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ADVANCES IN DATA AND METHODS

Vision and method in global historical sociology

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Abstract

Recent years have seen the development of a range of approaches concerned with theorizing and empirically demonstrating the significance of "transboundary entanglements" – patterns of connections between and across social sites. This work, spanning disciplines from sociology to international relations, and including subfields from postcolonial scholarship to global history, seeks to transcend the methodological nationalism associated with much preexisting historical social science by examining how, and with what effect, transboundary entanglements are formed and transformed over time. To date, however, the rich theoretical and substantive contributions made by these approaches have not been matched by comparable attention to the methodological principles and transposable procedures that can be used to analyze transboundary entanglements. This article contributes to this task. We make the case for a principle we call "global methodological relationalism" and explore how this principle can be operationalized through a three-step procedure: first, track relations across a boundary; second, follow these relations over time and across cases to establish variation; and third, provide an explanation of this variation. We highlight sites of overlap and contrast with existing methods for case selection, tracing historical processes, and making causal claims in small-N research, and establish the ways in which a "global historical sociology" oriented around "global methodological relationalism" can assess the significance of "transboundary entanglements."

Keywords: Historical sociology; global historical sociology; methodology; empires; policing; revolutions

Introduction: Globalizing Haiti

The once-neglected Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 has, over recent years, begun to receive considerable scholarly attention (Eddins 2022; Ferrer 2014; Hazareesingh 2020).[1] This work has shown the ways in which the revolution in Haiti formed part of a transnational field of contention that brought into question multiple strands of late eighteenth-century international order: the superiority of

[1]What we retrospectively call the "Haitian" revolution did not take place in Haiti, but in Saint-Domingue, the western third (roughly) of the island of Hispaniola. The territory only became known as Haiti following independence in 1804.

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European coercive power; the legitimacy of colonial rule; an Atlantic order premised on the trafficking of African slaves; and the ways in which racism and slavery challenged notions of liberty and emancipation. The events of 1791–1804 also demonstrated the ways in which an uprising in a "peripheral" country could generate changes in the "metropole." In France, it became increasingly difficult to square the principles of the 1789 revolution – liberty, equality, fraternity – with the slave trade, particularly after the uprising demonstrated the capacity of slaves to resist, fight, and govern for themselves. Even before the revolution had been concluded, the universality of discourse around rights was challenged by racial discrimination, leading to debates over whether the revolutionary constitution should be extended to the colonies. In April 1792, male *gens de couleur* (freemen of African descent) in Saint-Domingue were granted full civil rights. The following year, the French colonial commissioners abolished slavery in the territory. In 1793, Jean-Baptiste Belley, a *gens de couleur* representing northern Saint-Domingue, became the first nonwhite to take up a seat in the National Assembly. In February 1794, the revolutionary regime in Paris extended emancipation throughout the French colonies. Although both colonialism and slavery proved to be resilient features of nineteenth-century international order (the emancipation decree was revoked by Napoleon in 1802), the Haitian revolution served as a catalyst for debates that, over time, deinstitutionalized the place of the slave trade within the Atlantic international order.

The experiences of the Haitian Revolution help to demonstrate the ways in which events associated with a particular domestic space (Saint Domingue/Haiti) are deeply entwined with events in another domestic space (France). In the case of Haiti, this entwining took multiple forms, from shared discourses of rights to common practices of revolt.[2] These "transboundary entanglements," by which we mean patterns of connections between or across social sites, tied together colony and metropole, and had effects that extended over time and across space. For example, the revolution in Haiti led Napoleon to reorient French imperial policy. Napoleon's occupation of Spain and Portugal in 1807–8 provided a window of opportunity for independence movements throughout the Iberian Atlantic. These movements were, in turn, encouraged by the revolutionary government in Haiti, particularly the administration in the southern part of the country led by Alexandre Pétion, which first sheltered Simon Bolívar and many of his supporters, and then supported their struggle through the provision of arms and personnel in exchange for a commitment to abolish slavery. Haiti also acted as a spur to counter-revolution. In Cuba, Haiti's revolution was taken as a warning; in response, there was a hardening of both enslavement and the plantation system – by 1820, Cuba had become the largest sugar producer in the world (Ferrer 2014: 36).

The transboundary dynamics that lie behind events like the Haitian Revolution are an increasingly important area of enquiry for historical social scientists,

[2]Given that Haiti was part of the French empire, it could be argued that both the revolution and subsequent counter-revolutionary intervention were "internal" affairs. However, empires are not big states and intra-imperial struggles are not civil wars – the revolution in Haiti was not seen or treated, whether by the French or the insurgents, as the equivalent of post-revolutionary conflicts within France. The Haitian revolution was a struggle over both the extent and significance of political boundaries, while the French counter-revolution crossed a number of boundaries (geographic, political, etc.) in attempting to maintain its colony.

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including those associated with "global historical sociology" (GHS), an approach that attends to events, forms, and processes that are not contained by the boundaries of nation-states (Go and Lawson 2017; Magubane 2005). This scholarship differs from conventional, "internalist" historical social science, which is mounted upon "methodological nationalism" (Chernilo 2006: 8–9), analyzing events, relations, and processes *within* the boundaries of nation-states and/or comparing them *across* nation-states. While recognizing the considerable insights that this scholarship generates, GHS focuses its attention on transboundary dynamics – as in the Haitian revolution discussed above. In this way, GHS examines the global, transnational, or regional entanglements that connect social sites across geopolitical boundaries, attending to their development and effects over time.

GHS draws on recent scholarship in "transnational" and "global" history, critiques of Eurocentrism found in postcolonial theory, work in historical international relations (Historical IR), and a series of more established interventions, such as Dependency Theory, World-Systems Analysis, and World Society Theory, which are also premised on a critique of methodological nationalism and a focus on transboundary processes. Work associated with GHS examines a wide range of processes and forms: the imperial logics of policing (Schrader 2019), the emergence of global health regimes (White 2023), the colonial origins of regional formations (Shilliam 2017), intra-civilizational interactions (Hobson 2017), the role of early modern trading companies in the development of modern capitalism (Erikson 2014), the transnational formation of sexual identities (Patil 2022), the ways in which colonialism "abroad" shapes metropolitan development "at home" (Go 2020), the "inter-social" dynamics that sustain revolutionary movements (Lawson 2019: 69–71), the origins and extension of projects of international development (Thornton 2021), and the formation of nation-state borders (Wyrtzen 2022). This work enables an understanding of the *connectedness* of experiences across diverse sites: "East" and "West," "colony" and "metropole," "international" and "national," and more. It likewise permits an analysis of transboundary events, relations, and forms that have often been underexplored.

