

Deepening 'multiplicity': a response to Rosenberg

Justin Rosenberg is right to argue the significance of societal multiplicity to the international and its defining relationship with the discipline of IR. I would, however, urge Rosenberg to deepen his understanding of multiplicity, as the shadow of the statist wall of the prison still looms over his response to multiplicity. This shadow is embodied in conceptual model of Uneven and Combined Development (UCD); one based on Leo Trotsky's argument that world development was not uni-linear but rather multiple and interactive, hence 'uneven and combined'.¹ Yet Trotsky's work is an analysis of only one form of society: the (Czarist Russian) nation-state and its relationship with other states. Trotsky's UCD is therefore ontologically statist, and Rosenberg echoes this in his example of the international relations of Brazilian literature.² IR – and human society more broadly – needs a more multi-layered understanding of multiplicity than this.

Recognition of multiplicity must therefore account for the plurality of societal forms relevant in any given context. It is not enough, for instance, to appreciate uneven and combined development across Russia and Western states without also appreciating the plethora of interactions between 'societies' below, within, and across states, such as the roles of aristocratic families or Marxists from outside Russia. Such a deepening of multiplicity allows for an IR not limited to relations between the same type of 'societies' and more attuned to the multiplicity of social forms that overlap across global time and space. Members of a national community, for example, simultaneously identify (or are identified) with any number of other social groupings, from socio-economic class-based groups to collectives based on ideological beliefs. The multiplicity of each of these 'societies' *may* (but not necessarily *does*) exert similar causal pressure in a given context as that exerted by a multiplicity of nation-states.

Rosenberg's recognition of multiplicity's influences on social processes is also in keeping with recent scholarship in the emerging sub-discipline of History, Global History. In his defence of Global History, Sebastian Conrad has called for an appreciation of potential causation at a global level.³ This is not to say that all historical processes *must* be caused by some global factor, but that global or extra-territorial factors *may* have influenced a given historical process. This helps avoid 'internalist' and genealogical explanations that neglect factors from beyond the spatial and, indeed, temporal frameworks that are most immediately apparent. Yet this also hints at the significance of social multiplicity as a factor in determining the course of historical processes. For Conrad, 'no unit [of analysis] is inherently superior' and 'different units direct our attention to different processes',⁴ and research needs to be open to the significance of social forms at different levels. Whereas Conrad does not explicitly recognise that "the international" imparts its own dialectical mechanisms and dynamics to the structure of world history,⁵ his work nevertheless underlines the importance of multi-layered multiplicity. Appreciating this deeper, multi-layered extent of multiplicity might help IR break not just out of the prison, but also away from the shadow of its statist walls.

¹ Justin Rosenberg, 'IR in the Prison of Political Science ...', *International Relations*, 30(2), 2016, p. 141.

² Rosenberg, *Prison*, p. 147.

³ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 71-2.

⁴ Conrad, *Global History*, p. 133.

⁵ Rosenberg, Prison p. 139.