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A larger grain of sense. Making early non-Western sociological thought visible

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Abstract: There are different ways to read sociological theory “against the grain”, as Walter Benjamin put it in 1940. The issue of invisibility – or invisibilization – is certainly the most important one. The mainstream and canonical narrative of the history of sociology and of sociological ideas and theories hardly leaves any room to non-Western appropriations and indigenizations from the late 19th century onwards. The article wants to offer another disciplinary history and another chronology by relying on instances from the late 19th century and early 20th century especially in Latin America and Asia (Japan and China). The circulation of different authors, books and theories, as well as their different reception according to the different countries and their different intellectual, social and political environments makes it possible to design a new chronology of sociological theory and of the institutionalization of the discipline. Despite the epistemic hegemony that was already established in the second half of the 19th century with the diffusion of sociological thought from France and Great-Britain (with Comte and Spencer), this circulation was no mere transplantation but rather a complex and selective appropriation that makes it possible for very different visions of the meaning of “sociology” as a movement of thought and also as an academic discipline.

Keywords: Sociological theory. History of sociology. Invisibilization. Latin America. Asia.

A larger grain of sense. Tornando visível o pensamento sociológico não-ocidental primevo

Resumo: Há diferentes caminhos para ler a teoria sociológica “a contrapelo”, como Walter Benjamin o colocou em 1940. A questão da invisibilidade – ou da invisibilização – é certamente a mais importante. A narrativa mainstream e canônica da história da sociologia e das ideias e teorias sociológicas raramente deixa espaço, a partir do final do século XIX, para apropriações e indigenizações não ocidentais. Este artigo busca oferecer outra história disciplinar e outra cronologia, ao apoiar-se nos exemplos do final do século XIX e começo do século XX, especialmente na América Latina e Ásia (Japão e China). A circulação de diferentes autores, livros e teorias, bem como as suas distintas recepções, de acordo com seus países e seus diferentes contextos intelectuais, sociais e políticos, torna possível desenhar uma nova cronologia da teoria sociológica e da institucionalização da disciplina. Apesar da hegemonia epistêmica já estabelecida na segunda metade do século XIX, haja vista a difusão do pensamento sociológico a partir da França e da Grã-Bretanha (com Comte e Spencer), essa circulação não foi uma mera transplantação mas, antes, uma apro-

priação complexa e seletiva, tornando possíveis óticas muito diferentes do significado de “sociologia”, tanto enquanto movimento de pensamento como disciplina acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: Teoria sociológica. História da sociologia. Invisibilização. América Latina. Ásia.

Introduction

In his 1940 study “On the concept of history”, the German thinker Walter Benjamin warns his reader against the risks of not properly understanding the mechanisms through which history is transmitted from one generation to the other:

With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of prior conquerors. Hence, empathizing with the victor invariably benefits the current rulers. The historical materialist knows what this means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. [...] There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain (Benjamin, 2003: 391-392).

The history of a discipline being usually written by the winners and the dominant ones, spending some time exploring its various “blank pages” offers the possibility to write a more “actual” history, as well as to reflect upon the conditions of possibility and impossibility to escape the weight of this history when one is dominated by it. However highlighting “the fight for the oppressed past” (Benjamin, 2003: 396)¹ implies much more than a mere reversal. The history of sociology that is needed is not a counter-history, not an alternative history, nor a history from below as opposed to a history from above... We should both and at the same time look into the production mechanisms of a simple history – the Western-centered one that never has to justify its existence since the pretention to universalism is sufficient to make any other form of history invisible and unnecessary – and into the strategies of resistance to this history and to hegemony. Writing a new history of sociology that would contribute to its decolonization would be tantamount to writing a genealogical history in order to refuse both teleology and presentism. In this respect, such a history would be “writing the history of the present” (Foucault 1991: 31), not in present terms or with present questions but with the very categories and ideas that were considered in the studied period of time and in the various locations where

1. One has to note that the German word here translated by “oppressed”, *unterdrückte*, may also mean “suppressed” (Benjamin, 2003: 400, note 27).

things happened. It also means paying attention to how “only history can free us from history” (Bourdieu, 1982: 9), as essentialized and naturalized narratives of the past obscure both its contingency and its patterns of domination. Writing history can then be seen as having a liberating power, provided it includes into the act of searching what has been left out and silenced the very processes through which epistemic hegemony was produced and reproduced over time.