This article seeks to advance work in GHS and related approaches by addressing one of its principal limitations – the lack of a clear methodology by which to assess the significance of transboundary entanglements. While the theoretical and substantive agendas of GHS are well articulated across diverse subfields, its proponents have paid less attention to the methodological procedures that lie behind these agendas (Wyrtzen 2020). In this sense, the practice of "doing" GHS has run ahead of the establishment of procedures that can guide its analyses. This stands in contrast to much of the scholarship that GHS seeks to critique and, in many instances, transcend. Internalist analysis in comparative-historical sociology and political science, for example, is supported by explicit procedures for studying historical events and processes, developing and comparing cases, and making inferences to register causal claims. Comparative-historical sociologists studying revolutions and state-formation have been especially prominent in this regard, reaching back to the formative methodological statements offered by Skocpol (1984) and Tilly (1984) amidst the "second wave" of historical sociology.

Compared to this literature, discussions of methodology among proponents of GHS are scarce. This leaves GHS subject to a range of pressing questions: How can researchers conduct enquiry into transboundary entanglements given deeply held

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assumptions about the national and state boundedness of social relations? How can scholarship determine a "case" when "cases" are no longer nation-states or the events, processes, and dynamics that are presumed to be bounded by nation-states? Are the kinds of causal claims common to internalist historical social science appropriate for tracking and analyzing transboundary relations? How can, or even should, researchers carry out comparisons into "transboundary entanglements?" What, relatedly, is the relationship between description and explanation in GHS scholarship?

This article offers some preliminary answers to these questions. We begin by situating GHS within existing work in the historical social sciences and outlining its central pillar – a relational understanding of transboundary processes, forms, and entanglements, which we label "global methodological relationalism." This principle treats objects of enquiry as transboundary relations that move in and through time. The next section outlines three steps through which global methodological relationalism can be put to work: first, track relations across a boundary; second, follow these relations over time and across cases to establish variation; and third, provide an explanation of this variation. In many ways, these steps borrow from and extend, rather than discard, existing methods for doing social science history, including a range of existing – if modified – comparative procedures, from causal narratives to process tracing, pattern matching to statistical methods (Lange 2017). As such, we argue that GHS sustains procedures that, to a great extent, can work alongside rather than replace existing methodological repertoires. A brief conclusion summarizes our argument and offers some thoughts regarding issues of data collection and source material in GHS.

Global methodological relationalism in GHS

The scholarship we refer to under the category "GHS" is wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary, drawing on a range of developments over the past half century, from transnational and global history to postcolonial studies, World-Systems Analyses, and the "third wave" of historical sociology (Adams et al. 2005). Despite these heterogeneous starting points, GHS shares a set of ontological and analytical principles that we call "global methodological relationalism." There are two main components to this principle.

First is the "global" orientation of GHS. By this, we do not mean studies that take the entire world as their object of enquiry, but rather analyses that trouble the analytic binaries though which global and national scales appear as mutually exclusive. Much "second wave" historical sociology and work in cognate subfields, such as comparative politics, have been bound up in internalist accounts of domestic relations and processes, that is, relations and processes within nation-states, or comparisons between nation-states (Go and Lawson 2017). By way of contrast, GHS examines transboundary dynamics that traverse nation-states, unearthing multi-scalar interconnectedness and spatially expansive social relations.[3] As the illustration of the Haitian revolution shows, GHS treats social sites "at home" and "over there," the

[3]Social "sites" can be thought of as any social product (human and nonhuman, material and ideational) that can be related to, or connected to, other social products.

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"foreign" and the "domestic," "metropole" and "colony," and "core" and "periphery" as entangled rather than discrete. The word "global" in GHS, therefore, is an encompassing term denoting multi-scalar interactions between social sites. As Douki and Minard (2007: 2) put it in their discussion of global historiography, the "global" in GHS refers to "a way to study objects rather than [only] an object of study."

The point of focusing on "global" relations is not to overcome methodological nationalism for the sake of it. Rather, it is to better understand the ways in which the objects of enquiry that internalist accounts take for granted, most notably nation-states, are nested within broader scales: imperial orders, global practices of accumulation, transnational revolutionary movements, and so on. If internalist analysis sees historical development as the product of processes drawn from within a particular unit (whether this unit is a state, region, civilization, or other entity), global methodological relationalism invites examination of the constitutive character of transboundary entanglements. If it is sometimes hard from the vantage point of the contemporary world to unthink a world of nation-states, this form of unthinking is essential to enquiry into historical events and processes, in other words: how "we" got "here."

An emphasis on transboundary entanglements is linked to the second component of GHS: "relationalism." Internalist accounts evidenced in second-wave historical sociology and comparative politics are often "substantialist," operating from the assumption that "the social world consists of fixed entities (the units of analysis) that have attributes (the variables)" (Abbott 2001: 39; also see Jackson and Nexon 1999). The reification of the nation-state as the taken-for-granted, natural unit of enquiry results from substantialist thinking. So, too, does World-Systems Analysis in its attribution of causal power to a "system" with characteristics that determine how its constituent parts function. Global methodological relationalism, by contrast, treats social forms as created, reproduced, and transformed in and through wider relations that constitute them in the first place.

For example, states are not treated in GHS as pre-formed entities with elemental properties, but as social forms generated by webs of connections that are, over time, regularized, institutionalized, and bounded. These dynamics of boundary-formation are not "natural" or "pre-formed," but subject to logics of coercion, emulation, and contestation that demand explanation (Norton 2023; Wyrtzen 2022). The same goes for "systems," such as the "world system" or the "international system," as well as other units like "civilizations." Global methodological relationalism does not start with the existence of such forms but rather interrogates their creation, reproduction, and transformation over time (Schlichte and Stetter 2023). To use Wallerstein's (1974) categories, rather than take "mini-systems," "world-empires," or "world-economies" as pre-given units with elemental characteristics, a relational approach examines how these units are formed historically and evolve over time, treating them as social formations whose boundaries have to be explained rather than assumed (Abbott 1995). In this way, GHS is a *necessarily* historical social science. As GHS is concerned with the relational dynamics that sustain the emergence, reproduction, and transformation of social forms, it *has* to adopt a temporal, processual approach to the objects it examines.

GHS thereby pays attention to two interrelated dynamics: first, the global or transboundary dynamics that enable the emergence, reproduction, and breakdown

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of social orders, whether these orders are situated at the subnational, national, transnational, or global scales; and second, the historical emergence, reproduction, and breakdown of transnational and global social forms (Go and Lawson 2017: 2). The first of these provides the "global," the second constitutes the "historical sociology." Work associated with these two dynamics can be found in a range of approaches across different disciplines, including transnational and global history (e.g., Chamberlain et al. 2023), histories of commodities like cotton and associated practices such as slavery (Beckert 2014), studies of "entangled histories" (Capan 2020) or "connected histories" (Subrahmanyam 2005), and elements of Historical IR (e.g., Bukovanksy and Keene 2023). All such work explores the emergence and transformation over time of transboundary relations and forms. Historical sociologists, too, have begun to move from cross-national comparisons to connected histories or "connected sociologies" (e.g., Bhambra 2014; Patil 2017). Similarly, work inspired by postcolonial studies highlights the centrality of imperial formations and metropolitan-colony relations to the formation of modern world order (e.g., Go and Krause 2016; Steinmetz 2013; White 2023). If much comparative politics is still largely methodologically nationalist in orientation, work on the ways in which colonialism impacts developmental trajectories pushes toward examinations of transboundary relations and processes (Branch 2012; Lange 2009; Mahoney 2010; Owolabi 2023). So, too, does work in political theory and intellectual history that highlights the transboundary networks and discourses that have generated regional and global governance projects (Getachew 2019; Valdez 2019). In international law, too, can be found a concern for the transboundary, often colonial, origins and development of modern legal orders (Tzouvala 2020).

