

**EDITORIAL**

International Circulations and Inequalities in the Social Sciences: An Introduction

Pierre Benz, Johanna Gautier Morin, Elisa Klüger and
Thierry Rossier
pierre.benz@umontreal.ca

Abstract

This special issue calls for a critical, historically grounded, and interdisciplinary perspective on international circulations and inequalities in the social sciences. It emphasizes the importance of considering the social sciences as a whole and in relation to broader power dynamics. To address inequalities in the production and dissemination of knowledge in the social sciences from diverse perspectives, this special issue brings together scholars from different higher education systems, countries, and disciplines. Its five contributions examine various national contexts, international configurations, and historical periods, utilizing a range of methodological strategies, including document and archival analysis, secondary databases and descriptive statistics, prosopographical databases, and multiple correspondence analysis. The first section of this editorial proposes a socio-historical approach for reflexive study of international circulations and inequalities in the social sciences. The second section situates the five contributions within the transforming context of the internationalization of the social sciences, providing a periodization of these dynamics from the late nineteenth century until the present. Finally, a concluding section advocates for a renewed perspective on the subject.

Keywords

International, circulation, social sciences, inequalities

In 1798, 160 French scientists (including representatives of what would later be called the 'social sciences', e.g., geographers, anthropologists, and archaeologists) traveled to Egypt during Napoleon's military expedition (El Ashmouni and Bartsch 2014). The scientific knowledge that the French gained about Egypt during the invasion was later published in *La Description de l'Égypte*, a 23-volume encyclopedia gradually released from 1809 to 1828. In reaction, the governor of the Egyptian province after Napoleon's withdrawal aimed to create an alternative knowledge regime to resist Western imperialism and provide Egypt, a peripheral state of the Ottoman Empire, with its own historical narrative and national foundations (Reid 2003; Campbell and Pederson 2014; Adelman 2019). From 1826 to 1831, he entrusted Imam Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī with a five-year mission to Paris. In the account of his travel, al-Tahtāwī emphasized the geographic diversity of the student population in Paris and the concentration and cosmopolitanism of higher education institutions (al-Tahtāwī 2004). He also described the numerous available courses that students



could take in various foreign languages, including Arabic (Edmonson and Edelstein 2019). Upon his return to Egypt, al-Tahtāwī achieved a prominent position in the Egyptian higher education system. He headed an office that translated European books into Arabic and Turkish for government schools and contributed to the establishment of the first press in the country (Salama-Carr 2007; Liauzu 2005; Elshakry 2008; Sarfatti 2022).

This trajectory demonstrates how international circulations enable the transfer of knowledge from one society to another. It illustrates the close relationship that early social sciences have been entertaining with economic and geopolitical interests at a global level. It also provides an empirical illustration of the tension between situated ways of defining scientific practice and knowledge. On the one hand, science, as a relatively autonomous social system, is considered to rely on mostly exclusive logics, which involve a rewarding system based on recognition from peers (Merton 1968; Bourdieu 1976; Gingras 2013). On the other hand, however, scholars and institutions are shaped by broader social concerns, the extent of which is defined by the changing autonomy of disciplines and national systems of higher education, particularly in relation to economic and political powers (Bourdieu 2001; Gingras 2012; Elias 2017). Due to these relationships and to their pretension of 'universalism', social scientists are prone to embody and reproduce a (very) unequal system, even though they possess the keys to detect these inequalities and work towards social change (Bourdieu 1995).

Simultaneously, this story reminds us that the international circulation of knowledge and scholars is not a recent feature of scientific fields (Heilbron 2023; Adelman 2019). Considering social science disciplines within their institutional and international framework allows us to account for their progressive development from the late nineteenth century onwards, with their own academic degrees and career systems, disciplinary societies and associations, information and publication networks, conferences, and scientific journals. These elements constitute the social practices and organization of disciplinary life in various national contexts (Gingras 1991, 2018; Abbott 2001; Revel 2015; Rossier and Benz 2022). Nevertheless, as we exemplified above, the circulation of scholars and knowledge in Europe existed long before that (Romano 2014; Soulier 2021; Hulsboom and Moss 2022), while similar dynamics also occurred in India, Persia, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire (Dickinson 2001; Subramanyam 2004; Alam 2007; Casale 2010). The explorations by Western scientists of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, aligned with colonial interests, and the flows of correspondence between scholars also long predated the institutionalization of social science disciplines (Casanova 2004; Salomon 1971; Fumaroli 2018).