For instance, as we’ll try to show in the first section of this article through the analysis of French, German and Anglophone sociology textbooks or works addressing the history of sociology, it is usually considered that the discipline was born in Europe in the late 19th century, that its founding “fathers” are European or American and that it only later spread from these regions to the rest of the world. This vision of the “diffusion” process is largely untrue. By the time sociology started to be discussed in Europe (including Central Europe and Russia) and America, it was also in others parts of the world that are frequently seen as having no sociology before the 1940s or even the 1950s. If the Arab world and Sub-Saharan Africa are specific cases due to the persistence of colonialism until the second half of the 20th century, Latin America and East Asia represent good instances to study the presence of “sociology” – as a word or as an emergent discipline at times when the canonical narrative does not acknowledge them. In this respect, showing the complexity of how “sociology” was diffused and appropriated in Latin America and East Asia at the turn of the 20th century opens new paths for the understanding of the invisibility of these phenomena in most works addressing the history of the discipline. It also creates new opportunities to challenge classical epistemology about the meaning of universalism.

The invisibility of the Rest²

The recent “Sociology Transformed” series edited by John Holmwood and Stephen Turner at Palgrave has published twenty-three books since 2014, each devoted to the sociology of one country³. If only six of them are devoted to a non-Western country (South Africa, China, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Ecuador), this figure is nevertheless important to notice against the background of the common trends appearing in the literature concerning history of sociology.

As shown in Dufoix (2022), the French books explicitly devoted to the history of the discipline (Bouthoul, 1950; Giraud, 2004; Simon 2008; Cuin, Gresle & Hervouet, 2017) or to the history of sociological ideas and theories (e.g Delas & Milly, 2021; Lallement, 2017) reduce the global landscape of sociology to a group of five countries of varying importance (France, the United States, Germany, Britain and Italy).

2. Taking up the distinction established by Stuart Hall (1992) between “the West” and “the Rest”.

3. By year of publication, between 2014 and 2022, the countries in question are: United States (2014), Australia (2014), Ireland (2015), Sweden (2015), Denmark (2015), Portugal (2016), Poland (2016), South Africa (2016), post-1945 France (2016), Austria (2016), post-1945 Italy (2017), Russia (2017), Czech Republic (2017), Israel (2018), China (2018), Belgium (2018), New Zealand (2018), Brazil (2019), Hungary (2019), Argentina (2020), Great Britain (2020), Germany (2021), Chile (forthcoming 2022), Ecuador (forthcoming 2022), Serbia (forthcoming 2022) and Greece (forthcoming 2022).

This restrictive synecdoche restricts the history of sociological practices and meanings to those that developed in these five countries. As a consequence, the vast majority of these works can at the same time retrospectively justify the limitation of the history to that of the history of ideas and theories, the late appearance of sociology in other parts of the world, its “late” development and, ipso facto, its absence in the most general works on the discipline. “Sociology” does not need to be situated or geographically indexed since the figure of speech suffices to “demonstrate” its universal reality, that of the definite article that makes manifest the logic of the common noun as well as that of the “point of view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986; also see Castro-Gómez, 2005). Despite its title, Albion Small’s *Origins of sociology* (1924) deals almost exclusively with the state of social science methodology in Germany and its impact in the USA, while the portraits of the founders (for instance in Aron, 1965-1967) tend to “heroise” the scheme around a few figures, but generally still restrict the scheme to authors from three European countries – France, Germany and Italy – namely Montesquieu, Tocqueville, Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Pareto.

4. It should be noted, however, that out of the nine chapters in question, five concern France, the United States, Great Britain, Germany and Italy, thus reproducing the synecdoche mentioned above. The other four deal with Spain, Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America (this last chapter being written by Roger Bastide who held the chair of sociology at the University of São Paulo between 1938 and 1954). The Spanish translation of the same book – published in 1956 in Buenos Aires – added six other chapters to Bastide’s (Argentina, Brazil, Pacific Latin American countries, Venezuela, Central America and the West Indies, and finally on Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay, for a total of 212 pages (compared to 22 in the American version!).

As noticed by Suzie Guth (2008), the earliest French textbooks from the 1920s to the 1940s were overwhelmingly devoted to French, American, English and German authors. This is mostly the case in the post-war period, with the notable exception of *Twentieth Century Sociology* (Gurvitch and Moore, 1945), the second volume of which includes several chapters on the state of sociology in different countries or regions of the world⁴. In the first two chapters of Armand Cuvillier’s *Manuel de sociologie* (1950: 1-95), European and North American references are overwhelmingly prominent. Three pages (84-86) are nevertheless devoted to Romanian, Polish and Russian sociology. However, the bibliography of the second chapter – “After Auguste Comte” – includes two pages (94 and 95) where references to European countries not often mentioned (Netherlands, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Turkey) are compiled, as well as to Latin American countries (Argentina and Brazil) and Asian countries (Japan and China).