Relatively little of this work self-identifies as global historical sociology, yet all of it shares a root in global methodological relationism. As well as this shared concern, this scholarship also shares a common shortcoming in that, to date, relatively little attention has been paid to the methodological principles and procedures that can sustain research into transboundary entanglements. So: how can global methodological relationalism be operationalized?

A question of method

As noted above, proponents of GHS-related enquiry have largely been quiet on the question of methods. This is often the case with relational work more generally. Although an increasing amount of work in an increasing number of disciplines describes itself as relational, it is not always clear how relational work is to be operationalized (on the "methodological void" within relationalism, see Klasche and Poopuu 2023). In a similar vein, a range of approaches posit the importance of transboundary entanglements, but they do not provide a clear strategy for how to systematically examine them, nor do they always clarify how causal claims are to be made and assessed. For example, work in postcolonial studies often assumes rather than systematically examines the importance of colonial entanglements in shaping colonies and metropoles (e.g., Bhambra 2014). For its part, Historical IR has done little reflection about what type of historical enquiry it constitutes (for an exception, see Bukovansky and Keene 2023).

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Alternatively, as noted in the previous section, methodologically nationalist work in the social sciences *has* developed a range of procedures for establishing case selection, guiding comparative work, and making causal inferences using qualitative data. Figures associated with "second wave" historical sociology, for example, adapted Millian principles of comparison as a means of emulating statistical reasoning on causal inference in small-N qualitative research, generating a method of "controlled comparisons" (e.g., Skocpol 1979, 1984). Subsequent adaptations of, and alternatives to, these principles include sequence analysis (Abbott and Tsay 2000; Abbott 1992; Griffin 1993), Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) or "fuzzy set social science" (Ragin 2000, 2014), "paired comparisons" (Tarrow 2010), methods for comparing historical time periods through "sequences of problem solving" (Haydu 1998), various strategies of "process tracing" (George and Bennett 2005), and work on causal narratives (Mahoney 2000; Sewell 1996a, 1996b). There is now a range of sophisticated procedures by which to make causal inferences in small-N cross-case or within-case studies, including procedures for "negative" case analysis (Emigh 1997; Goertz and Mahoney 2013; Mahoney and Thelen 2015; Slater and Ziblatt 2013). There is also myriad ways to conduct comparative work, including: "incorporated comparison" (McMichael 1990); "unbound comparison" (Cheesman 2021); "nested comparison" (Lieberman 2005); "oscillating comparison" (Bodnár 2019); "relational comparison" (Hart 2016), and more (for an important collective statement, see Simmons and Smith 2021).

Many of these procedures have been articulated within the context of cross-national controlled comparisons, requiring an ontological separation between events, actors, and units for establishing and validating causal claims. This raises a number of challenges for GHS and its attempts to operationalize the principles of global methodological relationalism. First, if existing methods for analyzing historical processes and forms assume the stability of bordered units (such as nation-states), how, if at all, might they be used for tracking relations across boundaries? Second, how can causal claims into transboundary entanglements be generated and assessed, or does global methodological relationalism imply a descriptive rather than explanatory project? Third, if existing comparative methods have been premised on the assumption of a separation between objects of enquiry, how can comparisons be conducted into relational processes and entanglements? As Witte and Schmitz (2021) note, in its treatment of units as bounded substances that contain a set of elemental, essential properties, "comparative research runs the principal risk of essentializing traits and entities, thereby opposing the basic of logic of relationality." Perhaps, then, comparative work is not desirable, or even possible, through the principle of global methodological relationalism?

To help answer these questions, it is worth building on existing "global" research programs. World-Systems Analysis has been particularly methodologically innovative in this regard, developing ways of understanding and comparing world-systems in different time periods (e.g., McMichael 1990). This follows from World-Systems' substantialist ontology, which treats world-systems as discrete, singular units of analysis. The question remains, therefore, as to whether such comparisons can work for tracking the formation of a transboundary entanglement into a relatively stable "system," how transboundary networks mutate – or not – into imperial formations, and so on. Indeed, it is unclear whether these procedures can

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be transposed to studies of transboundary relations without the presumption that they are expressions of a particular world system.[4] Charles Tilly (1984: 87–96, 97–115, 125–143) also offered methodological procedures for analyzing global forms: "individualizing comparison," "universalizing comparison," and "encompassing comparison." However, as with World-Systems approaches, it is not clear whether Tilly's strategies are suited to the study of transboundary relations. Tilly's focus on "big structures" and "large processes" was tied to comparisons between nation-states rather than studies of transboundary entanglements; Tilly treated empires, for instance, as appendages to nation-states rather than as sociopolitical formations in their own right (Go and Krause 2016: 89–91).

Doing global historical sociology: Three steps

The key question, therefore, remains: how can researchers systematically *do* global historical sociology? Can existing methods be repurposed that follow the principles of global methodological relationalism or does the principle require establishing new procedures? We suggest that existing scholarship that adopts the principle of global methodological relationalism contains implicit procedures that can be made explicit and systematized. This provides us with a guide for how to enact GHS in ways that repurpose rather than jettison existing strategies. Specifically, we propose that global methodological relationalism contains a three-step procedure: first, follow social relations across a boundary; second, track these transboundary relations in and through time to find variations; and third, explain the outcomes of these variations through comparative work and various modalities of causal assessment. This three-step procedure employs comparative strategies that already exist but leverages them to study transboundary relations, processes, and entanglements.

To explicate our three-step procedure, we use examples from existing scholarship on a range of phenomenon, paying particularly close attention to three forms of transboundary entanglement: empires, policing, and revolutions.[5] While empires are self-evidently transboundary formations, at first glance, policing and revolutions appear to be less so. We show that all three are transboundary phenomena and outline systematic procedures through which to study them and assess their effects.

Step 1: Follow relations across a boundary

Bruno Latour (2005: 12) urges researchers to "follow the actors." We instead suggest that, as a first step, researchers should "follow the *relations*" and that they do so across a boundary. As discussed in the previous section, most work in comparative

[4]McMichael's (1990: 385–89, 391–96) development of "incorporated comparison" was intended to overcome this limitation. Where we differ from McMichael is that his approach remains committed to reconstructing a worldwide global whole. World Society/World Polity studies also offer insights into global scales, using deductive theorizing or quantitative studies of diffusion using national data (e.g., Schofer and Meyer 2005), but without outlining any specific methodological principles.

