

**BOOK REVIEW**

Solovey, Dayé: Cold War Social Science

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Solovey, Mark, and Christian Dayé (Eds.) (2021) *Cold War Social Science: Transnational Entanglements*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

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“Never judge a book by its cover!” they say. I shall not. Yet, the cover is the first thing you see and Christian Dayé and Mark Solovey, the editors of *Cold War Social Science: Transnational Entanglements*, made a sensible choice: a minimalist front cover picturing a notice board reading: “You are leaving the American sector.” The four-language board suggests that it was located in one of the Allied zones of occupation following the Second World War. For a book placing special emphasis on the transnational dimension of Cold War social science, one could hardly think of a better symbol. I take it that most readers will get the message at once: they are invited to go beyond US-centered narratives.

For contemporaries of the postwar era, the message on the notice board was no doubt less metaphorical. When I first saw the book’s front cover, I was reminded of a memorable story. In April 1950, the would-be economist and Nobel laureate János Harsányi (later John Harsanyi), his future wife and her parents, left illegally the increasingly Sovietized Hungary. Following a grueling and dangerous journey by foot from Budapest, they eventually reached the Austrian eastern border. From there they headed towards the four-power occupied Vienna, this time by bus, and eventually landed in the Russian zone. They were not lucky enough to see one of the notice boards marking the entry or exit of the various Allied sectors, but a bystander suggested they go over to the other side of the street, which was in the American sector. They did. Leaving the Russian sector was the first step towards a mind-changing experience—a process that will imply regularly re-visiting the foregone past in light of a changing present. In a sense, that is what Dayé and Solovey want their readers to do, though the context is altogether different: re-revisit the past of the social sciences in the Cold War now that the erosion of the American dream has prompted increased attention to the *oubliés de l’histoire*.

As is well-known, in the past thirty years or so, the history of the social sciences since 1945 has often concentrated on the Anglo-American world, relegating the transnational dimension of social science in the Cold War to footnotes. It must be admitted that inadequate attention has been paid to other sites, their own logics and interests and their role in acclimating the US and UK social sciences to a variety of situations. Nor has much been done to explain the way US and UK social scientists, their approaches, ideas and practices were transformed through exposure to new cultural environments. When efforts were occasionally made to go beyond the Anglo-American world, the story was often over-determined by the alleged irresistibility and imperturbability of the dominant side.

Studying this collection of essays, readers will reach the conclusion that other, decentered, histories of the social sciences can be written that challenge the one-way conception of international social scientific exchange and favor instead multivocal narratives. “In following developments in Cold War social science across diverse national contexts, including the United States and Soviet Union as well as many others around the globe,” the editors write in their introduction, “this volume is also inspired by recent scholarship that has urged us to rethink certain fundamental points about how we should understand ... the Cold War itself” (p. 3). Helped by the crumbling of Cold War triumphalism and the emergence of a multipolar world, the transnational perspective has gained ground to the point that diversifying observation points is gradually becoming second nature for historians of the post-war social sciences.

Those who contributed a chapter in *Cold War Social Science: Transnational Entanglements* are not the usual suspects, but their conclusions are no less valuable if only because they shed light on episodes which are still poorly known or often analyzed from a US-centered perspective. At the same time, we should not expect a transnational history of the social sciences to be built in a day. Following the “transnational turn” in history, Johan Heilbron, Nicolas Guilhot and Laurent Jeanpierre (2008) laid down a few markers for the social sciences, and *Serendipities* itself has made a special effort in that direction, but there is still a long way to go. On this inadequately signposted path, Dayé and Solovey’s introduction and the eleven chapters comprising the volume prove useful.

Going through the essays composing the collection one after the other is not the best way to convey its contribution to the history of recent social science. Despite the editors’ successful effort to weave together the various threads in the introduction, the reader would inevitably be submerged by the variety of viewpoints, topics and characters. It is better to see the volume as the outcome of an ongoing conversation producing mutual enrichment despite left-over questions and unsolved misunderstandings. Then, the quality of the collection is shown by the capacity of its essays to respond to each other within the framework defined by the editors.

That framework is defined as “the general subject of transnationalism in Cold War social science” (p. 4). More precisely, Dayé and Solovey identified three central themes that form the skeleton of the collection:

- the role of institutions in promoting transnationalism;
- the impact of transnationalism on Cold War social science;
- and the impact on transnationalism on the way their practitioners see the nature and meaning of the social sciences.

Those interested in the themes above will find much of interest in the collection, but I would like to depart from the editors’ organizing themes to insist on two important aspects of the collection.

