

Rethinking the Concept of 'Society' in the Age of Globalisation

Society as a Whole, the Social, and Sociological Traditions

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to take issue with the opinion that, in sociology, the concept of 'society' was equated with the nation-state. Firstly, a diachronic analysis of the term 'society', as used by the general public, shall be attempted: 'society as a whole' and 'the social'. Secondly, the article shall illustrate that sociology has developed its own analytical concept of society within the space between the two lay terms. Thirdly, the fact that the process of globalisation yet again problematizes the distinction between 'society as a whole' and 'the social' shall be shown. The conclusion of the paper is that, by yet again, becoming aware of the three dimensions of the concept of 'society', we can provide cues for a theoretical reconstruction of the sociological concept of 'society' that will contribute to research on 'society' in the age of globalisation.

Keywords Society. The social. Society as a whole. The state. Civil society. Market economy. Nation-state. Globalisation.

Summary 1 Rethinking the Concept of 'Society'. – 2 The Distinction Between State and Civil Society. – 3 The Distinction Between Market Economy and 'the Social'. – 4 The Nation-state as 'Society as a Whole'. – 5 Legacies of the Sociological Theory. – 6 Social Study in the Age of Globalisation.



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1 Rethinking the Concept of 'Society'

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand: "I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!" or "I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!" "I am homeless, the Government must house me!" and so they are casting their problems on society, and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. (September 23, 1987, Margaret Thatcher, Interview for Woman's Own)

This well-known statement was made by Thatcher, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in 1987, in an interview she did for a magazine. What is meant here is that there are people who, on encountering a problem, tend not to try to solve it themselves but instead place the blame on the government, shifting responsibility by redefining their own problems as social ones. However, in Thatcher's opinion, a "society" is, in fact, just "individual men and women", just many "families" and nothing more. If that is the case, redefining one's own problems as 'social' ones do nothing except shifting the burden onto someone else's shoulders, and when people call for the government to take responsibility, they are merely justifying this kind of 'buck-passing' on an institutional level. However, before making demands of this sort, people should first and foremost try to look after themselves. She claimed that we should not think there is any kind of 'society' people can shift their personal problems onto and that from this time on, there is a need to foster and reinforce an attitude towards life that one's problems are one's own.

The reaction to this statement among sociologists has been summarised quite succinctly by Urry (2000, 1-20). At first, sociologists contended that there is, in fact, a society, an entity that is something more than just individual men and women and their families - the definition espoused by Thatcher. However, they were not able to clearly show what this 'society', in fact, was. And later, after the rise of globalisation theories in the nineties, sociological research critical of the concept started to appear as well. Many such critics focused on the tendency to equate the concept of 'society' with the nation-state. They pointed out that throughout its history, sociology had used the concept of 'society' to refer to nation-state-like entities. However, they argued, as long as the discipline remained confined to this traditional concept of 'society', sociology would be incapable of analysing the ever-increasing degree of global interdependence. Gradually, this understanding has become widely accepted by the discipline. But, this critique notwithstanding, no significant advances have been made as regards the theoretical reconstruction of the concept of 'so-

ciety', and, before long, voices proclaiming its demise started to appear (Latour 1987; Urry 2000; Rumford 2001). Without a unifying concept, sociological research in the age of globalisation appears to be nothing more than a hotchpotch of disparate analytical efforts. "Sociology thus appears to be cast adrift once we leave the relatively safe boundaries of a functionally integrated and bounded society, or of an autopoietic societal system *à la* Luhmann (1995). There is a theoretical and empirical whirlpool where most of the tentative certainties that sociology had endeavoured to erect are being washed away" (Urry 2000, 17). As Urry points out, in this sense "Thatcher was oddly right when she said there is no such thing as society" (12).

We believe that for sociology to analyse globalisation there is a need to reestablish the concept of 'society', tempering it into a tool appropriate for the requirements of the new era. The reason we want to attempt it, even though there are strong arguments for leaving it behind, is because we cannot agree with the most central of these arguments – the assertion that sociology has equated the concept of 'society' with the nation-state. We do not doubt the fact that the object of sociological studies in the latter half of the twentieth century has, in fact, been nation-states – it certainly was – but this does not mean that sociology was established as an independent discipline through studying nation-states, which sociologists viewed as 'societies'. We believe and shall argue below that sociology earned its place among already-established disciplines by drawing a distinction between 'society in a broad sense' and 'society in a narrow sense', and particularly by focusing on 'the social'. And this very distinction served as the basis whereby the discipline accumulated theoretical knowledge for an analysis of 'society'. Accordingly, the concept of society – a fundamental one for sociology – is a multi-dimensional one from the start, due to the dual nature of the object of its analysis, and also acquired further dimensions through the years of analytic pursuits, of which we shall speak later. If we forget this multidimensionality, we shall not only fail to come up with a sound counter-argument to Thatcher's statement but also – and even more importantly – we may well start to proclaim the death of this concept, central to our discipline, ourselves. Conversely, by yet again becoming aware of the multiple dimensions of the concept of 'society' in sociology, we can provide some cues for a theoretical reconstruction of the concept that could contribute to research on 'society' in the age of globalisation. And that is the conclusion at which this paper will arrive.