However, the modern era remains a crucial turning point as it systematized the nationalization of scientific communities, paving the way for their possible inter-nationalization, while establishing the social sciences as scientific disciplines with their own hierarchies and struggles for scientific credibility (Bourdieu 2001; Benz and Rossier 2023). This systematization resulted in the consolidation of academic and scientific inequalities at the national and international levels, encompassing countries, institutions, and individuals (Bourdieu 2023).

To address inequalities in the production and dissemination of knowledge in the social sciences from diverse perspectives, this special issue brings together scholars from different higher education systems, countries, and disciplines. Its five contributions examine various national contexts, international configurations, and historical periods, utilizing a range of methodological strategies, including document and archival analysis, secondary databases and descriptive statistics, prosopographical databases, and multiple correspondence analysis. The first section of this editorial proposes a socio-historical approach for reflexive study of international circulations and inequalities



in the social sciences. The second section situates the five contributions within the transforming context of the internationalization of the social sciences, providing a periodization of these dynamics from the late nineteenth century until the present. Finally, a concluding section advocates for a renewed perspective on the subject.

A SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATIONS AND INEQUALITIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The epistemology of the social sciences, grounded in individual and collective reflexivity, enables the investigation of the power hierarchies within which they are embedded (Elias 2017; Bourdieu 2022). Reflexive approaches highlight the tensions that exist between scholars' aspirations for global scholarly autonomy through 'universalist' peer recognition and the production and reproduction of deeply unequal research systems (Heilbron and Gingras 2018; Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras 2014). This situation calls for social scientists to engage in critical reflexivity regarding their own practices and epistemic universes (Fassin and Steinmetz 2023).

Consequently, a socio-historical approach can assist scholars in historicizing, reexamining, and deconstructing widely used concepts and units of analysis, such as the 'local', 'national', 'international', 'transnational', 'center', 'periphery', 'global', 'imperial', and even the 'social sciences' themselves. By doing so, it contributes to defining the actors involved in shaping these concepts while providing a deeper understanding of the social, geographical, and historical contexts in which such boundary-work occurs (Gieryn 1983; Abbott 2001). Thus, the meanings attributed to the notion of 'internationalization' are influenced by power relations at specific times and in specific contexts, which need to be brought to light. The power relations that shape the balance among scholars, between disciplines, and within academic institutions, have been extensively studied in nationally-oriented approaches (Ringer 1990; Weisz 1983; Bourdieu 1984; Lingelbach 2003). Therefore, it is essential to call for ambitious research programs that address these power relations at the international level.

Recent scholarship on international power structures and the mechanisms of global academic exchanges has raised questions about the role of transnational networks, foreign credentials, and cultural resources from leading Western institutions in providing scholars with powerful assets and prestige, thus contributing to the hierarchization of the social sciences (Dezalay and Garth 2002, 2006; Fourcade 2006; Vaucher and De Witte 2013; Klüger 2018; Rossier and Bühlmann 2018; Gingras 2002; Heilbron et al. 2018; Gautier Morin and Rossier 2021; Klüger et al. 2023). However, the influence of these logics varies across scientific and national contexts. Moreover, not all higher education systems assign equal importance to international mobility or the use of English in scientific articles.

Latin American social scientists have highlighted the significance of interdependencies between scientific, economic, and political systems since the late 1940s, with an active focus on promoting equitable global integration (Halperin-Donghi 1982; Love 1990; Prebisch 1949). The trajectories of social scientists across borders, local expectations, and career opportunities abroad differ significantly depending on whether they are situated at the core, immediate periphery, or distant edges of academic centers that concentrate symbolic and economic resources and establish the practical norms of knowledge production. Dependency-based approaches encourage the study of local cultures, economic structures, political dynamics, and transnational alliances from the perspective of these global inequalities (Cardoso and Faletto 1970; Santos 1970). It is crucial to examine how concepts, expertise, symbols of legitimacy, and research priorities indeed undergo



cultural adaptations, reappropriations, and even reinventions as they travel from one context to another (Perry 1995; Dezalay and Garth 2002; Bourdieu 2002; Morgan and Howlett 2010).