In the Germanophone literature devoted to the history of sociology or of sociological thought and theory, the most recent studies (e.g. Korte, 2011) usually do not take non-Western sociologies into account. Similarly, despite being very innovative in form and content, the recent book edited by Christian Fleck and Christian Dayé (2020) is limited to Western sociology. The “classics” inventoried by Dirk Käsler (1999) are all German, French, American or British, and only men! In contrast, the work of Heinz Maus – written in 1956 for the *Handbuch der Soziologie* edited by Werner Ziegenfuß, then translated into English in 1962 – begins by offering a fairly classical analysis of the evolution of social theory in the main European countries (in-

cluding Belgium and pre-revolutionary Russia) up to the end of the First World War, before tracing the recent evolution of American sociology. He then devotes about fifty pages (out of 216) to what he calls “world-wide sociology”, of which about 35 are devoted to the cases of Eastern Europe, the Middle and Far East, and then Latin America. Between the two, we find the work of Leopold von Wiese (1971), whose first edition dates from 1926. According to him, the small format of his book does not allow him to give an account of the development of the discipline in the world, but he points out in one sentence that it’s present in Latin America, India, China and Mexico (von Wiese, 1971: 92) before referring to the original edition of Maus and then proposing a paragraph of about twenty lines on Japan (von Wiese (1971: 95). Finally, the history of sociology written by Friedrich Jonas (1981) is neither systematic nor extensive on this point. However, it briefly mentions – which is quite rare – the appropriation of sociology in South America at the end of the 19th century, citing names such as the Dominican sociologist Eugenio de Hostos, the Argentine Ernesto Quesada or the Peruvian Mariano Cornejo (Jonas, 1981, v. 2: 105). Jonas also devotes three pages (Jonas, 1981, v. 2: 156-158) to the development of South American sociology (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina), citing important authors such as Orlando Fals Borda, Luís Álvaro Costa Pinto, Fernando de Azevedo, Florestan Fernandes, Alfredo Poviña, Lucio Mendieta y Núñez or Luis Recasens Siches.

The English-language literature seems – once again on the basis of a quick analysis that would be worth greater developments – to be divided between fairly old works that remained attentive, until the 1950s and 1960s, to the scope of the world sociological space, and more recent texts that ignore this fact, ignore this dimension or consider it negligible. The nearly one thousand pages book edited by Elmer E. Barnes (1917) on the history of sociology only pays lip service to non-Western sociology. After an introduction devoted to the “sociology before Comte” based on ancient, medieval and modern authors – the Arab thinker Ibn Khaldûn appears twice (Barnes, 1917: 24 and 28). The first part focuses on the “pioneers” (all European or North American: Comte, Spencer, Ward, Morgan, Sumner, Gumpowicz); the other four parts are organized geographically but in a much more limited way (Germanic countries, non-Germanic continental European sociology, British sociologists, sociological theory in the Americas). Only one chapter, the last one, formally devoted to Cornejo but more broadly devoted to sociology in Latin America, is written by the American sociologist Luther Lee Bernard, who had already written articles on Cornejo (1942) or on sociology in Argentina (1927), ten years before Harry Barnes’ and Howard Becker’s *Social Thought from Lore to Science* (1938).

Less well known, the collective work edited by Joseph Roucek in 1958 on contemporary sociology devotes 430 pages (out of 1200!) to the development of sociology

outside the United States. While about 200 of these concern the European and North American world, about 230 are organized around chapters on Latin America, Soviet Russia, Japan, China, India, Africa or the Middle East! With the exception of the third edition of *Social thought from Lore to Science*, in 1961, this is probably the earliest work to take into account the global landscape of sociology before the various collective works appearing in 2010 (Burawoy, Chang & Hsieh, 2010; Patel, 2010; *World Social Science Report*, 2010). While it is much more organized by themes and theories than by authors and countries, Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet's classic work (1978) on the history of sociological analysis includes, to my knowledge, only one reference to a non-Western author, the Brazilian economist and sociologist Theotonio dos Santos, who is cited in relation to dependency theory in Steven Lukes' chapter on "Power and Authority" (Bottomore & Nisbet, 1978: 637). In contrast, the works of Rollin Chambliss (1954), Lewis Coser (1971), Geoffrey Hawthorn (1976), Alan Swingewood (1984) and even the more recent books by Albert Halsey (2004) or Plamena Panayotova (2019) are completely silent on regions of the world outside the European or North American world.

