentley (1993) and William McNeill (1991a, 1991b). The latter's earlier account of world history, first published in 1963, stressed that inter-civilizational dynamics had occurred from early history. His later account goes further, stressing that long-lasting inter-civilizational 'ecumenical world-systems' have existed in Eurasia since about 1700 BCE, and that the post-1850 CE globalized world-system is but the latest in a line of such systems that have pulled different civilizations into systematic relations with each other over most of the past four thousand years. Regardless of the empirical veracity of these claims, as Delanty (2006: 47) argues, the work of McNeill remains an important source for accounts of very long-term globalization (or proto-globalization) processes that can be rooted in analysis of civilizations. One can at least imagine an Eisenstadt-inspired analysis of particular civilizational complexes as they have existed within, and were affected by in multi-dimensional ways, the world-systems depicted by McNeill.

It would also be worth revisiting the work of a scholar who often gets name-checked in histories of civilizational analysis in sociology but whose ideas have

today perhaps fallen out of fashion, namely the American sociologist and medievalist Benjamin Nelson (1973, 1974, 1981). The notion of inter-civilizational encounters was at the heart of his work, as was a pluralistic conception of the internal dynamics of civilizational complexes that has affinities with Eisenstadt's position. It seems to me well worth rediscovering Nelson's work of the 1960s and 1970s, as it anticipates many of the themes that are involved in the conjuncture of civilizational analysis with the more historically-sensitive capacities of globalization theory.

Nelson's civilizational analysis was explicitly formulated in order to grapple with contemporary globalization processes (as we now call them), involving 'the precipitous shrinking of a world now forced into anguished conjunctions in the midst of abrasive contacts' between civilizational complexes, leading to profound changes 'in the structures of consciousness and conscience' (Nelson, 1973: 80). Thus 'civilizational structures and complexes which were once in infrequent contact are now in one another's back yard', with the effect that 'heightened feelings of threat, ecstasy, even vertigo' are characteristic of the contemporary global condition (p. 81). Such a conceptualization of the present-day conditions of overlapping, intertwining, mutually dependent civilizational complexes and the world-visions they give rise to, very much chimes with the ideas of both Arnason and Robertson mentioned above. Nelson was an early – if now generally unacknowledged – proponent of the view that sociology must be global in orientation (1974: 135), possessing 'a planetary sense of civilizational patterns and conflicts of civilizational complexes' (p. 139), and an acute awareness of how the global field, to borrow Robertson's phrase, induces ongoing 'variabilities in the mixes of economic, political, social, [and] cultural elements' within particular civilizational complexes (p. 141).

If Nelson's diagnosis from the 1970s chimes with how civilizational analysis in the present day can engage with globalization problems, so too does his account of pre-modern inter-civilizational interactions suggest ways in which civilizational analysis has already gone some way towards conceiving of pre-modern globalization or proto-globalization. For Nelson, the archetypal condition of a complex civilization involves ongoing 'civil wars in the structures of consciousness and conscience', and constant 'struggles over competing definitions of world, group and self' (Nelson, 1974: 102) are the motors of change within any given civilizational complex (and we might note that the focus on actors' changing perceptions of world, group and self is reminiscent of Robertson's analysis of the global field).

Implied by this stance is the view that what may seem like highly 'traditional' cultural and social orders always have certain dynamic tendencies, although this of course is more pronounced in some epochs than in others. Thus pre-modern civilizational complexes are regarded as being as potentially productive of feelings of disarray and uncertainty among actors within them, as are their modern counterparts. While Eisenstadt also regards civilizations as dynamic constellations, there is a stronger emphasis in Nelson on the condition of a multiplicity of possible cultural viewpoints and the struggles within a civilization between different groups holding them, as itself deriving from contacts with others from 'outside' the civilization. Cultural borrowings, adaptations, syntheses, and challenges to tradition

– these figure more prominently in Nelson's account than in Eisenstadt's, and in that sense may give a renewed orientation to how civilizational analysis deals with pre-modern civilizations. This would involve seeing the latter as being (at least in certain historical periods, and at least in part) constituted in and through inter-civilizational interactions (Mandalios, 2004: 406; Mazlish, 2004: xii), the very dynamics that can be seen to make up pre-modern (proto-)globalization processes. In this vision, then, it is not just that civilizations interact, and that those interaction processes are construable as pre-modern globalization; in addition, civilizations themselves are (in part) made and remade through such processes. Putting the point simply, *interacting civilizations make 'globalization'; but 'globalization' makes and remakes those very civilizations themselves.*

All of this needs fleshing out with a host of empirical researches. But this does not detract from the general point that the ideas of Nelson imply, namely that it is the 'the nexus between societal, civilizational and global change' that must be the focus of civilizational analysis, not just for the modern world but for the pre-modern too (Mandalios, 2004: 407). Admittedly, Nelson did not create what we might have expected him to create, that is, a typology of different sorts of inter-civilizational interactions that could serve as the initial basis for the kinds of empirical researches just mentioned. As Arnason (2006c: 46) notes, no such comprehensive typology yet exists in historical sociology.