This special issue calls for a critical, historically grounded, and interdisciplinary perspective on international circulations and inequalities in the social sciences. It emphasizes the importance of considering the social sciences as a whole and in relation to broader power dynamics. The social sciences face a dilemma between their transnational scope in producing scientific knowledge and their deep entrenchment within national contexts. The intensity of this entrenchment varies, with some national academic spaces appearing more nationally oriented than others (Fourcade 2009; Heilbron et al. 2017; Sapiro et al. 2018; Fleck et al. 2019). The political economy of borders, which characterizes the internationalization of the social sciences, also plays a crucial role in the circulation of people, resources, and ideas (Pries 2009). In this international context, specific forms of scientific imperialism and power relations are continually reshaped through conflicting definitions of the 'international', 'global', and 'universal' (Somsen 2008; Connell et al. 2017). The epistemology of the social sciences serves as a useful tool for scholars to reflect on the relationship between international circulations and inequalities, preventing the misuse and abuse of concepts that may perpetuate unwanted preconceptions (Duller 2020; Bourdieu 2023). The subsequent section provides an overview of the evolving contexts surrounding international circulations and inequalities within the social sciences.

INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATIONS AND INEQUALITIES IN CHANGING SOCIAL, GEOGRAPHICAL, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The five articles featured in this special issue explore diverse social, geographic, and historical contexts of knowledge production spanning from the late nineteenth century to the present. In this second section, we present a chronological overview of evolving patterns of international circulations and inequalities in the social sciences, highlighting the key contributions of the articles to this field of study. We focus on three historical phases, each corresponding to different processes of international circulation: 1) the early institutionalization of the social sciences (from the nineteenth century until the First World War); 2) the world wars and the transatlantic nexus (from the inter-war period until the 1980s); 3) the globalization of the social sciences (since the 1990s onwards).

Early institutionalization of the social sciences

In the late nineteenth century, the expansion and specialization of higher education institutions led to significant global disparities (Charle and Verger 2012). Western social sciences, closely tied to the state, often aligned their research agenda with imperial expansion. As a result, the initial internationalization of the social sciences followed colonial and hegemonic lines (Abir 1977; Elshakry 2010; Adelman 2019; Asseraf 2022; Kárady 2020). In the French and British Empires, the emerging social sciences benefited from state funding and employment of experts who sought specialized knowledge about colonized populations (Singaravélou 2008; Steinmetz 2023). These developments simultaneously encouraged and marginalized efforts to establish alternative internationalisms of science and transnational networks among individuals excluded from Western countries (Meléndez-Badillo 2022).

The academization of the social sciences led to the gradual homogenization of legitimate practices and practitioners. Academic professorships became largely dependent on national systems of social promotion, in contrast to the social knowledge produced outside academia by trade unions, political groups, journalists, and independent researchers (Smith 2000). This homogenization process,



coupled with the increasing closure of academic fields, resulted in the exclusion of women on a large scale and the establishment of gendered hierarchies within the production and reproduction of knowledge.

In this issue, Margot Elmer examines the gendered processes of institutionalization and internationalization of the social sciences at the Université Nouvelle de Bruxelles (1894–1919), where women from Central and Eastern Europe were admitted to the new social science curriculum. Elmer highlights the significance of international mobility for upper-class women who lacked access to university education in their home countries. However, she demonstrates that as women and foreigners, they were confined to fields with low academic prestige. Elmer's contribution sheds light on an understudied aspect of the early development of the social sciences, namely the underlying inequalities in accessing new academic disciplines and the subsequent professional opportunities that followed.

World Wars and the Transatlantic nexus

The interwar period marked a significant phase of systematic institutionalization and nationalization of the social sciences. During the First World War, belligerent states recognized the potential of the social sciences as tools for social engineering, scientific explanation, planning, and forecasting, even in colonial contexts. The complex relationship between researchers and colonial administrators influenced the development of social science concepts and theories of modernization and development, extending into the decolonization process with the dissemination of social innovations created by colonial authorities to manage colonized populations (Cooper 2004; Connell 2017; Patel 2020). However, the growing number of students from colonized regions studying at universities in Paris and London played a role in accelerating the development of decolonial and anti-colonial thinking, as well as facilitating the circulation of knowledge among countries in the Global South (Connell 2018; Watanabe 2021).