First, there is the issue of the relationship between the personal transformations undergone by social scientists confronted with other cultures and the way they approach society. Interestingly, half of the essays in the collection examine their subjects through the story of individual social scientists. Not all focus on the scientific personae of social scientists, as does Begüm Adalet when she examines the careers of Dankwart Rustow and Frederick Frey, two US-based scholars in comparative politics; but all insist on the necessity of questioning the separation of the scientist and the person and exploring instead the causes and consequences of the changing worldview of the individual immersed in another culture. Clearly, social scientists learn to adapt to new cultures and their personal change affects in turn the way they approach their new environment as much as their culture of origin. Think of the American library scholar and entrepreneur Eugene Garfield who developed the Science Citation Index (SCI) as a commercial product. As Elena Aronova shows, Garfield benefitted from the interest of Soviet researchers to give his project a second wind after it failed to convince US scientists and policy makers that it could help them keep abreast of increased scientific information. Likewise, Garfield's experience of Soviet information management as much as his capitalist instincts gave him a significant advantage as he pursued his efforts in the US, and as SCI eventually became an indispensable tool for many scientists there.

Consider, likewise, the US anthropologist Charles Wagley and the University of Chicago-trained anthropologist Felipe Landa Jocano. As shown by Sebastián Gil-Riaño, the work of the former depended on his involvement with transnational networks, including various strata of Brazilian society. As a result, Wagley's social scientific work can hardly be dissociated from his more general experience of Brazilian society. His personal attachment to Brazil—his wife was Brazilian—placed him in a better situation to appreciate the cultural specificity of the groups he studied and encouraged him to try to see the world from a non-US viewpoint. From this perspective, it seems difficult to examine the making of Wagley as a Cold War area studies expert without recognizing the influential part taken by a number of Brazilian actors and institutions in the process, and it would be a mistake to limit the influences on his studies to the orientations of US anthropology or to geopolitical and national security concerns alone. Jocano offers another interesting example, though his was that of a native Filipino returning home after graduate training at the University of Chicago. As the nation's most influential anthropologist, Jocano developed close ties with dictator Ferdinand Marcos and, as a result, he was in a good position to propagate the message of Western modernization theory in his home country. Here again, however, his story reveals more complexity than expected, for his vision of modernization was informed by the willingness to take the nation's pre-modern heritage into account. Christa Wirth shows the relevance of the Cold War in Jocano's life and work, but in so doing she makes clear that his experience within the Philippine Studies Program at the University of Chicago, or his endorsement of structural-functionalism, did not imply unconditional adherence to US Cold War interests or their embodiment in modernization theory.

Finally, Per Wisselgren followed the Swedish social scientist Alva Myrdal as she embarked on a new adventure as head of UNESCO's Department of the Social Sciences in 1950. Myrdal's social scientific internationalism betrayed her adherence to a scientific approach that one could easily connect with the orientations of US social science at the time. Myrdal's highly international profile, her experience of cultural differences and knowledge of various geopolitical contexts did not predispose her to thinking about the internationalization of social science as a process of Americanization. Instead, she believed that overcoming national isolation was the first step towards mutual understanding between nations, which implied paying special attention to the conditions of application of social scientific knowledge, its geographical and interdisciplinary specificity. That orientation amounted to

cultivating a decentered social scientific internationalism that reflected Myrdal's own position in the international social science community.

The above essays achieve a process of cultural decentering through the analysis of the life and work of social scientists whose personal experience of different cultures influences their overall vision of the world, which in turn influences the way they approach it as social scientists. The experience of new cultures is a total experience that covers the multiplicity of capacities in which individuals embrace the world and not just their effort to understand it as social scientists. This brings us back to Adalet's conclusion that the uncertainties unleashed by transnational (and other personal) experiences, and not just academic constraints, complicate the construction of scientific personae.

Another aspect of the collection which is worth pointing out is what can be described as the "political element" of social scientific knowledge. In its generality, the phrase covers a variety of interactions between politics on the one hand and the production and use of Cold War social science on the other. Here the transnational perspective proves especially illuminating. It shows that policy demands stand as a crucial factor in the production and transformation of social science because its results were used for ideologically opposed purposes by the protagonists of the Cold War. Likewise, it illustrates the role of social scientific theories as social interventions—their use in political arguments in Cold War debates.

Ekaterina Babintseva shows how the question of the efficiency of the learning process became crucial in relation to the objective of strengthening education. The Soviet approach to programmed instruction was inspired by Western scientific developments, the work of B. F. Skinner in particular, but, because of pressing matters of political significance, it underwent notable adaptations in the hands of psychologist Lev Landa and other scientists at the Soviet Council on Cybernetics, who developed a theory of algorithmic thinking. Soviet scholars found it difficult to rely on a form of behaviorism that eventually downplayed the fact that "the self has an agency in determining its own development" (p. 50). Accordingly, cybernetics seemed to offer better theoretical foundations than behaviorism for programmed instruction.

A perhaps stronger example of the influence of politics on social science in the context of transnational exchange of ideas is to be found in Zhipeng Gao's chapter on Chinese education. First, it shows how the educators of the People's Republic of China gradually substituted a pedagogy developed by the Soviet educator Ivan A. Kairov for the American-influenced and student-centered Deweyan pedagogy that had dominated education before the Chinese Communist Party ascended to power in 1949. Second, it describes another shift that responded to late-1950s economic and political demands: away from Soviet pedagogy toward a labor-based pedagogy. Here it is quite clear that Chinese education and psychology's reconceptualizations of human nature were often driven by political ambitions, which is not to say however that more individual factors played no role in the practical translation of these ambitions.