[5]Although many of our examples drawn from these three issue-areas concentrate on polities, including states, scholars might also – and increasingly are – examining diasporas, civilizations, discursive configurations, and social networks using our proposed procedure.

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historical sociology assumes, if only for the purposes of analysis, that social relations overlap with the boundaries of nation-states or a global "system." As also noted above, GHS is concerned with relations that exceed these boundaries. Hence, the first task for researchers is to follow these relations and analytically reconstruct those that have been previously overlooked.

In practice, following the relations means identifying a connection or connections between "social sites" (geographical spaces, sets of social interactions, individual or collective actors, workplaces, commodities, discourses, texts, etc.) that cross a boundary of some kind (geographical, political, and more). The strategy thus links to work in World-Systems Analysis and related approaches, such as Dependency Theory, which trace economic connections across or between units of analysis; it also connects with multi-sited ethnographies that follow people, objects, and events across social sites (e.g., Marcus 1995; Van Dujin 2020), and forms of network analysis that track relations within world society (e.g., Beckfield 2008).

Transboundary capitalist relations, multi-sited objects, and networks are not the only transboundary forms through which these relations might be explored. Consider smaller-scale transboundary relations established by states and companies, such as empires. Modern empires are transboundary formations that connect a variety of social sites: actors, territories, capitals, and more. To study modern empires, therefore, GHS scholars have to analytically reconstruct the webs, circulations, and assemblages of relations that constitute an empire. In other words, they track relations between colonies and metropoles to generate analytic maps of imperial networks or, in the case of informal empires, trace the relations between imperial centers and peripheral polities. The analysis usually begins by tracking a state's construction of relations overseas or beyond its conventional borders, as when a state invades another territory or – in the case of informal imperialism – establishes a new order of clientelist exchange through vanguard merchants, settlers, or missionaries (Robinson and Gallagher 1953). Informal ties have also been examined by tracing flows of economic or military aid (Go 2011).

Besides reconstructing the sites in an already-existing network or formation and charting their connections, another approach is to start with a "critical event" that acts as a breakpoint in existing social formations (Mahoney 2021: 292). An example is provided by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010. This event not only acted as a catalyst for revolutionary mobilization within Tunisia but also acted as a spur to uprisings around North Africa and the Middle East (El-Ghobashi 2021). At other times, critical events are centered around elite actors, as in the decision by Tunisian dictator, Zine Ben Ali, to flee to Saudi Arabia in January 2011, which emboldened protestors and accelerated elite fracture (Wolf 2022). Reconstructing the timeline of this critical event and tracking its transboundary content provides the contours of "transboundary event-sequences" (Lawson 2019).[6]

[6]Work on "transboundary event-sequences" has the potential to link productively to approaches developed by scholarship on historical institutionalism (e.g., Mahoney and Thelen 2015) and critical junctures (Collier and Munck 2022).

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The goal of this first procedural step, therefore, is to identify in descriptive terms the ways in which a social site is related to another social site across a boundary of some kind.

Following the relations to arrive at a descriptive account, though, raises a problem attendant with all such projects – where to stop? Transboundary relations are sprawling, multi-scalar, and, in principle, infinite. This is an issue that ethnographers have raised when conducting multi-sited ethnographic studies of specific field sites. As Van Dujin (2020: 286) puts it, it is the problem of "not knowing where to draw the line in what to include or when to leave my fields." There is no simple solution to this concern but, for GHS, there are two considerations that may help.

First, GHS involves research into sources where records are limited. Compared to ethnographies, there are built-in limitations within these sources as to how far one can go in tracking relations, especially when researchers are working with archives. For straightforward practical reasons, therefore, where to stop is limited by the availability of source material. The second rationale is more strategic. For example, if the research strategy is to follow the relations by tracking individuals, and their careers or experiences, then following actors becomes a way of both tracking and limiting substantive enquiry (e.g., Umoren 2018). For example, Schrader (2019) tracks the circulation of police officials from cities in the US to overseas colonies or foreign countries and back again. In the early twentieth century, August Vollmer served overseas in the US army during the Philippine-American war; he then returned to the US to become the City of Berkeley's police chief and a leading police reformer, becoming known as the "Father of Modern Policing" (Go 2020). Following relations via individual experiences in this way presents relatively natural parameters on enquiry as there is a limit to the individual ties to be traced. The same goes for critical events. As with the case of Ben Ali fleeing to Saudi Arabia, there are limits placed around this event by virtue of a reasonably slim set of interpersonal relations to track and a discrete timeframe within which the critical event took place.

Whether by tracking critical events or reconstructing interpersonal ties across a boundary, the goal in this first step is to reconstruct entanglements between social sites that may, in turn, take on a variety of forms. These forms can be captured by a number of concepts: "world orders," "social networks," "actor-networks," "assemblages," "formations," "circulations," "fields," or simply "relations" (of emulation, exchange, cooperation, contestation, or conflict). Furthermore, the materials that sustain connections can be equally wide-ranging, including interpersonal relations and exchanges of resources (aid, trade, weapons, etc.), strategies and tactics, and ideas and rhetorics. Examples of research that locate such forms include Nexon's (2009) work on imperial orders that are theorized through network dynamics, Phillips's (2022) analysis of the strategies of "incorporation" and "customization" practiced by Asian "world orders," Erikson's (2014) study of the East India Trading Company and its embeddedness in transnational exchange networks that gave rise to capitalism, scholarship that conceptualizes transnational relations or international relations as "fields" (e.g., Go and Krause 2016; Musgrave and Nexon 2018; Witte and Schmitz 2021), and more.

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Table 1. Tracking relations over time (Step two)

Procedure	"Case" or unit tracked	Variation
Analysis of Emergence	A single transboundary relation/ entanglement	Temporal: within-case over time
Relational Effects	(i) A social site within a transboundary relation/entanglement (ii) Two social sites within a transboundary relation/entanglement	(i) Temporal: over time (ii) Temporal and cross-case
Cross-Case Transboundary Analysis	Two or more transboundary relations/ entanglements	Temporal and across cases/entanglements

Step 2: Tracking relations over time and across cases to identify variation

If following – and reconstructing – relations across a boundary provides the "global" in global methodological relationalism, the second step is concerned with issues of history and temporality, requiring us to track relations in and through time. In all relational approaches, objects of enquiry are "relations-in-motion": they are relations between social sites that are produced, reproduced, and contested over time.[7] Our method thus insists upon tracing these relations temporally. What happens to the circulation of police officials as they travel back and forth between colonies or between metropoles and colonies? Do imperial networks strengthen or weaken over time? Do relations of exchange and emulation between revolutionaries in different sites deepen or abate over time? This concern with temporality ultimately helps to identify variation. As Table 1 outlines, there are several variants of this.