International organizations and philanthropic societies also began to play a more active role in shaping the concrete landscape of the social sciences through external funding and the implementation of international research agendas in areas such as economic development, agricultural policies, and public health (Marshall 1965; Jacobson 1966; Karl 1985; Tournès 2012; Parmar 2012). The 1930s were also marked by a massive exodus of Russian, Turkish, and European scientists to the United States and Latin America (Krohn 1993; Arendt 1994; Çağlar 2008; Burschel et al. 2011). Foreign universities provided a refuge for persecuted intellectuals (Cassedy 1997) and benefited from the cross fertilization of academic ideas and cultures promoted by them.

Examining the historical backdrop characterized by the increasing dominance of elite North American universities in the social sciences, particularly in the interwar period, Marie Linos (this issue) delves into the history of the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1930–1935) to problematize 'North'-'South' imbalances, mechanisms of exclusion, and imperialist logics embedded in a transnational project with universalist claims. Drawing on archival sources and printed materials, Linos shows the resistance of scholars from Southern regions, who had been excluded from the project, against the work of foreign authors who ignored the voices of local intellectuals. She also points out how the Encyclopedia served as a showcase for the concrete combination of tensions, contradictions, and oscillations between, on the one hand, a symbolic affiliation to European traditions mixed with a rhetoric of internationality and, on the other hand, a project to secure a leading institutional position, define a legitimate language of publication, and reinvent the world from a North American perspective.



After World War II, the valorization of foreign languages in peripheral national academic fields tended to reinforce existing class inequalities by privileging scholars with the time, resources, and dispositions to cultivate these skills (Beigel 2014; Hanafi and Arvanitis 2014; Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras 2014; Collyer et al. 2019), whereas writing and publishing in one's native language limited the dissemination and internationalization of certain research areas (Rodríguez et al. 2010). Meanwhile, the growing importance of funding and ranking agencies, selection committees, and awarding bodies exacerbated inequalities in opportunities to enter the academic field and earn academic credit. Social, geographic, and linguistic properties played critical roles in career advancement, faculty appointments, research productivity, scientific recognition, and access to information, networks, and funding (Gingras and Mosbah-Natanson 2010; Brink and Benschop 2014; Ammon 2010; Bol et al. 2018; Ni et al. 2021; Larivière et al. 2013; Benz and Rossier 2022).

In this issue, Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt addresses another crucial feature of this period, namely the uneven distribution of financial resources for research in the social sciences, the standardization of institutional evaluation, and the mechanisms governing its formalization. Specifically, she proposes an in-depth study of how external peer-review of research proposals has been negotiated and implemented in the European Science Foundation since the 1970s. The ESF, which once promoted ideals of fairness and transparency, has quickly adopted logistical instruments required to accommodate a growing number of projects while simultaneously requiring external reviewers to perform their work without remuneration. This case illustrates the strong organizational logic underlying resource allocation and institutional concentration at the European level during that period.

Globalization of the social sciences

The 1990s witnessed a new turn in the internationalization of the social sciences, with an increasing number of universities adopting managerial governance models that challenged traditional peer recognition mechanisms (Gingras et al. 2013; Musselin 2005; Benz et al. 2021). The formalization and systematization of competition-based regulatory models in the evaluation of research productivity and institutional performance, based on university rankings and the widespread use of h-indexes, have widened global inequalities (Gingras 2014; Brankovic 2022; Börjesson and Lillo Cea 2020). The proliferation of researchers, students, and staff, specialized journals, societies, as well as the intensification of transnational contacts and encounters, have not led to the democratization of science. Rather, the contrast has deepened between a small number of research clusters that claim a monopoly on legitimate scientific methods and academic practices, and other areas that lack access to scholarly networks, public or private funding, publishing institutions, and sources of scientific reputation or prestige (Gingras 2018). The uneven capacity to bear the growing costs of access to scientific production has made these hierarchical systems and the publishing industry major factors in the exclusionary mechanisms between institutions, countries, and regions of the world (Collyer 2018).

Top-tier universities in North America and Western Europe take advantage of their dominant position in a globalized yet fragmented space to set the standards of research and establish a symbolic hierarchy between 'worthy,' 'original,' or 'hot' research topics. They designate research problems that arise in their social and geographical contexts as 'universal' and studies of other national settings as 'case studies' (Alatas 2003; Baber 2003; Porciani and Tollebeek 2012; Gordin 2015; Heilbron et al. 2018). However, even dominant Western spaces are subject to reconfigurations and influences stemming from international dynamics. In this issue, Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg employs multiple correspondence analysis to demonstrate the association between French economists'



positioning within the academic field and their public discourse on economic and social crises. In particular, he emphasizes the role of resources beyond the national frame in influencing the stances taken by economists concerning the controversies surrounding the euro crisis and the debates about the political and scientific economic models in France.

