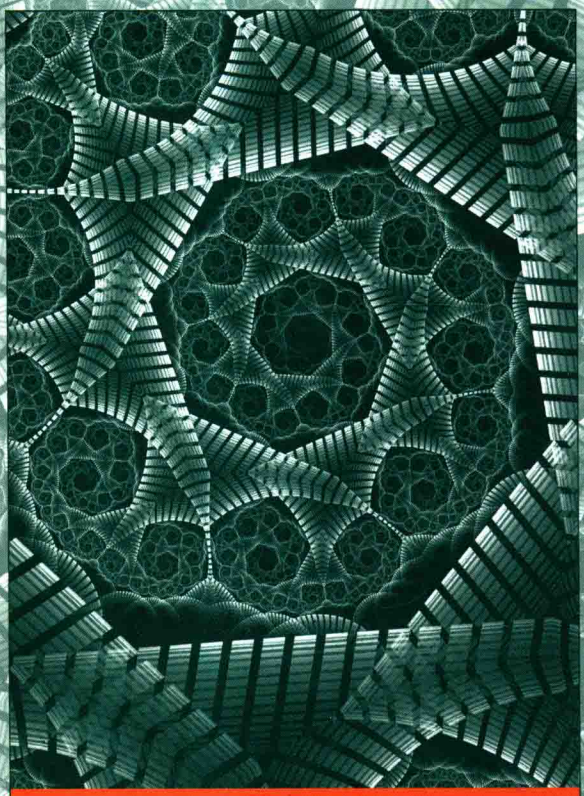

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Global Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences

Made in Circulation

EDITED BY
Wiebke Keim, Ercüment Çelik, Christian Ersche and Veronika Wöhrer

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

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Edited by

WIEBKE KEIM, ERCÜMENT ÇELIK,
CHRISTIAN ERSCHE AND VERONIKA WOHRER
University of Freiburg, Germany

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GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This book widens the theoretical and methodological perspective of studies on the global circulation of knowledge, by offering interesting cases and discussing relevant concepts. A truly international contribution to rethinking the entangled processes at work in the production of social sciences in local, national and transnational spaces.

Fernanda Beigel, CONICET-Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Argentina

After the wave of criticism of the Eurocentric and colonial character of hegemonic social sciences during the 1990s and in the early 2000s, more recent studies have tried to offer institutional and epistemic solutions to adequately represent the 'global South' in the social sciences. This volume systematically discusses some of these experiences, presenting new critical responses to the challenge of overcoming parochialism and Eurocentrism. Bringing together a team of brilliant and internationally renowned authors, this book represents an indispensable contribution for those interested in following contemporary reinvention of social sciences.

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Preface

Michael Burawoy

By its own doing humanity has become an endangered species – endangered by the commodification of nature and consequential environmental degradation, by the commodification of labour resulting in precariousness for an ever-increasing proportion of the world's population, by the commodification of money expressed in financial crises that have plunged people and nations into debilitating debt, and most recently by the commodification of knowledge that intensifies rather than arrests commodification of nature, labour and money. This wave of marketization, commonly known as neoliberalism, is not the first but the third wave that capitalism has generated, bringing about the broadest disruption of communities across the planet, the deepest penetration into hitherto protected arenas of life, and the greatest polarization of wealth and poverty. Nothing escapes the market.

One peculiarity of third-wave marketization, indeed, is the galloping commodification of the production and dissemination of knowledge that, rather than addressing the mounting problems of human survival, is increasingly turned into a weapon of destruction. As social scientists we are inherently implicated in this, participants in the very process we criticize. This book tries to come to terms with this dilemma: how to be a responsible social scientist in a world that makes this ever more difficult.

For so long knowledge was regarded as a public good accessible to all, produced and disseminated in public institutions for the public interest. Today, the university, bereft of public funds, is drawn into selling its wares to those who can afford to buy them, those with the financial resources to exploit the cheap subsidized research the university provides. This applies to the latest developments in genetically modified crops for agribusiness, drugs for pharmaceutical companies, new techniques of surveillance, economic models for futures markets, and in some places it sells or rents out its own means of production, its own real estate. Commodification applies to the dissemination of knowledge as well as to its production, whether in the form of vocational training, business degrees or ever higher fees for all students. As the university is privatized so it is driven by budgetary concerns, distorting knowledge production and its dissemination, making a mockery of its claim to advance the public interest. Where the university fails to draw in the necessary funds it is replaced by think tanks, centres of research, so-called Mode-2 type knowledge geared to clients, usually states or businesses, on a contractual basis. Knowledge on demand is the shallowest of knowledge that depends on more fundamental knowledge which it displaces.