The paper is structured as follows. As we saw in Thatcher's statement, sociology holds no monopoly over the concept of 'society'. And even within the discipline, the concept is premised on the development of the term in various other areas. This development can be summarised as a process of division between the state and 'civil society' (§ 2), and that between the market economy and 'the social'

(§ 3), which both lead to the formation of the concept of 'society as a whole' - the nation-state (§ 4). In sociology, the concept of 'society' was developed along the same lines, but still walked its own independent path, which resulted in it becoming a more robust analytic tool (§ 5). Today, in the age of globalisation, the distinction between 'society in a broad sense' and 'society in a narrow sense' is once again becoming an issue. By searching for cues in a diachronic analysis of the concept of 'society', we shall try to find the theoretical knowledge related to the concept that has been amassed by sociology thus far and find hints to help us save the concept for the future (§ 6).¹

2 The Distinction Between State and Civil Society

'Society' started to be viewed as an entity functioning according to its own unique principles from the time the concept of 'civil society' was born - in its modern variation. The term 'civil society' has a long history in Europe. However, in the linguistic tradition stretching from Aristotle to the mid-eighteenth century - the Graeco-Latin linguistic lineage starting from the politics of Classical Greece, moving on to Roman law and Christianity, then further to the rediscovery of Aristotle in scholasticism, and up to the natural law theory in the early modern times - the term 'civil society' was synonymous with the state and thus was not perceived as an entity with its own original principles. But if we look into the modern usage of the concept of 'civil society' - the civil liberalism of the eighteenth century that emerged from the modern natural law theory - the synonymity of the state and 'civil society' breaks down, with the latter starting to be perceived as an independent entity at odds with the state. The advent of this newly developed concept of 'civil society' denoting spheres of life beyond the control of the state also entailed the birth of the concept of 'society', an entity with its own principles (Hashimoto 1957; Riedel 1974; Dumont 1986).

The conceptual divergence of state from 'society' can be seen from two angles - state formation and independence of 'society'.

State formation can be perceived as an establishment of sovereignty, that is, as an establishment of a distinction between a king as an individual and the state apparatus per se (Kantorowicz 1957; Fuku-

1 To simplify the discussion, here we shall regard the birth of the modern concept of 'civil society' as the birth of the concept of 'society' as well and give a schematic picture of the subsequent transformation of the concept of 'society'. Furthermore, although our examination of 'society' here shall mainly focus on Europe, this does not mean that our world view is Eurocentric - even if we are to look into the concept of 'society' in Japan, where the author happens to live, we shall not be able to gain a proper understanding of this concept unless we look into its European history as well.

da 1985; Elias 1995b).² This process of differentiation is apparent in the formation of the doctrine of sovereignty and the establishment of absolutist states, in organisational diplomacy and modern international law. The formation of the doctrine of sovereignty and the establishment of absolutist states had dual consequences. On the one hand, the sovereign power of the kings was reinforced. On the other, the whims and caprices of individual kings were reined in.³ The divorce of organisational diplomacy from the dispositions of individual kings resulted in an expansion of diplomatic networks, an expansion of the scope of modern international law, gradually creating an international power balance system premised on the independence of individual countries. Under pressure from both flanks – both domestically and internationally – the distinction between the mortal king and the immortal state apparatus grows more and more pronounced.

Concurrently with the formation of the state, a civil sphere separate from the state starts to be consciously noticed. This is evidenced in the transformation of the natural law theory. Instead of the static tradition of the natural law theory, which goes back to Aristotle and explains history as a movement from household economies towards economies of state, the modern natural law theory posits a dynamic relationship whereby nature is set against the human order, that is, the state. In other words, in the modern natural law theory, humanity, perceived as endowed with freedom and ownership rights, is charged with the task of overcoming the state of nature, where no guarantees for order are certain. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, for example, argued that this task is solved through contract. Contracts can be divided into two types: those of association and those of obedience. The logical organisation of the natural law theory, which, premised on the association of individuals, envisaged a delegation of power to the government and an agreement to obey it, was an important page in the history of state formation, on the one hand, and of the separation of state and 'society', on the other.