Nonetheless it is notable that one of Nelson's central cases of inter-civilizational encounter, the Western 'renaissance' of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is now being treated to systematic civilization-analytical treatment (Arnason and Wittrock, 2004), and that it can be regarded as an 'ecumenical renaissance' (Wittrock, 2001) at least on the general lines that Nelson viewed it – that is, as a meeting point of Western Christian, Byzantine, Jewish and Islamic civilizational complexes that had great ramifications for how Catholic Christendom was culturally reoriented over time and how eventually it came to conceive of itself (Nelson, 1973: 96–7). At least in some ways, this crucial period can be seen in light of one of Nelson's ideas that could usefully be rejuvenated in contemporary research, that is, the notion that at certain points in history wider universes of shared discourse and association can be created in the spaces that exist between, and which overlap across, civilizational complexes (Gittleman, 1974: 82). This focus could also import into civilizational analysis, if scholars pursuing such a programme were so inclined, a certain normative project – namely the search for historically existing instances of productive inter-civilizational communication and mutual comprehension, a task that could be construed as very important for scholarship at a time when 'clash of civilizations' talk animates much scholarly debate as well as public discourses (Cox, 2002: 14).

## Conclusion

In this article, I have traced out the ways in which civilizational analysis, far from being an antagonist of all versions of globalization theory, can be configured so



as to work in conjunction with the more sophisticated, historically-sensitive versions of them. It is only the more intellectually unsatisfactory versions of globalization theory that have nothing to say to civilizational analysts. The latter have, in my view quite rightly, subjected simplistic accounts of allegedly homogenizing global totality to quite stinging critique. While the civilization-analytic account of multiple modernities does constitute an alternative paradigm to some brands of globalization theory, there are significant overlaps between the conceptions of the former and the analysis of the global field offered by Robertson. In addition, one can identify various ways in which civilizational analysis could respond to globalization theory's orientations towards issues of global connectivity and cross-cultural processes by applying such themes to particular pre-modern contexts of inter-civilizational interaction. In this way, really significant steps can be taken in the direction of constructing histories of pre-modern globalizing tendencies – or of proto-globalization, if one prefers to reserve use of the phrase 'globalization' to the post-Columbian epoch. Either way, more intellectually compelling attempts to historicize globalization than are currently available are possible through adopting civilization analytical lenses. Globalization theory's thematics coupled together with civilizational analysis's acute interpretations of civilizational complexes: it is through this conjuncture that real intellectual progress can be made, for it is surely the case that the world-visions of each can augment and enrich the other.

## Notes

- 1 While some versions of globalization theory focus on 'heterogenization', this tends to be more at the level of cultural forms, understood as relatively autonomous of socio-political arrangements, than at the level of institutional arrangements. Thus the alleged 'hybridization' or 'creolization' of cultures does not directly engage with the coming together of modern *problématiques* and civilizational legacies that is emphasized by Eisenstadt's focus on multiple modernities.
- 2 Eisenstadt's position is explicitly intended to avoid cultural determinism by asserting that there are always multiple interpretations of central ideas in a civilization, and that different elites struggle to institutionalise them – a theme taken from the avowedly non-deterministic Max Weber. See Eisenstadt (2000a: 18–20).
- 3 Liberal historicism can be seen as the flip-side of an equally glib Marxist historicism, which agrees with liberalism as to the global spread of capitalism, but glosses this apparently inexorable fact in negative terms.
- 4 Earlier accounts of 'civilization' regarded the latter as being unitary, and as the anti-thesis of some hypothesized 'barbarity'; more recent accounts stress the multiplicity of 'civilizations'. See Mazlish (2004).
- 5 Relatedly, even those who focus on globalization as 'increasingly global networks of interaction' between units smaller than civilizations, especially nation-states, 'are also making far-reaching assumptions which have to be justified through confrontation with models centred on macro-units', especially civilizational complexes (Arnason, 2006a: 230).



- 6 This disposition probably springs from the focus on the Axial civilizations, their respective modes of axially apparently not deriving from inter-civilizational interactions (Wittrock, 2001). Such interactions are, however, discernible within the 'second axial age', of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an increasingly major focus of civilizational analysis (Arnason and Wittrock, 2004).

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