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One of the most perverse consequences of privatization is the rise of instrumental rationality, the global ranking of universities in terms of 'excellence', which serves to guide investment decisions of corporations looking to outsource research or direct wealthy parents to reliable credentialing for their children. Northern universities, especially those whose operative language is English, dominate the rankings, proudly displaying Nobel Prize winners, medal winners, faculty publications and citations in the most prestigious Northern journals, and alumni who occupy the higher reaches of the same global order. This arbitrary ranking of universities generates its own symbolic capital that attracts the best students and researchers from the South, further deepening inequalities.

It is not simply the drawing out of inequalities between North and South, but the drawing out of inequalities within the North, where a small elite monopolizes funding for research opportunities, but especially within the South. Thus within Southern nations, states increasingly concentrate public resources in just one or two prestigious 'national' universities in the hope of concentrating sufficient symbolic capital for entry into the league of 'world-class' universities; that is, universities that will attract private funding, whether for research or learning. This leaves the remainder of the so-called universities starved of public funding, so they become assembly lines for the mass production of students or they simply go bankrupt and disappear. Some universities try to stay alive by creating elite tracks where English is the medium of instruction, class size is smaller, superior faculty do the teaching and students pay much higher fees. Outside the one or two elite universities or the increasing number of satellites of elite Northern universities, faculty members in the global South are poorly paid, have to work at multiple jobs, and have little or no time to devote to research. The lucky ones obtain consultancy work for international agencies or in the burgeoning sector of think tanks that drain off the best academics, further impoverishing universities.

As students, faculty members, universities and nation states all scramble for a place in this order, they also reproduce that order. At the very top the elite universities develop a nonchalant conceit about their high rankings, which change but only slightly over the years, without considering the implications for those lower down in the pecking order, especially in other countries, where universities face very different problems. This is not a case of hegemony, of negotiated domination with concessions or self-conscious consent from the dominated, but a case of *distinction* in which the dominant lay claim to their superiority on the basis of their presumed concentration of talents and abilities. The academic elites know that anyone in the hierarchical global order would give their right arm to be a student, faculty person or visitor at an elite university in the West. And those outside the system are either scrambling to get their foot on the ladder at the lower rungs, or are so driven by material survival that the ranking system becomes totally irrelevant. This is an archetypal case of symbolic domination and misrecognition, legitimating and reproducing a massive unequal distribution of resources.

This book offers a critique of this symbolic domination. It is no accident that the contributors are all from the social sciences and humanities, which are especially

sensitive to the distortions introduced by the hierarchy of the global division of knowledge production. Perhaps, in the natural sciences – though even here we note manifold and differential consequences for humanity's survival – we can say that what is discovered in the North applies to the South and vice versa, but in those disciplines that seek to understand the immediate world around them the domination of Northern journals, languages and frameworks can be debilitating. To publish in an established Northern social science journal, cited by lots of Northern scholars and therefore ranked high on impact factors, means to conform to the paradigms operative in Northern countries; it means addressing problems intelligible in the North. To write about distinctive problems of the South is only permissible if they somehow fit into the schemes of understanding of the North. The Northerners are, for the most part, quite oblivious to the specificity of social problems in the South and they, therefore, see their frameworks as universal; they do not see them as the false universalization of the particular, for example, the universalization of features that define the peculiarities of the US. But this strangeness is amply apparent to the social scientist of the South who sends in an article on, say, HIV-AIDS in South Africa and then has to justify studying South Africa through the lens, for example, of African Renaissance and the repudiation of Western medicine. The more that social sciences of the South are drawn into the orbit of Northern journals, Northern research funds, Northern debates – and Southern powers tend to incentivize such participation – the more they may be drawn away from the issues most relevant to their local or national context.

Discontent with benchmarking research to the North rises with engagement in the local context. Whether they are formulating policy for clients or conversing with publics, such committed scientists require an emerging body of academic knowledge that is relevant to their surroundings. Inasmuch as scientists are driven by Northern paradigms, by having their research benchmarked against publications in Northern journals, so their contributions will be of little use to the practitioners, and the discipline will wither on the vine or, as it is in some countries, it will be just a shrinking appendage of Northern social science. This is all the more so where, as is often the case in the South, public engagement has been the driving force behind the advance of the social sciences. Indeed, the same public engagement may problematize the idea of disciplines that is still so much part of the Northern academic framework. Chapters in this book suggest, indeed, that disciplinary silos are inimical to the development of social science in the South.

