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# SOCIOLOGY'S GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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Issues related to globalization are central to most contemporary works in sociology, no matter the specialization. During the past two decades, sociologists have investigated the effects of globalization on most aspects of social life and the extent and variety of the research and literature on the subject have been widely commented upon. This special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* represents a modest attempt to stimulate a discussion of the relation sociology itself has with globalization. These papers examine the contemporary transformations of the organization of sociological work and the production of sociological research and discourse in the context of the growing interaction of local, national, regional, and global networks.

The *Canadian Journal of Sociology's* open source format, something partly motivated by a vision of bringing sociology into a new global era,<sup>1</sup> is an ideal venue for such an initiative. Canadian sociology, of course, is a small national version of the discipline. In English Canada, in particular, our culture and style of research is more influenced by US and British sociology than most other sociological traditions and thus less fully global than we might think. While the role for Canadian sociology in globalizing the discipline inevitably must be modest, however, Canadian sociology's dual identity as both an English- and French-speaking discipline and the open access format of one of our two major journals allow us to contribute to a globally oriented sociological research and scholarly debate that is freely available to scholars throughout the world irrespective of the ability to pay expensive subscription rates. We believe the cost of accessing knowledge under the contemporary regime of privately controlled academic journals is a major impediment to a truly global sociology and the intellectual community more broadly. This special issue, in an open source format, thus represents a step forward in a much larger discussion about the global nature and potential of sociology today.

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1. See Haggerty, Kevin D. 2008. "Taking the Plunge: Open Access at the Canadian Journal of Sociology" in *Information Research* 13(1). Available online: <http://InformationR.net/ir/13-1/paper338.html>

Ultimately, the authors of our special issue reflect the basic contours of the debate in the global sociological community regarding globalization itself. The more theoretically inclined among us consider it important to think about how to name and conceptualize the contemporary dynamics, while empirical researchers and regional subfield specialists tend to be more interested in thinking about one specific aspect of this whole picture. This special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* does both of these things, appropriately so. It provides articles that deal with the various specific dynamics regarding our profession's relationship to processes of globalization and internationalization as well as offering critical evaluations of how our discipline has recently evolved with an eye towards possible futures.

The issue is divided in three sections. In the first section, we gathered three theoretically informed papers examining global sociology and its implications from distinct epistemological perspectives. In the second section, we group together two case studies of regional and national sociologies, grounding the broader issues introduced somewhat polemically in the first section with specific discussions of globalization in practice within two major sociological communities: Russia and Africa. In the final section, we present two papers about the environment, allowing us to think thematically about a central intellectual question that poses truly global challenges to the sociological enterprise to the extent that we think in purely nation-state and territorial terms. Despite the differences among these seven papers, they all address four general issues that we will discuss briefly in this introduction: definitions of what we mean by globalization, the nature of science and sociology itself, the relevance of the nation, and the importance of language. Any serious attempt to globalize sociology would have to confront some version of these issues; we thus offer our thoughts here on some of the shared intellectual questions our authors have addressed in their varied contributions.

### WHAT IS GLOBALIZATION?

One of the key tasks for sociologists interested in globalizing the discipline is defining what exactly we mean by the term globalization. All too often in the globalization debates advocates or critics of globalization simply adopt different theoretical perspectives or concepts relating to the nature of this process. Linked to this lack of conceptual clarity is a large unresolved debate about the temporal origins of globalization. To some, the roots of globalization date back as far as the contacts created between "civilizations" along the Silk Road during Western antiquity.

For others, globalization is far more contemporary phenomenon that can be attributed to the technological breakthroughs in communication and transport of the 20th century, or even as recent as the post-war or post-sixties world. Debates regarding the globalization of sociology will be most productive when they are conducted within the context of a consensus among sociologists around the definition and the terminology of this process. The debate in this special issue reflects, and certainly can not yet resolve, both the general lack of consensus in the field as well as the efforts to refine a conceptual language to help us explore globalizing processes in the world around us and within our own discipline.