But what truly solidified the independence of 'society' from the state are the economic theories that appeared in the United Kingdom and France, closely connected to the increase in productivity, and the growth of the economy of exchange made possible by this increase. However, neither this productivity increase nor the economy of exchange could have immediately produced the idea of a 'society' endowed with its own principles. The mercantilism that flourished in

2 For an interpretation of the social theory of Elias, see Utsumi 2014.

3 For a helpful discussion of absolutist states, see Duindam 2003. His book attempts to show that the conventional assumption that the courts of modern Europe are irrelevant to the history of nation-states is wrong and argues that the courts have played a vital role in the establishment of nation-states.

absolutist states did not produce the idea of a 'society' functioning in accordance with its own intrinsic principles either; rather, it expanded the state's control over economic activities. It is when state control comes to be perceived as a constraint unnecessary for an increase in productivity and the spread of the exchange economy that a new vision is born: a vision of a 'society' functioning in accordance with its own intrinsic principles, distinct from those of the state. The formation of these unique principles of 'society' - principles independent of the state's - can be perceived from two angles. One is self-containment, and the other is an orientation towards happiness. Firstly, to justify the liberation of this 'society' from the state, the logic it is built upon has to be intrinsically complete. Unless a 'society' is self-contained, it will need some support from without - from the state. Secondly, the self-containment of the 'society' is justified insofar as it yields useful results. If a self-contained 'society' is harmful, it also needs some intervention from the state - an entity beyond its confines. The first step in the direction of these two tendencies was made by the physiocrats, but the most decisive arguments were made by the Scottish moral philosophers and especially Adam Smith. They presumed that it is in human nature to pursue self-interest, and to do so freely and on an equal basis; and they envisaged a concept of 'civil society' consistent with the natural law theory, wherein individuals engaged in this pursuit, privately interconnected through the market and the division of labour, achieve prosperity together. This concept of 'civil society' is then given a historical perspective dimension. Under the name of 'civilisation', the history of civil society was characterised as humankind's natural progress on the road toward happiness. This is how the concept of a 'civil society' distinct from the state was born.

3 The Distinction Between Market Economy and 'the Social'

The advocates of the modern theory of 'civil society' did not necessarily argue for the existence of a 'society' distinct from the state, limiting their vision to a narrow sphere of the market economy in the modern sense of the term. 'Civil society' was not immediately equated with the market economy. But as various markets increasingly become perceived as black boxes - constructs that allow no room for discussion - under the initiative of the state, 'civil society' comes to stand for the market economy. At the same time, a 'society in a narrow sense', one differentiated from market society, is born. This is when the term 'civil society' starts to acquire two separate dimensions - one denoting the market economy and the other standing for 'the social' (Hirschman 1977; Castel 2000; Polanyi 2001).

The earliest concrete manifestations of the modern 'civil society' theory can be found in the American War of Independence and the Virginia Declaration of Rights, in the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Developed later in the nineteenth century, modern civil law dismantled the conventional right of ownership, which made no distinction between ownership of land and control of people, and divided these old laws into laws of property and laws of obligations. The new legal system permitted control of things only, while relationships between people (which were seen as agents with free will) were to be handled through contracts. These two principles – the principle of private ownership and the principle of freedom of contract – became the foundation stones of modern civil law.⁴

Modern civil law served as a basis for the emergence of the cross-border labour market, the commodity market, and the capital market. For the first of these markets – the labour market – to function, it is necessary to dismantle such former systems as kinship, communal bonds, and guilds, transforming an individual into a product that can change occupation or place of residence according to the demands of the labour market. This transformation was expedited by the principle of contractual freedom and the threat of poverty. It is at the point of confluence of the two that we have the product of the labour market – the waged worker. Similarly, the formation of the second market – the commodity market – required the dismantlement of communal bonds and class systems hitherto connected to land systems, and required, too, that land becomes a product whose purpose of use and owner could be changed to fit the demands of the commodity market, and which could enable merchandise production according to the demands of the commodity market as well. This transformation was expedited by the establishment of the right of private ownership and the advances made in goods transportation technologies. At this time, we see the formation of spaces centred on towns and cities and capable of being quickly transformed in any way and producing all kinds of things to meet the demands of the commodity market. Lastly, the formation of a labour market and a commodity market required the creation and maintenance of a monetary system. This system was created mainly by the central banks of each country, with the gold standard used for international transactions and the convertible note system for domestic ones. At this stage, we also see the establishment of securities exchanges that increased the efficiency of fund procurement and utilisation of capital, and of banks that converted inactive capital to active. This is how the capital market was formed.