Local engagement sensitizes one to the limits of Northern reference points, but so does global circulation. Those who move between the North and the South often find themselves in a contradictory position, seeking to be responsive to issues in their local surroundings while, at the same time, trying to engage the paradigms of the North. They are caught in Sari Hanafi's polarity: publish locally and perish globally or publish globally and perish locally. Many of the authors in this book straddle the divide between North and South, both those whose base is in the South and those whose base is in the North. Not surprisingly, they raise profound challenges to conventional knowledges.

These cosmopolitan locals are, almost by definition, part of an elite in the South, exploiting their connection to the North to advance their academic capital in the South, but at the same time representing the South in the North. A few even find a place of distinction in the North as representatives of Southern Studies, as in Subaltern Studies or Postcolonial Studies, their authenticity dependent on their ongoing connection to the South. Such cosmopolitans have become a powerful voice in semi-peripheral countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, South Africa and India, with established scholarly traditions and accumulated resources. Brazil, for example, has many social science journals and a national committee ranks them, according to their own standards, attempting to circumvent the domination of Northern journals. The South–South collaborations, referred to in this volume, often again among semi-peripheral countries, seek to create an alternative pole in the global production of knowledge, though one that does not ignore Northern knowledge but engages with it in a constructively critical manner. However, countries with authoritarian legacies or where social science is a new field are less likely to be steeped in debates that engage Northern knowledge from an autonomous base. In Russia and China, for example, Northern social science is often uncritically embraced or unreflectively rejected, but more rarely critically assessed or selectively appropriated.

Just as the South is not a homogeneous entity with its enormous inequality of scholarly output between the behemoths of Brazil, India and China and their regional satellites, just as within these countries there are the globally connected cosmopolitan elites and the global disconnected regions, so the North too is not homogeneous. Indeed, with privatization and the defunding of public education polarization also deepens. Just as there is a North in the South so there is a South in the North. In many ways Europe lies in the shadow of the US, and within countries there develop, to a varying degree dependent on the character of the national systems of higher education, new hierarchies of prestige. The South in the North finds its expression in the emergence of critical theory – race theory, queer theory, feminist theory and newfangled modes of public engagement. Here, too, there is questioning of disciplinary divides. This provides the potential for alliances between the dissidents of the global North and the cosmopolitans of the South, again exemplified in this book.

With all this complexity – and it is far more complex than can be rendered here – how then shall we think of social science at a global level? First and foremost, it is a conversation between perspectives that arise in different places at different times, a conversation that recognizes the hollowness of false universalities that generalize particular vantage points. Can one rise above a plethora of particularisms? For there to be a conversation there has to be a common social science language informed by a common set of values and concerns. As regards the latter we can return to the challenges this planet faces, the challenges wrought by a tsunami of marketization aided and abetted by nation states, a tsunami that shows no signs of abating. As regards the former we can still draw on a sociological tradition – from Marx to Habermas, from Durkheim to Parsons, from Weber to Bourdieu,

from Addams to W.E.B. Du Bois, from Wallerstein to Cardoso – that has provided an unabashed critique of utilitarianism and market supremacy as well as of rationalization and state domination. Sociology was born in the nineteenth century against the first wave of marketization. It was born with civil society which stood against market tyranny and state despotism. Notwithstanding the plurality within sociology – manifestations of the plurality of civil societies and the divergent interests they represent – it is nonetheless bound together by a shared commitment to the defence of civil society against the war that has been declared upon it by state and economy. On that basis it has generated broad macro theories of social reproduction and transformation of lasting significance.

Sociology is the core of a broader social science that embraces anthropologists, human geographers and historians. It has to be distinguished from economics that is primarily concerned with the advance of market society and political science that is concerned with the state and political order – Northern disciplines ever more preoccupied with modelling a world ever more remote from reality. There are dissidents, led by such Nobel Prize winners as Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman and Amartya Sen, who become fellow travellers in the social sciences, which becomes a broader multidisciplinary community that valorizes the social as against the economic and the political – the last stand on behalf of the welfare of humanity.

Still, if sociology is, indeed, to be the core of such a project, it has to recover its grandest ambitions. Its greatest challenge is to advance beyond the nation as frame of analysis to a transnational perspective on the defence of civil society itself conceived as embedded in global interconnections. The hope for such a new sociology and more broadly a social science that will address problems on a planetary scale must surely lie with a new generation of multilingual social scientists who knit together local, national and global commitments, respectful of perspectives from different parts of the world, cognizant of the dangers of false universality as well as the very uneven playing field on which we operate, in other words social scientists of the type represented in this book.

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