Another vantage point from which to observe today's international division of scientific labor and its hegemonic effects is the interaction and exchanges between distant regions of the scientific world. Despite the intensification of international co-authorship since the 1980s, collaborations often occur among researchers located in geographically and culturally neighboring countries. Recent trends to diversify and expand the scope of international collaboration have not overcome the long-lasting fracture between centers and peripheries (Leydesdorff and Wagner 2009). As more South American scholars engage in collaborative research with colleagues in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Iberian Peninsula, they have come to rely heavily on English, the dominant language of scientific publishing today (Finardi et al. 2022; Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. 2022). Therefore, the internationalization of science has not led to a democratization of science at any scale. Rather, it has concentrated and centralized resources in a small number of research and teaching centers, creating new inequalities in access to resources and content, as well as peer and social recognition (Bandau et al. 2010; Wildavski 2012; Feld and Kreimer 2019).

In this issue, Stefan Klein and Carolina Monteiro de Castro Nascimento analyze the educational and professional trajectories of sociology professors in Brazil to highlight how access to the international arena produces hierarchies among them and governs their horizons of possibility. Their ascension to top-ranked universities located in the wealthiest regions of the country is closely correlated with their international experience, publications in foreign journals, and other objective signs of valuable resources acquired through international experiences. This article reflects on broader dynamics of knowledge production and academic legitimation by questioning the traditional divide between center and periphery.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the extensive literature on the history of Western social sciences and their expansion, work remains to be done to write an 'equal' history of international circulations in the social sciences (Bertrand 2011), not only from the perspective of the peripheries of the empire but also from the perspective of the marginalized from within as they navigate an internationalized but polarized and hierarchical environment (Zemon Davis 1992; Carby 2019; Asseraf 2022).

While digitalization has created unprecedented opportunities for information dissemination, copyright laws and paywalled publishing have greatly hindered open access to scholarly publications and exacerbated inequalities between academic institutions based on their financial ability to provide their students and faculty members with private access to international scholarly materials (Salatino 2020). One consequence of these access restrictions is the emergence of online shadow libraries like the Z-Library, Sci-Hub, and Library Genesis Project (Libgen), which are pirate platforms or open-source search engines that provide free access to paywalled content. If most traffic on Sci-Hub and Libgen comes from Iran, Russia, China, Brazil, and India, the United States generates the second-highest traffic on Sci-Hub. The use of these informal systems is widespread and stems from the gap between the need to constantly update knowledge and the growing lack of financial resources (Karaganis 2018). Some scholars have launched an open access movement to address this problem, which goes to the heart of research ethics and inequalities in the international dissemination of knowledge. Academics in the Global South (Vuong et al. 2020), as well as



international organizations such as UNESCO and the Confederation of Open Access Repositories, now advocate for the right to access all scientific research.

Over the past two decades, growing global wealth disparities and inequalities in research investment have further shaped scientific production, exacerbating existing hierarchies and rankings of countries and institutions (Piketty 2014, 2020; Savage 2021). The aim of this special issue is thus to highlight the ruptures in the course of scientific globalization, its shortcomings, the opportunities it has opened up, and the contradictions it has generated.



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Author biographies

Pierre Benz is Postdoctoral Fellow at the École de Bibliothéconomie et des Sciences de l'Information, Université de Montréal, Canada. His research interests include social stratification in science, interdisciplinarity, scientific careers and academic elites.

Johanna Gautier Morin is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence as part of the ERC-funded research program ECOINT. She received her PhD in International History from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva in January 2021 and has taught for two years in the Global History Lab program at Princeton University (2020-2022).

Elisa Klüger is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral researcher at the Laboratoire d'Économie et de Sociologie du Travail (LEST) and an associated researcher at the Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP) nucleus of international studies. She obtained her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of São Paulo (2016), has been a researcher in CEBRAP's international



postdoctoral program (2017-2021) and visiting researcher at the Universities of Princeton (2018-2019), California - Berkeley (2014-2015), and Picardie Jules Verne (2012-2013).

Thierry Rossier is Senior Researcher at the Life Course and Inequality Research Centre (LIVES) at the University of Lausanne, and Visiting Fellow at the Department of Sociology at London School of Economics. His research interests include elites, inequality, gender, class, power, economics, science and relational methods in the social sciences.