With the development of all kinds of markets based on modern civil law, individual capitalists and individual enterprises expanded

⁴ For an analysis of the modern civil law and social law theory, see Utsumi 2009.

the scale of their businesses. Before long, they had become organised business corporations. A particularly convenient form of organisation is the joint stock company system with its limited liability and transferability of shares, allowing entrepreneurs to mobilise large assets for their business. In connection with these developments, commercial laws, which had played but a small role in the modern civil law, merely governing relationships between merchants, start to gain importance. This process is accompanied by the following two transformations. Firstly, a corporate organisation – contrary to the individualistic assumptions of conventional commercial law, which presumed equality between individuals – entails a number of relationships that can easily lead to inequality, such as the relationship between a business enterprise and its partners, between major stockholders and minority stockholders, or between a business enterprise and its customers. And this is why this time period witnessed the emergence of business organisation laws, which add a non-individualistic aspect to commercial law – that of considerations for the common good. Secondly, commercial transactions laws (yet another category of commercial laws) ensure the principle of the freedom of pure profit pursuit. In this way, because a corporate business organisation (an organisational entity) devotes itself to the pure pursuit of profit (an individualistic endeavour), commercial laws come to occupy a unique position in civil law, to integrate these two heterogeneous properties of one endeavour. And so was established the market economy, a system where all kinds of business enterprises operate in various markets in accordance with civil law.

An essential role in the formation of the market economy was played by the state. The market economy was institutionalised not through the elimination of state control but rather through the reinforcement of that control in all kinds of aspects. As various markets, as a result of the state's control, become black boxes, civil society starts to be an embodiment of the market economy. The state takes two functions upon itself here – the political function of protecting its people from external threats within the international balance of power system and the economic function of maintaining an international market economy.

However, the latter half of the nineteenth century, when everything looked as if the reduction of the 'civil society' with all its possibilities to a mere market economy was inevitable, witnessed the launch of a movement against the market economy. This phenomenon can be understood from the viewpoint of threats created by the market economy. The formation of the labour market placed wage workers into severe labour conditions while also demanding constant fluidity of the labour force. The formation of the international commodity market placed wage workers, business enterprises, and people engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishery into a state of in-

terdependence on a worldwide scale, subjecting them to a constant fluidity of conditions. The formation of the capital market exposed wage workers and business enterprises alike to the fluidity of all kinds of capital, including the fluidity of prices. The driving force behind the countermovement that occurred to neutralise these threats was truly diverse, comprising workers' unions, political parties representing workers, monopolistic industrial capitalists, agricultural powers, landowners, and even business enterprises. But although the development of this movement against the market economy was influenced by the interests of each of the actors, no individual actor can be perceived as the sole initiator of the movement – the sole initiator was the formation of the market economy itself. The movement resulted, by way of many twists and turns, in the formation of a great variety of practices and systems. These include labour movement, factory legislation, social insurance, sanitary services, public utilities, customs duties, incentive wages and subsidies, cartels and trusts, and prohibitions imposed on immigration, on import, and on capital movement, to name but a few.

In this way, 'civil society', which was born to serve as a counterforce to the state, has simultaneously emerged, through the control of the state, as the market economy. However, the market economy creates a number of new problems that cannot be dealt with by the respective markets. And these problems, wherever they happen, create cracks in the fabric of 'civil society'. What appears in these cracks is a countermovement against the market economy, that is, various collective protection measures and frameworks allowing actors deprived of security in the market economy to ensure that security through mutual connections. These collective practices and frameworks of protection were often referred to by the adjective 'social'. If we use the collective term 'the social' to describe them, 'the social' will refer to the various practices appearing in the crevices of civil society as a whole (including the market economy) while simultaneously referring to the prescriptive framework of cooperation for repairing these crevices. This is how the concept of 'society in a narrow sense', distinct from the market economy, was born.

4 The Nation-state as 'Society as a Whole'

The more distinct the twofold movement of the market economy and 'the social' gets, the more prominent the importance of the state as a mediator between the two becomes. As a result, the functions of the state proliferate, becoming tripartite or, perhaps, quadripartite. In addition to the functions the state had hitherto, that is, maintaining the trans-border market economy in the economic sphere and protecting its actors from external threats within the international

power balance system in the political sphere, the state starts to assume the function of ensuring security in internal affairs by mediating between the market economy and 'the social'. In this process, one category grows increasingly prominent - the category of 'nationals'. As this category gets applied to practices and systems in all kinds of areas, these areas, which abound with tensions both within them and between them, get increasingly united as one. This signifies the birth of a 'society as a whole', usually referred to as the 'nation-state' (Barker 1950; Anderson 2006; Utsumi 2006, 2007).

