

**BOOK REVIEW**

Sooryamoorthy, R. (2022)

Sociology Global: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.

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Sooryamoorthy, R. (2022) *Sociology Global: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Anthem Press, New York

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[editor's note: this review was completed by Charles Crothers, who passed away in 2023 before its publication. The text has been very lightly edited after his passing. Charles is greatly missed by his friends, family and colleagues].

Following rapidly after several books on *Transforming Science in South Africa: Development, Collaboration and Productivity* (2015); *Sociology in South Africa: Colonial, Apartheid and Democratic Forms* (2016); *Networks of Communication in South Africa: New Media, New Technologies* (2017); *Management Studies in South Africa* (2019); *Scientometrics for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (2020); *Science, Policy and Development in Africa* (2020); the edited *Doctoral Training and Higher Education in Africa* (2022); and the *Oxford Handbook of Sociology of Africa* (2022); Radhamany Sooryamoorthy (Professor of Sociology at the University of KwaZulu Natal) has produced a study of *Sociology Global: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Such a task faces many difficulties as it requires some acquaintance with and ability to source data on each national sociology across an array of different fields and over time. Sooryamoorthy develops a craftsman-like design to tackle this task and has produced a useful sourcebook documenting global sociology this millenium and providing an indispensable platform for further studies. His compilation spans three laborious tasks: discussions of national sociologies and fields of sociology; data on sociology publications; and discussions of commentaries on global sociology.

The first and last tasks are based on the amassed, nearly 30 pages, of references, in most cases briefly summarised in appropriate places in the text. These are invariably swiftly summarised and perhaps, for some particularly pertinent studies, some of the results might have been displayed to save readers having to look up material. Over many decades various handbooks have provided a global tour of national sociologies of field of sociology, although of course much is now historical. Moreover, the quality of such accounts varies enormously with observers of such sociologies facing a large task of summarising key features in a dispassionate and accurate way: a challenge not always successfully achieved. Sooryamoorthy leans most on the recent *Cambridge Handbook of Sociology* (Korgen, 2017) although this only has a few chapters covering regions. The three volume set edited by Burawoy

et al. (2010) is only sparingly drawn on, and the earlier ISA booklet series curated by Wallerstein is of course much out of date. Sooryamoorthy has vigorously scoured the published literature for articles which provide descriptions, although I think he has overlooked quite a few book-length treatments. The final chapter summarises issues which have been raised about the development of global sociology.

The heart (or rather the engine room) of the book is a major study of publications across the first two decades of the millenium (presumably the *historical* perspectives of the subtitle are incorporated with the summaries of literature). Ten percent of every other year (even years) between 2000 and 2018 are sampled from the *World of Science*. It may be a source of regret that insufficient attention is paid to the existing literature comparing the various data sources. This is supplemented by ten percent coverage of the WOS book and chapter database, although these were developed later in 2008 and 2010. Finally a 10 percent sample of the two ISA English-language journals *International Sociology* and *Current Sociology* (as a way of offsetting the limitations of the WOS database), which is carefully curated to include only journals of high quality. While the two journals are only of moderate ranking, they are undoubtedly the most global of the stable of sociology journals. So nearly 5,000 items are included. It is not clear how this dataset relates to the actual range of publications but at least it has the benefit of providing a multiplicity of sources (in the subsequent analyses each source is kept separate but also totals are provided).

In preparing the dataset for the study, Sooryamoorthy downloaded the identified items and supplemented the usually available information provided by the WOS (author(s), title, keywords, departmental affiliation of author, citation, field of research) by searching websites to identify the gender of authors, discipline (of training), location, disciplinary affiliation and gender of collaborators, methodology etc. I would have preferred (for replication purposes) more discussion of the coding of some variables. The data is largely presented in tables, with the two decades usually separately displayed (with totals and percentages presented). Some tables have many empty cells which is untidy. In general, the commentary is confined to reporting on key points in the tables or providing an account where there is not a supporting table. The results are spread across two chapters with the first table, while the second examines the characteristics of 17 research fields. (A short comparative analysis of a few fields shows that they differ considerably in relationships amongst their constituent characteristics).

Sooryamoorthy has a “flat” conceptualisation of global sociology:” i.e. global sociology is the sum total of the work produced by all sociologists around the world. It is 'flat' in the sense that all publications are heaped together so that, in effect, the global becomes a portrait of North American/European sociology – with only a couple of country by country tables available for teasing out core/periphery differences.

It is also 'flat' in that the infrastructure and body of researchers lying behind the production of knowledge is barely attended to. A contrast might be in Heilbron's work on globalisation of the social sciences where he proposes there are four levels to consider in understanding the globalisation of sociology, arguing that:

... the social sciences today are best seen as an emerging global field or world system, because they have come to include producers from virtually all countries and regions of the world. Like other transnational structures, this globalizing field is best characterized as a core-periphery structure, firmly dominated by producers, publishers and journals from Western countries. The power relations that derive from this structure form the background for much of the current



debate about global social science. What has been largely neglected in these debates, however, is that this emerging global field is interrelated with the equally increasing significance of transnational regional structures. Located between the national and the global level, these regional structures are essential for understanding the scope and significance of global institutions (2014: 687).

While the writing is mainly clear there are some strange constructions, as well as far too frequent a recourse to platitudes – which don't convey much meaning and with occasional jarring wretches of subject focus. Sooryamoorthy's almost unrelenting positive sensibility hides conflicts, for example, the latent conflicts between the various 'worlds' pertinent in much earlier decades. Nevertheless, the literature on the globalisation of sociology has tended to rely too much on discussions or on high-level generalisations of patterns and trends, so Sooryamoorthy's work will help establish it on a much stronger footing for the future.

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