(i) Analysis of emergence

Our starting point is temporal "within-case" analysis. This type of analysis is already highlighted above: researchers track transboundary relations over time to see how they change. Both the form and outcomes of connections are open-ended: transboundary relations may be fleeting or enduring, deep or superficial, direct or indirect, mono- or multi-directional, or interpersonal or impersonal. The relations between a set of actors or social sites might expand in scale and intensity, taking in more social sites: empires expand or a revolution upscales to a range of locations. In other instances, these relations might contract: counter-revolutionary repression rolls back a revolutionary movement, and empires implode. Both of these instances require attention to possible transformations in relations-in-motion to assess how they change. This demands that we compare the forms, size, and scale of transboundary relations as they change over time. Such an approach thus maintains

[7]Elsewhere, we describe these objects as "entities-in-motion" (Go and Lawson 2017). Because it is possible to see this formulation as presuming a "thing" that does not change its character, we prefer here to describe the "units" of global historical sociology as relations-in-motion, while allowing for these relations to *become* entities-in-motion if they are institutionalized and bounded, thereby taking on the appearance of an "entity": states, empires, revolutions, and so on. We develop this point below.

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relational principles: we do not treat entities as stable or fixed essences but rather recognize them as historically formed, reproduced, and contested.

One possible observed outcome in temporal within-case analysis is of particular interest: the transformation of relations into patterned structural forms. This represents an analysis of "emergence" (e.g., Clemens 2007; also see Abbott 1995). Here, the researcher is concerned with instances when transboundary relations-in-motion are routinized, regularized, and bordered. In these cases, relations-in-motion become entities-in-motion, shifting from informal, sporadic ties to patterned social forms, even to the extent of taking on the appearance of a "thing." The variation is temporal: relations are altered over time, becoming regularized and hardened.

An example is provided by policing in the early twentieth century, when US police officials circulated around empires and between states, forming a number of networks. Over time, those networks transformed into a new organization: the International Association of Chiefs of Police. This organization, which still exists, began meeting regularly during this period; its membership included officials from different countries and imperial spaces, becoming a crucial site for police officials to share best practices, tactics, and techniques (Whitaker 2017). In this way, a range of informal networks were transformed into an international organization with formal rules of membership and association. Another example is contained within Robinson and Gallagher's (1953) classic analysis of British imperialism. In this account, enterprising merchants or adventurous diplomats initiated relations with indigenous planters or local elites. In some cases, those relations became regularized, leading to the establishment of sovereignty claims and the annexation of territory. Through a series of points of connection, informal relations of trade and exchange constituted by ad hoc ties between actors morphed into patterns of asymmetrical relations and, ultimately, formal empire. In this way, relations-in-motion became an entity-in-motion.

The emergent process from relations-in-motion to entities-in-motion is not predetermined, and not all transboundary relations transform into structural patterns or formal organizations. Sometimes, transboundary relations might lead to sustained contact and expand into networks that fall short of formalization: traders or missionaries create economic and social ties with local actors, but do not formalize these ties into stable contracts or imperial formations; transnational networks of revolutionaries exchange ideas and tactics but do not generate a coherent revolutionary movement. The same applies to modern nation-states. For example, Wyrtzen (2022) tracks the ways in which actors located in polities in the Middle East and North Africa used the period in and after World War I to make, unmake and, in some cases, remake territorial borders.

Transboundary relations might develop into "fields" of struggle even if they do not form stable organizations or movements. That is, to draw from Bourdieu's (1983) theory of fields, they might lead to relations of sustained conflict or competition over scare resources and "capitals" that fall short of formalization: British traders compete with French entrepreneurs; a revolutionary leader in one country makes connections with counterparts overseas, but this connection generates competition rather than cooperation. These fields can persist indefinitely before any further changes take place. Or they might morph into other dynamics. Revolutionary fields, for instance, might expand (by becoming revolutionary

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waves), contract (by fading into low-intensity uprisings), implode (by revolutionary situations failing to turn into successful revolutions), or become territorially bounded and further institutionalized through the formation of transnational "meta-capital" of different sorts (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 112).

Global methodological relationalism therefore urges researchers to consider sociologies of emergence that problematize the historical formation of "things" (Abbott 1995; Clemens 2007). The point is not to *presume* that relations-in-motion amount to, or will necessarily generate, entities-in-motion. Relations do not always forge regularities. In taking up this methodological strategy, therefore, researchers operate from a "substantialist skepticism," which locates transboundary relations as they unfold in time without assuming that they constitute substances with thing-like characteristics (Norton 2023). The formation of entities-in-motion is a question, not an assumption; GHS requires tracking relations over time.

(ii) Relational effects

A second way to mobilize transboundary within-case analysis is to examine "relational effects" within the transboundary formation, exploring how social points within transboundary entanglements might themselves be transformed through interactions. One of the principles of global methodological relationalism is that the actors, events, and organizations that are interrelated across boundaries are themselves constituted and reconstituted through or by those relations. Tracking these relational effects is, therefore, a crucial strategy for GHS research, enabling analysts to see the ways in which a social site is changed in form, character, or content over time through a transboundary relation. In this strategy, social sites are treated as analytically separate, but ontologically entangled, units that are examined over time to see how they might be altered by this relation. As with analysis of emergence, the variation of interest is temporal: the analyst is looking for changes over time. The difference is that the social site in question is the unit or part of the transboundary relation rather than the entire transboundary formation.

Take, as an illustration, work on how metropole and colony impact each other. A study of emergence tracks whether this relationship is transformed into a formal colonial relationship or some other pattern. In tracking relational effects, the question is different: once the relationship has been established, in whatever form, how are the interrelated actors or units changed by the relationship? Magubane (2005), for instance, shows how British colonialism in South Africa during the nineteenth century had an impact on both social relations in South Africa and on British conceptions of race and class. Patil (2022) demonstrates how North American concepts of "sexuality" or "gender" have been shaped – "effected"– by imperial and colonial relationships. Barkawi (2017) examines the ways in which "small wars" and colonial battles impacted, often detrimentally, on the stability of metropolitan societies: Vietnam and the United States; Algeria and France; Adwa and Italy.

Studies of policing offer another example (e.g., Go 2023). When police officials go abroad, or when soldiers return from wars and become police officers, much more than the circulation of people occurs: the circulation in turn shapes social sites in the relation. When August Vollmer returned from serving in the Philippines to become

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police chief in Berkeley and, later, Los Angeles, he transformed policing in those cities (Go 2023). Manifesting "the boomerang effect," Vollmer brought back techniques and tactics from the Philippine-American war, including pin-mapping and mounted units, and applied them to urban policing, thus changing the character of policing in ways that persist into the present day. But Vollmer was not alone. In the 1910s, Smedley Butler served in the US Marines, joining campaigns in Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, Honduras, and Nicaragua. He then became Philadelphia's police chief in the 1920s, reconstituting Philadelphia's police department into a heavily armed organization that adopted the culture, forms, weaponry, and tactics of the US military. In turn, the work of these imperial importers was picked up by other cities in the US. Other social sites (in this case, city police departments) that were part of the circulatory network were thereby transformed.