To guarantee the internal security of the system, the state needs predominantly to deal with the following two threats. One is a threat inherent in the market economy. Classical economics believed in the self-regulating nature of the market, and its motto was *laissez-faire*. However, the market economy, when left to its own devices, creates monopolies and unfair competition - both internationally and domestically. Thus, people gradually came to an understanding that an unconstrained economy obstructs the optimal distribution of wealth, which is the normative justification for the market economy in the first place. The second threat is the one posed, with a certain probability, by the market economy to specific business enterprises and individuals. As mentioned earlier, the real-life market is never so faultless that it can always achieve an impartial distribution of opportunities and wealth. However, even if we presume that a perfect market is possible, it will nevertheless always generate, with a certain probability, such phenomena as unemployment or bankruptcy that will - the efforts of individual persons or business enterprises notwithstanding - deal some damaging blows to certain people. Neither of the threats can be neutralised under existing civil law. And to remedy the situation, a framework to eliminate these threats is established and maintained by the state.

The state's attempts to eliminate threats manifest themselves very symbolically in the amendments made to civil law. Up to a point, protecting the principle of private ownership and the principle of freedom of contract formed the nucleus of civil law. One upshot of the fact that various countries established their civil laws this way was the ability of these countries to maintain an international market economy. But after the second half of the nineteenth century, civil laws start to exhibit a tendency that can only be interpreted as repentance. The amendments made changes to the principle of freedom of contract and placed restrictions on the principle of private ownership. This tendency consists of the following two directions. One is the attempts to thoroughly ensure the principles of modern civil law, and the other is to transcend them. The two are not necessarily contradictory - in fact, they often appear intermingled.

If we look at the institution of contracts - relationships between people - early modern civil law, adhering to the principle of freedom

of contract, did not concern itself with actual relationships, including the issue of inequality between the contracting parties, and by and large all aspects of the resulting relationship were left to the discretion of the contracting parties. Therefore, the principle of freedom of contract actually created contractual deprivation of freedom. This state of affairs came to be addressed from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards: to ensure the actual freedom of contract, the state started to have a say in the relationships between the contracting parties to ensure that the actual relationships were more in line with the principle of equality. During this same era, there was also a series of efforts to create functioning international laws and international organisations to ensure indiscriminate free trade and stabilise the foreign exchange, to expand the scope of economic law by adding antitrust laws, laws to prevent unfair competition, etc. At the same time, in order to rectify actual inequalities between states in the international market economy, all kinds of economic policies get implemented by the governments of various countries – the establishment of financial policies, including fiscal policies and provision of subsidies; the imposition of restrictions on immigration, imports, and capital movements; and the institution of approval systems for cartels and trusts. Also, labour laws are expanded to rectify inequality in the domestic labour market, resulting in a reduction of threats posed by the market economy to specific individuals. In the domain of private ownership of things, early modern civil law perceived private ownership as a natural right that had existed even prior to the establishment of any written laws. From the latter half of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, private ownership comes to be seen as a right only existing as long as it is put into statute. As a result, to reduce the threats posed by the market economy to specific individuals, the right of private ownership is subjected to progressively greater restrictions, while in addition to private ownership, which is seen as just one possible type of ownership among many, a new type called 'social ownership' appears, allowing property to be used for private benefit even though it is not privately owned. During this time period, the state starts to implement public works projects and to expand social welfare, providing public assistance and social insurance.

These amendments to civil law were made possible by the concept of 'nationals'. A term that initially referred to individuals inhabiting a specific geographic area, 'national' gradually comes to signify much more, a concept imagined as independent of the individuals that are supposed to comprise it. In other words, the term 'nationals' – given to a group of people consisting of N individuals, just as in the case of a collective concept in set theory – becomes relatively independent of the individuals that serve as elements in an extensional definition of the group, and is, in a sense, substantiated as a per-

son 'N+1'. Nationals are thus considered to be actors – particularly when it comes to relationships with external entities. Moreover, the concept of the 'national' exerts a unique effect on relationships between individuals within the geographic area with which the term is linked as well. If one group of people is assigned the term 'nationals', just as in the case of intentional definition in set theory, this assignment assumes that these people have some common properties, with 'culture' being the generic concept used to denote this commonality. Nationals – even if they have never met each other – are envisioned, according to the intentional definition, as a kind of culturally uniform community with shared beliefs, customs, and lifestyle.

This category of 'nationals' gets applied virtually everywhere – to all kinds of practices and systems in various areas including politics, economics, and 'the social' realm. In the sphere of guaranteeing security within the international power balance system, the category of nationals is perceived as the agent establishing political relationships with nationals of other countries on the one hand and, on the other, serves as a mechanism for the state to mobilise individuals within the geographic area under its control to ensure safeguards against external entities. In the sphere of guaranteeing security as regards the market economy, the category of nationals is, on the one hand, perceived as the agent maintaining the international market economy together with nationals of other countries and, on the other, serves as a mechanism to justify the state's interventions into the market economy within the geographic area it controls – it is nationals who reap the benefits from developments of the national economy. Furthermore, in the realm of 'the social', the category of nationals serves as a mechanism to transform people in all kinds of positions within the shared geographic area into members of a community who offer each other assistance when it comes to various life-related risks such as accidents, illnesses, unemployment, disasters, old age, and death. And lastly, the category of nationals operates as a mechanism enabling each of the individual geographic areas – which abounds with tensions both within them and between them – to function as integrated entities. In other words, the concept becomes a device for justifying the state's multilateral and highly potent functionality. If we look at the state's connections to its external milieu, this functionality involves maintaining the international market economy and transnational systems as well as securing the state's own independence from other states. Internally, this functionality includes interventions into the market economy and measures to enrich and maintain 'the social'. And finally, the state also functions as a mediator between all of the above.