In Vítězslav Sommer's chapter, the political element of Cold War social science is also visible because the Prague Spring offers a convenient dividing line between the introduction of leisure studies in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and their transformation following the intervention of the Soviet Union. From the 1950s to 1968, the development of leisure research in Czechoslovakia was marked by reformist ambitions and the recognition that social scientific knowledge could help build a socialist society, both of which prompted critical attention to Western social science. In the wake of the Prague Spring, political pressures, and not just political demands, impacted social science as a whole, with

the return of Marxism-Leninism as a general theoretical framework. Within leisure studies, the promotion of a socialist lifestyle often replaced empirical examination of its conditions, blurring the lines between social scientific research and policy recommendations. By the late 1980s, because of the mixing of genres between reformist sociology and sociological advocacy, many students of the socialist lifestyle had lost touch with the socioeconomic realities of Czechoslovak society.

Political pressures do not necessarily influence social science in the expected way, for its practitioners always retain agency when they respond to government and military agencies in need of information. Surprisingly, that may be true of non-academic producers of knowledge as well. A good case in point is provided by Simon Ottersbach's essay on the CIA-supported Radio Free Europe (RFE). Created in the early 1950s, this pro-Western broadcasting organization was meant to produce information on life in the Eastern bloc so as to counter its propaganda. One could hardly think of a more blatantly ideological objective. Yet, RFE turned into one of the main purveyors of social scientific knowledge about Eastern Europe in the first two decades of the Cold War. RFE served as a source of information for social scientists and more generally for the media. Such a mission is not necessarily incompatible with propagandist ambitions—to the contrary. At the same time, the interplay between social scientific research, communication studies and propaganda suggests that the history of the social sciences cannot too easily dismiss the role of organizations like RFE in the production and dissemination of knowledge. As Ottersbach argues, the process of building up trust with listeners made RFE's commitment to "getting it right" central to its reputation and culminated with the introduction of academic research methods into its Research and Analysis Department in 1960. Gradually, RFE became a privileged site for the production of social scientific knowledge and its use in broadcasting: it "thus became part of a transnational and transsystemic space for thinking and speaking about the East" (p. 111).

As we have seen, the influence of political demands and pressures on Cold War social science was varied and at times unexpected. However, this must not obscure the fact that it can also be useful to consider social scientific theories as political interventions reflecting conflicting visions of the place of knowledge in society, as does Markus Arnold in the concluding chapter to this volume. The influence of Cold War concerns notwithstanding, these political interventions reflected the growing significance of social science knowledge and expertise in the postwar era.

It is fitting to conclude this review with a reference to Margarita Fajardo's chapter on dependency theory. Her essay does not fit well with my division between chapters dealing with the relationship between scholars' personal transformations and their approach to society on the one hand and chapters covering the political element in social science on the other. It is unclear whether that essay stands as an illustration of a transnational history of the social sciences either. Fajardo's thesis that dependency theory was not a reaction against modernization theory, but rather the product of a transnational network gravitating around the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin American (CEPAL) and linking a number of protagonists in Chile and Brazil, proves convincing and innovative. On the other hand, it reminds us of the importance of geographies of knowledge. Taking seriously the idea of the formation of a "Latin American" social science during the Cold War does make sense for historians of social science willing to go beyond US-centered narratives. Yet, it also implies that historians give due consideration to the role of specific locations in the making of social scientific knowledge and explain how local knowledge is at times transformed into something more global (which was the case of dependency theory in the 1960s and 1970s as Fajardo shows). In other



words, historians of social science need to ask geographical questions. Understanding the transnational flow of people and ideas is central to the history of the social sciences as is the effort to situate them in the places of their making.

Dayé and Solovey's essay collection is instructive and at times illuminating. Its case studies help us go beyond our Western preconceptions to consider perspectives we are often too quick to dismiss for lack of knowledge, because of the language barrier or simply by habit. As the editors recognize, the volume has been inspired by recent scholarship that challenges the usual equation between Cold War social science and social science in the Cold War. Yet, I should like to underline a perhaps more practical inspiration that has increasingly marked historical enterprises since the end of the Cold War and even more so in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. What has been called the "transnational turn" in history amounts to shifting emphasis towards actors, ideas and practices from different geographical centers with a view to challenging the precepts of modernization theories. In the process, transnational approaches have contested not merely the precepts whereby given ends may best be attained, but also the very idea that these ends are defined by external forces only. The end of the Cold War, at least initially, may have encouraged Cold War triumphalist narratives, but the persisting crisis of Western democracies, by making new voices heard, has gradually complicated our assessment of past achievements. Those voices can help shed a new light on the way we think about the history of the social sciences after 1945. The question of whether they will help make the production and dissemination of knowledge a more democratic enterprise or just another side-effect of globalization remains to be answered.

References

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