Revolutions provide a further illustration of this dynamic. Haitian revolutionaries mobilized in large part through ideas of universal rights that were circulating within the French empire. While they also drew upon local idioms, the revolutionaries' self-conception and movement were influenced, and hence transformed, by their interactions with rhetorics and practices within French imperial spaces. The same is true of other revolutions. Radical Shi'ite figures in Iran, such as Ali Shariati, linked an engagement with Marxism (developed in Shariati's case as a graduate student at the Sorbonne) with Islam – hence his call for a "red" or "revolutionary" Shi'ism (Bayat 2017: 35–48). Shariati's particular strength was "injecting radical meanings into stock scriptural terms": *jihad* shifted from crusade to liberation struggle; *shahid* from martyr to revolutionary hero; the story of Cain and Abel became a metaphor for class struggle; and Imam Hossein was, in Shariati's reckoning, an early day Che Guevara (Abrahamian 2008: 144). In this way, scripts circulating around a transboundary network of radical activists "affected" those processes of circulation.

In these examples of relational effects, one social site is first examined to see how it is transformed: policing in an American city or transboundary revolutionary repertoires. But researchers might also examine more than one social site through "incorporated comparison" (McMichael 1990). In this approach, two or more social sites (nodes in a network, actors in a field, etc.) are analyzed and compared, but not as separate cases. Instead, they are treated as instances, moments, or sites within the same overarching set of relations. For example, just as it is possible to examine the ways in which policing officials serving overseas brought back tactics to transform policing in the US, it is also possible to examine flows moving in the other direction of the transboundary relation. In this way, Schrader's (2019) study of policing in the US informal imperial network in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrates that US policing officials were sent to countries in the Global South to "modernize" policing in those countries, thereby transforming policing in those social sites. Both points in the transboundary entanglement were altered by the metropole-periphery relation.

The transboundary revolutionary "field" that incorporated French and Haitian revolutionaries serves as a final example. On the one hand, Haitian revolutionaries adopted and indigenized ideas from the French revolutionary experience; on the other hand, French revolutionaries were influenced by events in Haiti. Prior to the 1791 uprising, Parisian revolutionaries interacted with a wide range of political

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actors, including Caribbean *gens de couleur*, French settlers and planters, bureaucrats, and slaves. From Paris to Nantes to Cap–Français, these groups were engaged in various "struggles for position" (in Bourdieu's famous phrase) to define and shape revolutionary practices. One of the key issues at stake was citizenship. As the Parisian assemblies and Enlightenment intellectuals debated the "Rights of Man," slaves and *gens de couleur* argued that French citizenship status should not be restricted by color (although gender remained a barrier to citizenship). Even as the assemblies initially tried to silence the question, the 1791 revolt changed the tenor of debate. The Society of the Friends of the Blacks (*Société des Amis des Noirs*), including major revolutionary figures such as Brissot, Condorcet, and Mirabeau, argued that slavery and racism could not stand alongside revolutionary claims of universal rights. In this way, the transboundary field within which the French and Haitian revolutions took place was sustained by a struggle over the meaning of universal rights. At least for a time, the actions of slave insurgents and French intellectuals "brought about the institutionalization of the idea that the rights of citizens were universally applicable to all people within the nation, regardless of race" (Dubois 2004: 22).

(iii) Cross-case transboundary analysis

Alongside these two modes of within-case analysis over time sits a third strategy: cross-case comparative analyses of sets of transboundary relations.[8] These entail the cross-national comparisons that are common to comparative-historical sociology and comparative politics (e.g., Skocpol 1984), albeit with the amendment that the social sites or event-sequences being compared are transboundary formations or bundles of relations rather than presumed entities like nation-states.

This prompts two questions about commensurability: the first concerns scales of analysis; the second concerns the character of units. In conventional cross-national comparisons, both questions are resolved by the assumptions of methodological nationalism: social relations are assumed to be contained by the borders of nation-states and nation-states are taken to be the units of analysis. Our contention is that transboundary formations can also be examined via cross-case comparison as long as assumptions about scales of analysis are repurposed. In a similar vein, comparison between entities-in-motion is possible even absent assumptions about units containing timeless characteristics or systems having distinct attributes or logics (Witte and Schmitz 2021). The "cases" to be compared therefore are not nation-states and their internal features (levels of GDP, military spending, class structure, etc.), but two or more entities-in-motion, or sets of transboundary relations, as they move through time.

In carrying out this analysis, researchers first locate two or more transboundary forms to be compared, freezing them in time to establish commensurability. In this way, a set of transboundary relations – an imperial formation or a series of revolutionary event-sequences in a transnational revolutionary field – are treated as a "case" that can be compared to another "case" of these transboundary forms. Having

[8]On the broader issues surrounding comparison, see two recent, wide-ranging volumes: Simmons and Smith (2021) and Wilson and Mayrl (2024).

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"cased" their enquiry (Beck et al. 2023), analysts then examine how those sets of transboundary relations unfold over time and whether this process is different across "cases." As noted above, not all relations-in-motion become entities-in-motion. Analysts can thus compare one set of relations-in-motion that became an entity of some sort (that is, it becomes routinized and regularized over time) with another set of relations that do not. This strategy is akin to tracking emergence and examining historical processes (Liao et al. 2022) but via a comparison of sets of transboundary entanglements that unfold temporally (also see Tilly 1984).

Go's (2008, 2011) study of empires provides an illustration of how this works in practice. Go compares America's imperial formation (sets of intra-imperial transboundary relations) in the mid-twentieth century with Britain's imperial formation in the nineteenth century. In the case of the latter, the British state established a series of political and economic ties with a wide array of other societies, actors, and polities. This informal network was later transformed into a formal empire, as Britain annexed many of those territories. Conversely, the American state in the mid-twentieth century did not transform its series of asymmetrical international relations into a formal empire. Rather, it maintained relations of economic and political exchange with nominally sovereign nations, instead creating a network constituting "informal" rather than formal empire. Cross-case comparison thus yielded two different historical trajectories: an informal network that turned into a formal empire in one case, and an informal network that remained informal, yet expanded spatially, in the second.

The struggle between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries offers a second example. In many ways, revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries form part of a single transboundary field – a large number of revolutions, particularly those that seek to exit an international order, generate a counter-revolutionary response (Hirst 2022). From this starting point of recognizing revolutionary and counter-revolutionary dynamics as constituting a transboundary "case," it is possible to compare them. For example, following the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, a number of Western states enacted a range of counter-revolutionary measures, from covert practices to the provision of arms. However, following the 1910 revolution in Mexico, Western counter-revolutionary measures were more limited. In return for the relative acquiescence of their Mexican counterparts, US policy makers tended to follow a strategy of "watchful waiting" and did not end up generating a strong counter-revolutionary approach (Machado and Judge 1970: 2; also see Hirst 2022; Thornton 2021). Comparison of these two "cases" of revolutionary-counter-revolutionary transboundary entanglements over time maps variation and reveals divergent outcomes.