With the establishment of this concept of nationals, we see the birth of a new concept of 'society' linking together the state, the national economy, and 'the social' – 'society' as a new totality, 'society as a whole' or, as it is most often referred to, the 'nation-state'.

5 Legacies of the Sociological Theory

But how should we place the sociological concept of 'society' within this framework of diachronic change of the layman's concept of the same name?

The birth of sociology coincides with the era of the development of 'the social', that is, the latter half of the nineteenth century and thereafter, when the concept of 'society in a narrow sense' was coined as a counterpart to the market economy. Up to that time, social theories within academia predominantly focused on the workings of the state and the market. But from that time on, social theories focusing on 'the social' started to emerge. What all these social theories had in common was their focus on the unintended results of civil society movements that pushed for 'liberty, equality, and fraternity'. Accordingly, these social theories – although to a varied extent – all take a critical stance toward the state and the market economy, which use the modern civil society theory as their theoretical crutch. Before long, these theories were given a name – sociology – and institutionalized as a new discipline.⁵

However, although they all may share an approach characterized by attention to 'the social', there is some variation in their respective stances. Marx [1867] (1976), who perceived the consequences brought by the vision of civil society when it became reality through the prism of the concept of class, analysed the birth of class from the viewpoint of changing production relations in the capitalist market economy, and argued that social change is necessary to overcome class distinctions. 'The social', which has been the focus of attention here, was, on the one hand, the class system – a problematic consequence of civil society – but on the other, it was the normative practices and frameworks necessary to overcome it. Durkheim [1893] (1984), conversely, interpreted the consequences of civil society using the concept of *anomie*. He proposed that anomie emerges due to changes in social solidarity and argued that, in order to prevent anomie, a new morality is required. 'The social' Durkheim focused upon was not so much the problematic consequences of civil society as the normative practices and frameworks needed to overcome them. Weber [1904-5] (2002), on the other hand, did not concern himself with 'the social' in the normative sense, perceiving the development of civil society through the concept of rationalisation and providing a thorough analysis of the past and future of rationalisation. But this does not mean that Weber had only a limited interest in 'the social' – although it may seem as if Weber distanced himself from normative theories, the persistency with which he pursued his analysis

⁵ See Castel 2003; Koto 2009, 2010, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b; Utsumi, Takazakura 2014.

of rationalisation and its consequences shows the strength of his interest in the norms of 'the social', which lies behind it. Thus, in the formative years of sociology, there was a wide spectrum of stances regarding 'the social'. Some thinkers were strongly interested in the analysis of 'the social' as an unintended consequence of civil society; some were interested in the norms for 'the social' of a beneficial kind yet to come, while some were interested in the analysis of a broader 'society' that produces 'the social'.

Then came the twentieth century, an era when sociology developed more than during any other. For analytical purposes, it shall serve us to roughly divide the century into the first half and the second half.

The first half was the period of the birth of the nation-states, when within the boundaries defined by the term 'national' we see the strengthening of the connections between the state, the national economy, and 'the social'. Perhaps by way of response to this changing reality, sociology increasingly comes to focus its attention on society as a whole. Parsons (1951) used the word 'system' as a metaphor to describe it. According to Parsons, the social system of this 'society as a whole' is said to be comprised of relations of interdependence between its individuals. He argued that the functional prerequisites for the survival of a social system were the mediation of the relationships between members of the society and the mediation of the relationship between society and the environment. He particularly stressed the importance of subdivision into subsystems and their development. The propositions that defined sociology in its early stage - rationalisation, changes in social solidarity, changes in class relations and so forth - were later classified as the progress of social differentiation, characterised by development of the market economy and bureaucracy, voluntary association, and development of universal norms, all to be perceived as elements of a universal social change called 'modernisation'.

