

BOOK REVIEW

Putting (social) science in its place(s)

Leandro Rodriguez Medina

leandro.rodriguez@udlap.mx

Heilbron, Johan, Sorá, Gustavo, and Boncourt, Thibaud (eds). 2018. *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations*. London: Palgrave.

371 pp.

ISBN 978-3-319-73298-5

Price: €128,39

There is an increasing interest in the production and circulation of knowledge at a global scale. As usual, the STEM disciplines have attracted more attention, perhaps due to the widespread diffusion of the products of their knowledge, from vaccines to new materials. For the social sciences, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of their relation with the spaces in which they are produced, whether it is at the local level (is there anything similar to laboratory studies in the social sciences?) or the international level (is there a global social science? How does social science knowledge circulate? Are the international relations of the social sciences shaping their content, perhaps Americanizing all local landscapes?). *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations*, edited by Johan Heilbron, Gustavo Sorá, and Thibaud Boncourt, provides one of the first comprehensive answers to the latter questions, making it timely, relevant, and groundbreaking.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part I, “Patterns of Internationalization,” Heilbron and Gingras present a general map of European social sciences in the last decades from a bibliometric perspective, while Sapiro analyzes what factors determine the international circulation of scholarly books, paying special attention to translations from/to English and French. The section ends with a chapter by Boncourt on the institutionalization of international professional associations in sociology and political science. In Part II, “Transnational Regionalization,” Sorá and Blanco focus on the patterns of development within Latin American social sciences, showing how Latin American regionalization of cultural production is usually an outcome of the lack of local conditions and/or a defiance of hegemonic centers. In contrast, Heilbron, Boncourt and Timans study the European Research Area in the social and human sciences, critically assessing the impact of American hegemony. Part III, “South-North Relations,” consists of four chapters. Leperlier introduces the post-colonial internationality of Algerian academics, updating much of the discussion about the peripherality of scholars(hip) and the dilemma faced by non-Western social sciences. Blanco and Wilkis focus on Argentine sociology to observe trends in internationalization, while Canedo presents an historic overview of the role of the Ford Foundation in the institutionalization of Brazilian political science. Finally, Sorá and Dujovne compare translations from English, French, Italian, German, and Portuguese in Argentine social science to question the predominance of English and how the use of language in the academic world connects to more general intellectual and scholarly tendencies.

In the last part of the book, *East-West Relations*, Karady and Nagy summarize seven decades of Hungarian social science to show how the Westernization of the field has been seen many times as an attempt to free themselves from authoritarian rule and policies that shaped the local production of knowledge during the Cold War and beyond. The last chapter, by Brisson, Jeanpierre and Lee, is a comparative analysis of Korean and Japanese social sciences, observing similar patterns – such as the presence of a strong institutional arrangement in both countries – as well as differences – such as their different reactions to American social science.

The main strengths of this book are that it has a diverse geographic scope and plural methodologies, and that it is politically sensitive. By recognizing the particularities of certain areas of knowledge production, such as Western Europe, Latin America, Algeria, Hungary, Korea, and Japan, the authors acknowledge not only the relevance of geographical particularities but also the need to challenge simple frameworks to understand the circulation of knowledge. The economic and political crises of Latin American countries, the appropriation of a modernization discourse in Japan, and the consequences for the academic book market in Hungary after the fall of the Berlin Wall illustrate the diversity of situations that prevent scholars from relying on generic frameworks. What can be prematurely thought of as a weakness of the book is ultimately one of its main contributions: in order to understand global power relations and their impact on the social and human sciences, analysts must put the social and human sciences in their place(s).

With diverse methodologies, this book is a mandatory reading for those studying knowledge circulation. In the chapters by Heilbron and Gingras, Sapiro, Blanco and Wilkis, and Sorá and Dujovne, the reader will find features of well-researched social science texts. They combine qualitative and quantitative data to make their arguments more robust and consequently more convincing. At the same time, they do not merely describe the phenomenon they are interested in but rather propose theoretical insights into why some tendencies can be observed. Moreover, they connect theories of knowledge circulation with their empirical findings and challenge some common (mis)understandings, such as the undoubted preeminence of the English language or the current trends in the globalized publishing field that do not favor the diversification of intellectual exchanges. Globalization, from this perspective, is not praised but rather analytically weighed as a set of contradictory tendencies and practices that can only be understood in relation to the local contexts of the discipline.

Finally, and perhaps beyond the authors' explicit intentions, this is a political book. Heilbron, Sorá, and Boncourt's book clearly shows that power relations at the international level have always played a role in shaping social and human sciences. Global power is not presented as a pervasive force that prevents peripheral academics from thinking critically and creatively. Rather, power appears as subtly shaping the practices of academics, publishers, translators, journals, award committees, and even governments, companies, and civil organizations that demand knowledge from social scientists. Thus, the book does not engage with the literature of postcolonial studies, but rather with the mainstream sociological literature on the circulation of knowledge, which is often blind to power relations within the discipline itself. Again, what could be a weakness of the book is perhaps another one of its strengths. Focusing on these practices and institutional arrangements avoids the conclusion that asymmetries in knowledge production and circulation necessarily and logically lead to subordinate thinking, challenging a linear connection between power asymmetries and academic imperialism.