Step 3: From variation to explanation

Descriptive work enables researchers to locate variations, whether temporal (within case) or temporal and across cases (whether those "cases" are sets of transboundary relations or particular social sites within these sets). Explaining variation is the third, final step of our procedure: Why do some sets of transboundary relations become entities while others do not? Why are some social sites strongly impacted by their relations, and others less so? To address these questions, we can mobilize some

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existing procedures for tracing historical processes and sequences, making causal claims, and identifying causal mechanisms, including the use of Boolean logics, causal narratives, pattern matching, process tracing, or statistical methods, among others (Lange 2017). A strategy rooted in global methodological relationalism is not opposed to any of these strategies; procedures should be mobilized according to the task at hand. The point of difference between global methodological relationalism and other uses of these techniques is that researchers maintain a focus on transboundary relations – their forms, development over time, effects, and outcomes.

(i) Explaining emergence

Consider first an analysis of transformations over time in transboundary relations, i.e., analyses of emergence. Such analyses can start with "within-case" methods of causal assessment such as process-tracing or counterfactuals (Goertz and Mahoney 2013) and/or "causal narratives" that search for "context, sequence and conjuncture" (Lange 2017: 163). The latter is the implied procedure of landmark studies of how British informal relations in the nineteenth century gave way to formal colonization (e.g., Robinson and Gallagher 1953). Why did mercantile exchange or patron-client relations between the British state and African polities end up as formal colonial relations? These studies show that when patron-client relations broke down into conflicts of interest, or when local experiences of social change disrupted political configurations, British settlers or traders urged the imperial state to annex the territory. The result was formal colonization; informal transboundary relations turned into routinized metropole-colonial relations (Robinson and Gallagher 1953; also see Attard 2022).

These experiences of emergence are also common to revolutions. Almost every instance of revolutionary change starts with a particular event: a demonstration, an occupation, a riot, or similar. However, not every contentious event becomes institutionalized in a revolutionary movement. And not all of these movements are significantly transboundary in form and effect. As such, examination of an "unruly" event relies on a series of questions about emergence: Are these events the catalyst for the formation of a revolutionary movement – if so, why, and how? Does this movement contain substantial transboundary relations, whether of people, scripts, repertoires, and tactics, or of wider dynamics of emulation and exchange – again, if so, why, and how? As noted above, the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010 led to the formation of a revolutionary movement in Tunisia and, over time, a revolutionary wave across many parts of the region. An analysis of emergence examines the transformation over time that enabled the formation of this transboundary event-sequence.

(ii) Explaining relational effects

For explaining variations in relational effects, relational causal narratives can be employed. Conventional causal narrative is a "within-case" method to construct stories consisting of sequences of events that highlight causal processes (Griffin 1993; Lange 2017; Mahoney 2003: 365–66; Sewell 1996b). As Lange (2017: 163) explains, "to use this technique, the researcher compiles evidence, assesses it, and presents a

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sequential causal account." Relational causal narratives are similar, but treat the transboundary entanglement (the network, circulation, or field) as a "case" whose relations need to be traced over time (in this sense it remains "within-case"). What needs to be explained, therefore, is not the case itself, but rather units (or social sites) whose relations constitute the larger "case" (i.e., the transboundary formation). In examinations of the development of a transboundary formation over time and in comparisons of these formations, the main unit of analysis is first and foremost the transboundary formation itself, such as empires or transnational revolutionary movements. However, when explaining variations in relational effects, the variation to be explained is a transformation in the social site within the larger transboundary formation. Therefore, the social site – a colony or metropolitan city within an imperial network, a revolutionary movement in one country within an international order – is the main unit, and what needs to be explained is temporal variation within it: the police in a city within an empire adopts new tactics and techniques; a revolutionary movement within a larger international order adopts a novel protest repertoire, and so on.

In these instances, because the unit undergoes change within the transboundary network or formation, a change must be tracked over time, something that makes it particularly well-suited to relational causal narratives. Relational causal narratives are akin to Norbert Elias's (1978) process-oriented "figurational" sociology (Baur and Ernst 2011), Bourdieu's (1983) field analysis, and work in contentious politics (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001), which treats parts of the whole, that is the social sites within transboundary formations, as units, analyzes their relations to each other over time, and tracks changes in these relations (or in configurations of positions), often through historical events and sequences of events. Relational causal narratives track changing relations of the social sites within the transboundary formation to find conjunctures of factors that might have led to a change in the social site. For relational approaches like GHS, social sites in the larger transboundary formation are always acting and reacting to each other, and through these relations are formed and transformed. Identities, interests, strategies, and actions flow not from the intrinsic characteristics of the social site (or actor), but from these shifting relational configurations. Relational causal narrative thus rescales conventional process-tracing.

An example helps to clarify this point: the imperial revolutionary field encompassing Haiti and France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As noted in previous sections, comparisons over time can explore the ways in which the Haitian and French uprisings were shaped by relations with each other. But *why* did leading French revolutionaries support the 1791 slave revolt when in previous cases they had not done so? Increasing awareness of, and relations with, Haiti exposed them and likely gave some support to the notion that slaves were also deserving of rights. But correlation is not causation. This was hardly the first slave revolt that French radicals had been exposed to. So what explains the difference?

A relational causal narrative helps to provide an explanation. This procedure could examine France's political, economic, and social relations with Haiti, the place of both France and Haiti within imperial international orders, and their positional shifts over time, looking especially for relational changes that prompted French revolutionary leaders to alter their stance about slaves' rights. This is the implicit method of some existing analyses of how the Haitian revolution led to changes in

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the French revolution (Dubois 2004; Go 2013; James 1938). When the French revolutionaries first declared the Rights of Man in 1789, France's main relationship with Haiti was economic: Haiti supplied France with revenues from sugar, coffee, and other commodities. However, the relationship between the French revolutionaries and Haiti changed with the advent of the 1791 uprising. Imperial rivals in the Caribbean, most notably Britain, set their sights on alliances with Haiti, and, in turn, loyalists in Saint Domingue allied, at least sporadically, with the British. Thus, French Republicans realized that they needed Haitian insurgents on their side if they were to maintain their position vis-à-vis both the British and monarchists within France. Accordingly, local officials in Saint Domingue freed the slaves and the National Convention ratified the act, primarily to improve their relative positions against domestic (loyalist) and international (Britain) rivals (James 1938). Shifting configurations over time changed the character of the French revolution from a limited political movement guaranteeing rights for white men to a maximalist movement that universalized rights, at least for a time, to nonwhite Frenchmen.

This example highlights how the existence of transboundary relations might not in itself produce a transformative effect. The relations between Haiti and France were not deep enough to affect the trajectory and content of France's revolutionary regime (hence one reason why the emancipation decree was revoked by Napoleon). Certain changes to the configurations of positions within the transboundary field had to happen first. This adds to work that highlights the importance of connections but does not always specify how and why connections across boundaries or metropole-colony dyads matter. To assess the causal effects of these connections, we need to trace relational effects to look for variations and then use a relational causal narrative to explain these variations.