If sociology's focus in the first half of the twentieth century was on macrosocial issues, the century's second half witnessed a shift to the micro level, with a particular emphasis on interactions. Ariadne's thread for this endeavour was the theory of the self-proposed by Simmel (1890) and Mead [1927] (1934). According to them, an individual is not an absolute unity that should be used as the starting point for analysis, but an entity created through networks and interactions - and is thus secondary. Based on this viewpoint, Goffman (1959) and Garfinkel (1967) conducted a thorough analysis of the way interactions are organised. How do the elements structuring the interactions in which people engage over the course of their daily lives - such as positions and roles, norms and narratives, and power - function? How do participants in said interactions construct themselves and others as actors? Looking for answers to these and similar questions, Goffman and Garfinkel accumulated a body of

knowledge regarding interactions. The interest in and knowledge of such micro-interactions soon came to exert an influence on macrosocial analysis as well. Bourdieu, Elias, Foucault, Luhmann and Habermas,⁶ the most prominent sociologists of the second half of the twentieth century, were all – although they emphasized different aspects – preoccupied with interactions, linking them to the individual (*habitus*) or else to the social system. The same trend shows in the increasingly frequent use of the concept of 'network' first espoused by Simmel and Elias, which served as a metaphor for analysing multi-lateral interactions of the 'social', while conveniently providing a way to avoid substantiation. At this stage, the analytic concept of 'society' in sociology gets structured as a complex one consisting of multiple levels, the main four being *habitus*, network, interaction, and system.⁷

Now, let us summarise the points made so far. The concept of 'society' in sociology has been developed in close connection with the diachronic change (as described in the preceding section) of the same concept in domains beyond sociology. A particularly significant influence on sociology was exerted by the move to distinguish between 'society as a whole' and 'the social', and particularly by the focus on the 'social'. But that does not mean that sociology concerned itself solely with the analysis of 'society as a whole' and 'the social' while turning a blind eye to everything else. Within the space between these two lay concepts of society, sociological analysis has been dealing both with 'society as a whole' and 'the social', addressing these from various angles and distances. And this is the reason why sociology has assembled an analytic concept of 'society' distinct from lay concepts such as 'society as a whole' and 'the social', encapsulating *habitus*, interactions, and system. We can thus argue that the concept of 'society', which has always been one of the concepts most fundamental to sociology, although it was forged to analyse 'society as a whole' and 'the social', has always been a multi-dimensional one.

6 Social Study in the Age of Globalisation

Now, what can we add to the arguments made at the beginning of this paper based on the analysis made so far?

First of all, Thatcher's assertion that 'society' does not exist may seem to be a reference to the nation-state, seen as 'society as a whole'

⁶ Bourdieu 1980; Elias [1939] 1995a, [1939] 1995a; Foucault [1975] 1977; Luhmann [1984] 1995; Habermas [1981a] 1984; [1981b] 1987.

⁷ We shall not give a detailed account here of the three dimensions comprising the traditional analytic concept of 'society' in sociology since they are not the main object of this paper; they shall be addressed in another article.

in the twentieth century. However, that is not the case. Based on our discussion, we can say that she was referring to 'the social', that is, the collective practices and frameworks of protection by those deprived of security in the market economy, to mutually guarantee security - particularly the mechanisms of social welfare created under the initiative of the state following the growth of the national economy. Of course, social welfare did not cease to exist. However, the connections between the state, the national economy, and 'the social' that were strengthened within the boundaries defined by the term 'national' did, in fact, slacken to some extent during the last quarter of the twentieth century. And as this established 'social' weakened, the nationals comprising 'society as a whole' became nothing more than "individual men and women" or just many "families". And when, in this situation, actors who find themselves in a precarious position in the market economy shift their problems onto 'society', this action is, in fact, tantamount to forcing their own problems onto the nationals - the "individual men and women" and the "families" - which is why they get thus criticized as 'nationals' unworthy of the name. Yet another phenomenon that goes hand in hand with it is when people, who find themselves in a precarious position in the market economy due to a weakening of 'the social', start attributing their instability to peripheral groups of an even weaker position. What we are seeing here is that, although the idea of 'nationals' is broadcast to all and sundry, there is, in fact, insufficient cooperation between the state, the national economy, and 'the social' taking care of the actors that inhabit this category, thus resulting in the concept of the 'national' being simultaneously too much and too little. Undeniably, the nation-state still exists. But today, as the aspect of 'the social' is weak, it is no longer 'society as a whole' that takes care of those defined as 'nationals', but, rather, a 'society' that forces them into taking care of themselves by themselves and torments those who oppose it while labelling them 'nationals' unworthy of the name - all as if simply to save itself from demise. Proclaiming a 'society' without 'the social' is a mere postponement of the problem concerning 'the social', not a solution. This is what Thatcher's statement meant.