In concrete terms, it emerges from this very quick overview that the historical account presented by the authors of textbooks or general books that sociology is a Western science whose most important thoughts, authors and concepts are limited to a very small number of countries (five for the period considered as the founders' period, three or four if the whole period is taken into account). At the same time, it confounds this Western vision of sociology with the actual history of the discipline, thus making the former the only genesis and center of it. It also follows – and this must be seen as an effect of the synecdoche mechanism mentioned above – that sociologists working – as well as the forms of sociology practiced – in Latin America, the Arab world, sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and the Asia-Pacific region are almost entirely invisibilized by this history, which confuses the historicity of a discipline with the supposed historicity of its ideas and theories. A closer look at the emergence of sociological thinking in Latin America and East Asia at the turn of the 20th century not only shows that the word *sociology* had spread from France to other regions of the world but also that this diffusion was not a mere transplantation.

National appropriations of "sociology"

If it is usually considered nowadays that the first sociology courses were delivered in the United States, either by Robert E. Thompson at the University of Pennsylvania in 1874 (Blasi, 2005: 321) or by William Graham Sumner at Yale in 1875 (Williams, 2006: 2; Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2007: 64), it is however not trivial to insist on the fact that another American, Ernest Fenollosa, taught the first sociology course in

Japan in 1878 (Yazawa, 2014: 272) before being replaced as early as 1883 by a Japanese, Shoichi Toyama – who held the first chair of sociology in Japan from 1893. One can also take into account the lecture given by the Colombian Salvador Camacho Roldan on sociology at the National University of Bogotá in 1882 (Blanco, 2005: 25) which Hélió Trindade (2018: 27) considers – falsely relying on Blanco – to be the first sociology course in the world. We may also think of the sociology course given by Eugenio de Hostos at the Normal School of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from 1883 (Giner, 1963: 219) – which provides the material for his *Tratado de sociología* published posthumously in 1904. Where do these facts lead us?

The term invented by Comte does not spread spontaneously. It is carried by translators of his work, as well as by publishers or personal or collective networks. Its passage into the English-speaking world was ensured by several translations of his work, the most popular of which was Harriet Martineau's English summary of the *Cours de philosophie positive* in 1853 (Hill, 2017) before the publication (1875-1877) of the *System of Positive Politics* by John Henry Bridges, Frederic Harrison, Edward Spencer Beesly, Richard Congreve and Henry Dix Hutton⁵. During the second half of the 19th century, the different circulations and appropriations of positivism (Feichtinger, Fillaferm & Surman, 2018; Heilbron, 2007) – be it Comtean or not – and of Spencerism (Lightman, 2016) in Western and Eastern European countries⁶, as well as in the United States⁷, but also in other parts of the world like Latin America and East Asia are generally responsible for the various vernacular emergences of linguistic equivalents of *sociologie* or *sociology*.

The foundation in Caracas in 1877 of the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales⁸ – whose first director was Rafael Villavicencio, a former physician introduced to positivism and the social sciences by the German botanist Adolf Ernst, who emigrated to Venezuela in 1861 and disseminated the works of Comte and Darwin (Harwich Vallenilla, 1990) – marks one of the earliest stages in the Latin American adoption of the term. Before the end of the 19th century, other dates also indicate the extent to which the notion of sociology – which could hardly yet be called a discipline – met with the desire of the intellectual and political elites in several Latin American states that had recently become independent to found a new cohesion on a “scientific” basis in countries marked by deep rifts. The lecture on sociology given in 1882 by the Colombian lawyer Salvador Camacho Roldan at the National University of Bogotá (Camacho Roldan, 1936) is sometimes considered as the creation of the first chair of sociology in the world (Uribe, Henao & Hernández, 1982). The sociology course given by the Dominican philosopher Eugenio de Hostos at the Normal School of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from 1883 (Giner, 1963) is also one of these first initiatives identified but not well documented. The first chairs were founded in

5. On the trajectories and work of the first three translators cited above, see Wilson (2019).

6. The Russian publicist Valentin Maikov had read Comte in French. He was the first one to introduce positivism into Russia. See Titarenko and Zdravomyslova (2017: 16).

7. The first two books having sociology in their title were published in 1854 in the South of the United States. They relied on Comtean positivism to defend the preservation of slave society. Their authors, Henry Hughes and George Fitzhugh, still deserve nothing but only one sentence in Craig Calhoun (2007: 5-6). On this “sociology in the South”, which was not professional but remains fundamental to understand the international connections and the dead-ends of certain births of sociology, see Luther Lee Bernard (1937).

8. The addresses delivered during the inaugural sessions of the Institute are available in Luis Villalba Villalba (1961).

9. This book was translated into French in 1911 within the “Bibliothèque Sociologique Internationale” series directed by René Worms. See Sébastien Mosbah-Natanson (2015: 186).