Besides the example of the French revolutionary regime and Haiti's impact upon it, the example of veterans in policing in the US is telling. Only some veterans of imperial wars who became police officials in the early twentieth century brought back tactics and techniques from their imperial experiences – the "boomerang effect" did not happen in all cases. In other words, a number of US urban police departments were connected to the transnational imperial formation through the circulation of veterans, but only some of those social sites underwent change from those relations. To better explain this, cross-case relational causal narratives can help reconstruct the relational configurations of social sites and compare differences across social sites that explain different outcomes. Using this approach, Go (2020) shows that the veterans who did bring the boomerang home were located in cities that had a greater proportion of minorities who were perceived as a racial threat. Veterans in cities facing less of a perceived racial threat did not bring the boomerang home. The boomerang effect is the result of the convergence of colonial circulations on the one hand and, on the other, local conditions of perceived racial threat. Go (2020) validates this causal explanation through a "nested analysis" (Leiberman 2005), using negative binomial regression analysis on over one hundred cities treated as distinct social sites. This approach demonstrates the ways in which GHS and statistical work, including regression analyses, need not be opposed (see also Henke 2017).

Finally, consider cross-case transboundary analysis. Cross-case methods could employ either Millian or Boolean logics already developed in comparative-historical

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sociology with three major differences: (i) comparisons maintain a sensitivity to context, sequence, and conjuncture, in other words to interdependent historical processes; (ii) the units compared are not entities, such as nation-states, or events and dynamics internal to nation-states, but transboundary forms: empires, transnational revolutionary movements, networks of circulation, and so on; and (iii) relatedly, relations and, potentially, entanglements between cases are factored into the analysis.[9] This latter point is crucial for handling "Galton's problem" – the difficulty of explaining variation among cases if those cases are interdependent (Anckar 2007). It is typically a problem for large-scale cross-national research that relies on statistical inferences: each nation-state in the sample has to be analytically separated from the others, thereby occluding connections between them. With small-N studies in GHS, those entanglements can be more readily traced – interdependence of cases is a central feature of GHS work.[10]

To see such cross-case analyses at work, we return to Go's (2008, 2011) comparison of the US and British empires. As noted in previous sections, Go compares America's imperial formation in the mid-twentieth century with British imperial formations in the nineteenth century, finding that while Britain's informal relations were transformed into formal colonial relations in the late nineteenth century, America's relations with other countries in the twentieth century ended up as informal imperial relations. To explain why, Go compares the historical trajectories of the two imperial formations, identifying similar starting points but then looking for critical events and turning points that caused the divergence in outcomes. Go uses Tarrow's (2010) strategy of "paired comparison" to compare two historical trajectories, turning Abbott's "narrative positivism" that compares different sequences of events into a "causal narrative" (Abbott 1992; Abbott and Tsay 2000; also see Mahoney 2000).

Through this cross-case analysis, Go finds that both the US and Britain were the most economically powerful hegemons in the historical periods under question. Both also had economic and political interests in colonial annexation. The key difference between the two was that the global field in which the US rose to hegemony in the twentieth century was significantly different from the one which marked the British rise to hegemony in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, anticolonial nationalism had spread throughout the global field, making resistance more likely and hence raising the costs of colonial occupation. Furthermore, the US faced a field in which allied powers, including Britain, already held colonial territories, so the US could simply outsource colonialism to its allies rather than create its own formal empire. In contrast, in the nineteenth century, most of the world was not under the control of Britain's allies. These different field configurations explain why the British turned to formal imperialism while the US turned to informal imperialism. This explanation also takes into account interdependencies between the two "cases": part of the explanation for why

[9]In shifting from within-case to cross-case analyses, we are guided by methodologists who have shown that, while within- and cross-case analyses are typically seen as distinct, they are often combined (Goertz and Mahoney 2012: 87–97).

[10]Even when doing conventional cross-national research, there are similar ways to manage this problem, such as operationalizing diffusion (Jahn 2006).

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the US did not need to use formal strategies of colonization in the twentieth century is because the US could outsource imperial functions to the British empire, an opportunity the British imperial-state did not have in the nineteenth century (Go 2008).

Conclusion: Vision and method in global historical sociology

It has long been recognized that modern social science has been founded on the assumptions of methodological nationalism (Chernilo 2006). It is also clear that many, if not all, of the methods for conducting social science have been similarly premised upon the assumptions of methodological nationalism, as the Gulbenkian Commission on the social sciences noted a generation ago (Wallerstein 1996). The sources available to historical social scientists have fueled these tendencies: an immense amount of both qualitative and quantitative historical data is organized in and through nation-states. Historical social science that attempts to suspend the assumptions of methodological nationalism and examine transboundary relations faces problems when it comes to operationalization – if social science, including comparative historical sociology, is premised on methodological nationalism, whether through shared assumptions or because of source availability, then how are transboundary dynamics to be systematically traced and their significance assessed?

This article has sought to address this question. Rather than jettisoning existing methods, it has sought to repurpose them through the principle of global methodological relationalism and via a three-step procedure: first, follow social relations across a boundary, which overcomes the assumption that social relations are contained by national boundaries; second, track these transboundary relations in and through time in order to map variation, which sustains the relational principle that entanglements do not constitute static "substances" or "essences," but are processes of formation, reproduction, contestation, and transformation; and third, use this variation as the basis for causal explanations, which shifts the units of comparison from nation-states (or events and forms within nation-states) to transboundary formations across cases, transboundary relations over time, and social sites within transboundary relations. This approach facilitates the use of existing methods for causal explanations, such as causal narratives, pattern matching, or process tracing, which combines descriptive work with explanation. In this way, we have taken some initial steps towards outlining a portable procedure for GHS and related approaches that can be operationalized across a range of issue-areas, from policing and empires to revolutions and, we hope, many more.

It is worth closing with one cautionary note – this methodological guide for conducting GHS research does not solve the data problem, viz. that historical materials are often organized by and through nation-states. A full response to this issue would require a lengthier discussion than can be conducted here. For now, we simply point out that it offers one way to rethink how we mobilize source material and harness existing archival sources. For instance, the imperative of following relations across a boundary invites analysts to look beyond the limits of cross-national databases and instead trace individuals' careers using personal papers or diaries, as in Schrader's (2019) examination of transnational policing, or trading networks as evidenced in the records of trading companies, as in Erikson's (2014)

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study of the English East India Company. Our approach also invites the creative use of national-based data. Go (2011), for instance, reads the records of US government offices and papers of US officials to track imperial relations. Thornton (2021) triangulates different national archival sources to examine the role of actors in the Global South in generating international development projects. Jung (2023) and Brückenhaus (2017) similarly use government surveillance records to track transnational anticolonial movements. These examples suggest that, while our procedures for doing GHS do not directly address the problem of methodological nationalism within source materials, they do open up routes for remobilizing these sources in novel ways. As GHS is further developed, we hope that these examples of creative repurposing will be applied to an increasing number of issue-areas.

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