No matter how often her words are repeated, there are still always those in the market economy in precarious situations. Accordingly, we will never see the disappearance of the various collective practices and frameworks of protection created by these actors to guarantee one another's security. In this sense, sociologists were correct in their retorts that there is a 'society' beyond "individual men, women, and their families". But they failed to clearly show that the 'society' they espoused was 'the social' sphere of mutual guarantees of security by those deprived of safety in the market economy, as well as the kind of 'society as a whole' that is needed for maintaining 'the social'. The reason stems from the fact that sociology forgot its his-

tory: a history of analysis, conducted from various angles and distances, of the 'society as a whole' and 'the social' within the space between these two lay concepts of society.

Oblivious to its own history, sociology since the rise of globalisation theory has experienced a surge of research asserting the limitations of the concept of 'society'. A point frequently stressed in such critiques of the concept is the problem of equating the concept of 'society' with the nation-state. However, it is not necessarily true that sociologists have traditionally envisioned 'society' as a closed and ontic nation-state. Granted, the discipline was to some extent influenced by the lay concepts of 'society', referring to 'society as a whole' and 'the social', but its main endeavour was to analyse, within the space between these two lay concepts, the two from various angles and distances. As a result, sociology has forged over the years an analytic concept of 'society' that spans a number of dimensions – the habitus, the network, the interaction, and the system. But as sociology forgot the very path it left behind, the discipline has fallen into self-criticism based on an oversimplified view that equates the concept of 'society' with the nation-state, with some even proclaiming the death of this central concept for the discipline themselves.⁸

In light of the social change known as globalisation, it is important for us to understand the problems faced by the concept of 'society' in sociology today. It does not, however, mean that all aspects of the existing concept of 'society' are invalid. What we need is a careful dissection of this conceptual tool.⁹ And a helpful starting point for analysis of 'society as a whole' and 'the social' that are undergoing some important transformations in the era we live in is the concept of network woven by all kinds of actors. If we could capture an entire picture of all networks comprising all actors, we would be able to see various systems, unified to various degrees based on the intensity and closeness of the relationships of their participants, the level of organisation of interactions, and the shared definitions of reality. A nation-state now, even though those inhabiting it may perceive it as 'society as a whole', in this paradigm, will be just one of the systems – a system containing all kinds of other systems on the one hand and open to external interactions on the other. If we call the areas within the nation-state that are open to interactions with the outside world 'zones', good examples of such zones would be global cities and

⁸ A good example is the work of Latour (2005), where his depiction of the concept of society, which had been central to sociology so far, is purposefully caricature-like (a move often found in theoretical endeavours) to differentiate his own actor network theory. Otherwise, the book is very rich in substance, and, as we believe, would be even richer if it were to connect more widely to the existing findings of sociology.

⁹ For a discussion of future directions for the development of the analytical concept in sociology in a modern form, see Utsumi 2018.

special economic zones (Sassen 2001; Ong 2006). Brisk movement of people, things, information, or capital such global cities and special economic zones provide a stage that serves as the foundation for the transnational system, at the same time triggering changes of all kinds of systems within nation-states. The emergence of the global elites that have the capital and the habitus enabling them to freely cross the borders of nation-states and, on the other end of the continuum, of the global underclass living in poverty and precariousness are both examples of such changes (Bauman 2001). An important nature of these changes is that they entail transformations of 'the social' that go further than a mere weakening of social welfare, which had played the role of the main representative of 'the social' so far. One example is the various assemblages formed between the global elite existing both within and across borders and the global underclass, or the increasing role played by such assemblages as they redefine (in a situation where the connections between the state, the national economy, and 'the social' remain insufficiently weak) the nationals and the transnational communities as 'society as a whole'. Globalisation thus poses, at least, two problems for us: how to create 'the social' and of what kind 'the social' should be, and how to re-envisage 'society as a whole'. In other words, the process of globalisation has yet again problematised the relationship between 'society in a broad sense' and 'society in a narrow sense'.

This problem brought about by globalisation closely resembles the situation in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the discipline of sociology was born (Koto 2011a, 72-4). At the outset, sociologists were living in and analysing society with a jungle law market economy and weak political powers, which lacked both the will and the capability to curb the strong preying on the weak. Sociologists focused on 'the social' that grew in the crevices of the two - the collective attempts to deal with risks too great for any individual to cope with. Globalisation requires us to seek answers to the very same questions posed by sociologists in the early days of the discipline. But we are better equipped than they were, because the sociology of today has a long history of analysing all kinds of phenomena on the continuum between 'society as a whole' and 'the social'; and we also have the concept of 'society', a tool well-honed over the century-old history of the discipline. The task of sociology in the twenty-first century is to provide a theoretical reconstruction, based on a critical analysis of the discipline's legacy, of the concept of 'society', and to do so in ways that would contribute to empirical research on 'society' in the age of globalisation. Through an accumulation of such theoretical and empirical research, sociology must also reconceptualize 'the social' and re-envisage 'society as a whole', or attempt to find new ways of conceptually combining 'the economic', 'the political', and 'the social'.

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