Peru in 1896 at the Universidad San Marcos in Lima (Navarrette, 2005: 302; Núñez, 2016: 187; Giner, 1963: 219); in Argentina at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1898 (Pereyra, 2000; 2007); in Bolivia at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés de La Paz in 1902 (Romero Pittari, 1997: 4); or in Peru in 1915 at the Central University of Ecuador (Altmann, 2022: 17). The social scientists who held them were not unknown scholars: the Peruvian Mariano Cornejo, Eugenio de Hostos and the Argentinian Antonio Dellepiane each had their own entry in Fausto Squillace’s *Dizionario di sociologia* in 1911 (Squillace, 1911). They also wrote general sociological treatises published at the turn of the century like Eugenio de Hostos’ *Tratado de sociología* in 1904 or Mariano Cornejo’s *Sociología general* in 1908⁹. It was also in Peru, though never mentioned in sociology textbooks, that one of the first, if not the first, work of urban sociology, *Sociología de Lima*, by Joaquín Capelo, was published in 1895, recently hailed by Barbara Celarent – aka Andrew Abbott – as one of the “early classics of sociology” (Celarent, 2017: 294).

In 1899, the Argentine Juan Agustín García, who taught social sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, gives an example of how early visions of sociological thinking in Latin America did not necessarily adopt a European or Western conception of it. In his introductory book to social sciences, he intended to trace their broad outlines “from an exclusively national point of view [...] to show students that it is feasible to form Argentine social sciences and that our economic, social and political phenomena are just as interesting as those of Europeans”. According to him, it was a “serious mistake” to persist in trying to use classical approaches for new countries, because “the social facts there have an originality that is obvious” (García, 1907: 5-6, my translation).

If *sociología* was the easy translation of *sociologie* or *sociology*, the issue was much more complicated on the other side of the Pacific when sociological thinking emerged in Japan and China. In the former country, the neologisms *shakai* (社会) and *shakaigaku* (社会学) respectively translating *society* and *sociology*, were coined in 1875 and 1878 (Saitō, 2015: 74-79). The translations of Herbert Spencer’s *Social Statics* in 1882 and of the *Principles of Sociology* in 1885 established both terms as part of the academic lexicon. From the late 1850s onwards, after the compulsory opening of their country due to Western pressures, Japanese political and intellectual elites in Japan considered it a duty to open the country to the scientific and technological progress while keeping the tradition of the “Japanese spirit” (Souyri, 2016). After the sending to Europe and the United States of several scientific missions, the goal of which was to gather as much Western knowledge as possible, the Japanese government implemented a specific policy aimed at hiring foreign instructors for Japanese universities (Burks, 1985). This is how the American philos-

opher Ernest Fenollosa became the first professor teaching sociology – and notably Spencerian sociology – in Japan in 1878. In a few decades, Japanese sociology became highly structured with specific lectures at Tokyo Imperial University from the early 1880s; the first book entitled *Sociology (Shaikaigaku)* by Arigai Nagao in 1883; the first chair held by Shoichi Toyama in 1893; the first national association of sociology established in 1898 (Shakaigaku Kenkyūkai); the first sociological journal, *Shakai*, founded in 1899; the first specific department of sociology created in 1910; and, in 1913, the foundation of the Institute of Sociology (Nihon Shakai Gakuin)¹⁰. Its founder was Takebe Tongo, one of the most famous Japanese sociologists of the early 20th century and the author of a four-volumed *General sociology (Futsû shakaigaku)* published between 1904 and 1918 (Takebe, 2007)¹¹.

China followed with a slight delay. After a first discovery of Spencer through the translation of one chapter of *The Study of Sociology* by Yan Fu in 1897 – the very same year when Japan defeated China and thus became the country via which sociology became more and more known – in China too, a translation from Spencer – in this case *The Study of Sociology*, first partially translated in 1897 before the book was released in Chinese in 1902 – indicates the first real contact with sociology when the famous translator Yan Fu coined the word *qunxue* (群学) while, in 1902 as well, another Chinese translator, Zhang Taiyan, started using the word *shehuixue* (社会学) – that became predominant soon after – as a mere borrowing from *shaikaigaku* in his 1902 translation of Kishimoto Nobuta's *Shakaigaku* book published in 1898 (Gianninoto, 2013: 288). However, these translations of sociology in Japanese and Chinese should be less understood as Western transplants in these two countries than as complex importations that cannot be dissociated from a more general trend: Westernization is an issue that is all the more divisive among the political, economic and cultural elites as it is inscribed within specific historical contexts of major political and social transformations, and of rivalry between regional powers. Language was an important part of these processes (Huang, 2012; Howland, 2002).

The first sociology courses were delivered in American Christian missions in China from 1906 and the first department of sociology was founded in 1913 at the Hujiang College of the University of Shanghai by the American Methodist Episcopalians (Chen, 2018: 12). The early 1920s saw an acceleration in the institutionalization of the discipline in the country: the first department of sociology (and history) in a Chinese university was established in Xianmen in 1921; the first Chinese Society of Sociology was created in 1922, as well as the first sociology journal, *Shehuixue Zashi*. By 1930, China counted eleven distinct sociology departments and seventeen in 1934 (King, 1978: 38; Wong, 1979: 19). In his 1948 report, Sun Benwen recorded 143 sociology instructors in China (Chen, 2018: 14)¹².

10. On the history of Japanese sociology, see notably Kawamura (1994) and Steiner (1936). It seems that no specific degree in sociology existed in Japan before the second half of the 20th century.

11. This book is a translation of Takebe's introduction to the first volume and of a small part of the third one.

12. On the state of Chinese sociology before the Communist coup, see Sun Benwen (1949). His name is written Pen-Wen in this article.

In 1930s China, marked by the development of sociology departments in universities as well as its institutionalization, as signaled by the creation in 1930 of the Chinese Sociological Association (Zhongguo shehuixue she, 中國社會學社) as well as the first sociological journal, the question of what was then called either the *Sinicisation* (Zhongguohua, 中國化) or the *indigenization* (bentuhua, 本土化) of the discipline was at the heart of the debates, particularly under the leadership of the leading Chinese sociologist of the time, Sun Benwen. He left to study sociology in the United States in 1921 – where he attended the universities of Illinois, Columbia and Chicago – and returned to China in 1926 to teach at Fudan University and then at Nanjing Central University. As president of the National Association and editor-in-chief of the journal, he insisted that sociology in China should be Chinese, but he also said that the first priority was to “use the methods of European and American sociology, to put in order the social thoughts and systems already present in China with the help of the doctrines of precise and effective Western sociologists, and to set up, on the basis of the present state of this discipline in China, a comprehensive Chinese sociology with a system and an organization”¹³. At its sixth congress in January 1937, the Association officially called for the “establishment of a Chinese sociology” (Zhongguo shehuixue zhi jianshe, 中國社會學之建設) (Dirlik, 2012: 16-17).

13. Sun Benwen, *Geren jihu <个人计划>* (Individual Planification [1932], in Liu Yingdong (Dir.), *Mengxiang Zhongguo – sanshi niandai zhishijie dui weilai de zhanwang* « 梦想的中国 — 三十年代知识界对未来的展望 » (*Dreamt China: The Hopes of Intellectuals in the 1930s*), Beijing, Xiyuan chubanshe, 1998: 18-19, quoted in Zhou (2017). About the importance of Sun Benwen in 1930s and 1940s Chinese sociology, see also Li (2012).

Epistemological effects of decentering

Turning one’s gaze to Latin American and East Asian instances and showing how this decentering helps us discover a silenced history is not only a mere historical gesture. It also implies epistemological and conceptual effects. Relying on the most interesting social science works about circulation and reception, it becomes possible to move away from the classical diffusionist perspective that emphasizes a one-way path from North to South and a strong exportation-importation pattern leaving hardly if any place for Southern appropriations. Historical studies about scientific exchanges and borrowings going both ways (for instance Raj, 2007) have successfully challenged the ethnocentric diffusionist vision. Moreover, if the empirical direction of the “diffusion” can now be understood differently, some more conceptual works (Keim, 2014; 2016; Rodriguez Medina, 2014a) have insisted on the conditions of epistemic circulation and on how translations, translators and scholarly networks play a crucial role in differential appropriations of concepts and theories. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions (Rodriguez Medina, 2014b), empirical case studies are still rather rare.

What do the various elements from the previous section tell us? First of all, they show us a completely different chronology from the one generally proposed, whether we take the case of Latin American countries or East Asian ones. Secondly,

the comparison between these experiences shows us a profound difference. Indeed, the history of sociology in Japan at the turn of the 20th century shows us a rather rapid institutionalization: dedicated courses, chairs, publication of manuals, creation of professional associations, founding of journals¹⁴. On the other hand, the Latin American examples do not follow the same trajectory: the creation of courses and the writing of “sociological” works in discussion with the European and/or American traditions do not lead to disciplinary and academic institutionalization. The vast majority of sociology departments, degrees and professional associations were founded in the 1950s and 1960s, including in “pioneer” countries such as Colombia and Argentina. Thirdly, the national appropriations of the word *sociology* or of some early theoretical texts by Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Franklin Giddings, Émile Durkheim or Gabriel Tarde¹⁵ shows a great plurality of experiences and combinations that largely challenges the usual vision displayed by histories of sociology when they retrospectively design the evolution of the discipline by looking at the past with the categories of the present instead of searching the present categories of the past.

How can a more fruitful dialogue between the past and the present be initiated if the past itself is so much deprived of its contingency and plurality that an important part of the contemporary issues around social sciences in general becomes almost totally invisible because it seems to be less about science than about politics (Dufoix & Macé, 2019)? To take just one example, how can one understand and apprehend in a concrete and effective way the claims for the “decolonization of sociology” if one does not grasp both the historical and conceptual role played by imperialism in the development of Western sociology (Connell, 2007; Steinmetz, 2013), but also the prevalence of Western hegemony in the production and control of sociological knowledge production (Gareau, 1988; World Social Science Report, 2010; Boatcă, Costa & Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010; Bhabra, 2014; Mosbah-Natanson & Gingras, 2014)?

One may think of such recent movements as Rhodes Must Fall at the University of Cape Town in 2015, where the denunciation of the presence of the Cecil Rhodes statue in the center of the campus led to demands for curricular and recruitment policy changes (Chantiluke, Kwoba & Nkopo, 2018; Educational Research for Social Change, 2018). The political dimension cannot be dissociated from the academic dimension, just as it had been the case in the 1970s when African-American students denounced the absence of university courses about Africa or slavery in the United States and eventually paved the way for the creation of Black studies. The Rhodes Must Fall movement, in elective affinity with other forms of critique of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences that had developed in Europe, North Ameri-

14. In contrast, it seems that there was no specific sociology degree in Japan until the post-WWII period.

15. The reception of these authors and authors would deserve a whole study. Let's insist on the fact that Durkheim was not translated in Japanese before the 1930s – which does not mean he was not used, for instance by Takebe – whereas Weber became known, translated and used outside Germany only from the 1930s on (Hanke, 2015).

16. <<https://decolonisinglse.wordpress.com/>>.

17. <<https://decolonisesociology.com/>>.

18. <<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/about/>>.

19. This is a special issue dated December 1968 and entitled “Academic Colonialism” of the Indian periodical Seminar. On this special issue and on the question of “academic colonialism” more generally, see the special issue “Intellectual Imperialism” of *Seminar*, n. 747, Nov. 2021.

ca or Latin America – in particular postcolonial or decolonial approaches – served as a trigger for a wave of demands, notably in the Netherlands, but also in Great Britain in institutions as prestigious as the London School of Economics and Political Science¹⁶, the University of Cambridge¹⁷ or the very symbolic School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)¹⁸ (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancioğlu, 2018).

One must keep in mind that these claims are not new. In one way or another, they run through the history of sociology and anthropology. These claims about the originality of social phenomena elsewhere than in the West can be traced throughout the 20th century, but they multiply – and especially begin to undergo a process of intertextualization – in the late 1960s in the form of criticisms of the colonial dimension of knowledge, whether they give a name to this reality – “scientific colonialism” (Galtung, 1967), “academic colonialism” (Seminar, 1968)¹⁹ or “intellectual colonialism” (Fals Borda, 1970) – or call for the “decolonization” of this reality, as can be read very explicitly in the writings of the Moroccan sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi (1967) and thinker Tahar Ben Jelloun (1974) in direct relation to France.

The defense of the originality of social facts in different countries, as emphasized by Juan Agustín García in the case of Argentina, has often taken the form of a demand for greater “relevance” of the concepts used by sociologists to describe social phenomena in non-Western countries (Alatas S. F., 1995 and 2006). In one of the first colloquia on this issue in the late 1960s, the Filipino sociologist Aurelio Calderon argued that “the indiscriminate transplantation of Western-oriented social science methods is like getting a car out of a Detroit mass production line, a car designed for the American highways, and hoping that it will operate smoothly in the rain forests and rice paddies of Southeast Asia or the highlands and desert regions of Asia as a whole” (Calderon, 1968: 44). A few years later, Syed Hussein Alatas (1972 and 1974) also denounced this form of false universalism, which he called “methodological imperialism” (Alatas, 1974: 695) and studied its effects through the mirror notions of “captive mind” and “captor mind”. The reason why the transplantation is carried out without taking into account the particularity of local situations is that sociology teachers in Asian countries, whether they themselves are Westerners or their “Asian disciples” (Alatas, 1974: 698), apply to any situation a theoretical and conceptual grid of analysis that is supposed to be universal (see Shapin, 1988). The “captive mind” is then made prisoner, via a “captor mind”, of a thought that is both situated, in its hegemony, and not situated, in its epistemology.

This non-situationality takes two different forms: the universality of the Western concepts and the non-historicity of the sociological canon. The latter – as a solidified and neutralized form of the canonization process – is so solid that the “can-

non fodder” – to retain the expression used by the American writer Toni Morrison (1988) to designate the victims of this form of domination – simply disappears from the history of the discipline in favor of the pure and unadulterated account of theories that follow one another, complement one another or only ask for synthesis. Whether one considers the canon – a term that until recently was rarely used by sociologists to evoke both the origin and the core of their references, unlike “founders” or “pioneers” – in terms of exemplarity, biographical and national incarnation, or disciplined memorial narrative of the discipline, if one wishes to “get out of” it, one must know “what” to get out of. One must be able to name the canon – that is, to show as a historical product, thus situated not only temporally, but also geographically and culturally, what appears in the textbooks only in the form of a self-evident fact to be learnt, retained and repeated- and the processes of eviction that historically compose it while at the same time eternalizing it. It is also necessary to consider how the process might be broken, how a return to history might produce a history other than the one that has imposed itself as history itself, the history both defined by the definite article, but also the history conceived as the definitive and self-evident account of the discipline.

In the last thirty years, there has been many debate around the issue of the sociological canon and how it should be approached. Some have considered abandoning it altogether (Au, 2019), modifying it (Dowd, 1991), or restoring it as Alan How (2016) would like to do in a way that is quite similar to what Jeffrey Alexander (1987) had already advocated in the late 1980s in favor of the “centrality of the classics” – this is also largely Peter Baehr's argument (2002). Some other have reflected the question of the canon in a more reflexive, historical but also more contemporary way, whether by replacing it with another term (“anthologies”, “catalogue”) that would more adequately reflect the current situation (Jubber, 2006). Paying attention to “forgotten” or “neglected” social scientists (Conner, Baxter & Dickens, 2019; Law & Lybeck, 2015) has also been seen as a potential rewriting of the canon, even if most of the “forgotten” ones come from the Western world. In the same vein, of course, claims about the necessity to incorporate sociologists having been discriminated for their gender or race (Deegan, 1981 and 1988; Lengermann & Niebrugge, 1998; Morris, 2015; Parra Saiani, 2020; Miri, 2021; Burawoy, 2021; Gruening and Santoro, 2021) usually claim at changing the canon or at least transforming the history of sociology, but they hardly if ever include non-Western thinkers²⁰.

As a consequence, I consider that the most interesting proposals – as far as working against the grain is concerned – are those that, rather than simply positing the imperative need for the canon in a normative and often a-historical way, propose to situate its evolution within the overall process of canonization (Connell, 2019),

20. For a contrasted vision, see Alatas (2021) and Dufoix (2021).

thus paving the way for a broader – historically and geographically – consideration of the texts, concepts and theories produced (Alatas, 2021; Dufoix, 2021; Celarent, 2017; Connell, 2007). Alatas and Sinha (2017: 15) envision to “expand the playing field” rather than propose a new list of texts to be read at all costs. Regardless of the epistemic locus from which the canon is debated, for its maintenance, extension, replacement or disappearance, it has become an issue impossible to ignore or set aside. If French sociology does not yet seem to have fully grasped the scope and urgency of the issue, understanding the processes of disciplinary canonization is a salutary opening to other spaces of knowledge production, but also to a better consideration of the spatialized historicity of sociology.

Final remarks

In a recent article, the Austrian sociologist Christian Dayé (2018), who co-edited with Stephan Moebius an epistemological work on the history of sociology (Dayé & Moebius, 2014) lists and describes four reasons why the history of sociology – as a field of enquiry – is useful: its ability to forge the identity of the discipline, its role in teaching sociology, its ability to inform contemporary research and finally the way it serves to reflect on the current state of sociology. On this last point, he believes that “conceived as a historical sociology of knowledge about the social, HoS [history of sociology] would function as a corrective to the leading discourses within the discipline” (Dayé, 2018: 532). This way of understanding both history of sociology and historical sociology of knowledge is indeed a solution to make a greater sense of the past of the discipline as being broader than usually written in the canonical disciplinary histories. Hence, it becomes possible to incorporate into this new history the very process of eviction and exclusion that stands at the heart of the hegemonic mechanism, as well as the counter-hegemonic claims and movements in favor of another definition of universalism through a stronger emphasis on relevance and plurality. In this respect, such an academic enterprise would not be tantamount to a counter-history, a reverse history or even a postcolonial one since the focus on non-Western social sciences does not aim at giving them a specific importance or priority. It rather tries to rethink the whole process of disciplinary narrative writing by both unearthing the actual geneses and evolutions of non-Western social sciences, and explaining the social mechanisms that have historically produced the current epistemic hegemony. This opening to the world would not only be a potentially powerful tool for a better acknowledgement of non-Western sociologies but also a path forward for a better plural universalism (Dufoix & Hanafi, 2019).

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