The paper by Ronald N. Jacobs and Eleanor Townsley is most concerned with terminology and core conceptual concepts. They usefully distinguish between a *global* and a *transnational* sociological project. In their article, they discuss the changes induced by globalization as they become visible in the way we, as sociologists, interact. They argue that both the global and transnational projects are based on communication and exchange. The first project, the global one, would try to replace the existing networks and reorganize sociological communities. The second, the transnational one, would build on existing structures and guarantee the participation of underrepresented sociological communities. This distinction is worth reflecting on as one reads the rest of the essays in the volume.

In his paper about Russian sociology, Greg Sandstrom understands globalization as the interconnection of global and local perspectives. In his piece about African sociology, Claude Abé defines globalization as a process of compression of time and space. Similarly, in Haluza-DeLay and Davidson's article about environmental sociology, globalization appears to be a process of compression of space and of intensification of social consciousness. Beyond their various subjects and perspectives, most authors agree on an implicit definition of globalization explained through its social implications. A possible consensual description of the nature of globalization as discussed by the authors of our special issue could be that it consists of a process of social change, mainly characterized by a compression of space and an intensification of a global social consciousness. The compression of space and the growth of a new global consciousness are understood through the increased interconnection of local, national, regional, and global social dynamics.

Beyond this broad and general consensus, the discipline requires more conceptual work on the notion of globalization. For the sake of conceptual clarity as one reads the issue, it may be useful to note that notions such as globalization, internationalization, and transnationalization are sometimes used as synonyms by our authors. Indeed, some contribu-

tors seem to use the words “internationalization” and “globalization” interchangeably. One will note that in French both “globalisation” and “mondialisation” are used to characterize the described process. While they seem to be used in the general literature in a similar fashion, the first term — closer to the English word — mostly refers to the growing economic interdependency that has emerged since the end of World War II. The second term refers to a longer historical and geopolitical process that traces back to Middle Age merchants. A variety of terms with a wide range of meaning is clearly available; thinking about these larger conceptual issues along with our authors is a valuable first step towards being clear what exactly the stakes are when we think about globalizing sociology.

### THE SCIENTIFIC PROJECT?

If there are subtle differences in what our authors mean by globalization, the question of the nature of sociology itself represents a major dividing-line between the varied perspectives on offer in this special issue. The birth of sociology occurred at a time of great social change but also during a period of scholarly and broader intellectual debates regarding the role of science in the modern world. As a discipline that consolidated itself within modern university institutions, sociology was largely established in response to the rise of the intellectual movement we call positivism. William Graham Sumner, Albion Small, and Lester F. Ward did not strictly agree on all questions regarding the status of sociology as a science, but these three forefathers of North American sociology certainly believed that sociology constituted a different methodological approach to that of social philosophy. The positivism of sociology’s early founders remained unchallenged for decades, and the influence of these ideas remains in contemporary sociological approaches even among positivism’s critics. It is not surprising then, that the contributors to this special issue address positivism and its legacy in relation to global sociology, even though they often come to dramatically different conclusions.

There exists a different emphasis in the papers in this special issue regarding the optimal balance to be struck between two distinct options in discussing the scientific nature of sociology. Global sociology can be investigated analytically by studying, describing, measuring, or interpreting the state of the discipline as it actually exists today using modern social science methodology or, alternatively, one can propose a program for what global sociology *should be*. These approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, of course, even if most authors of this special

issue have tended to adopt the first point of view by attempting to empirically study past and contemporary sociologies. Nonetheless, a few have proposed a programmatic vision for global sociology, and here, in particular, differences in the meaning and value of science loom large.

Believing in the advancement of sociology strictly defined as a science and coming down clearly, in this case at least, on the polemical side of this divide, Joseph Michalski articulates a provocative positivist program for a global sociology. Without questioning the significance once found in the work of the founding fathers of sociology, Michalski argues that contemporary sociologists must move beyond the classics to find new ways to interpret and understand society. Michalski believes that for sociology to become global it must break from classical traditions; he sees too much ideology and hero worship in how contemporary sociologists deal with the work of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber. From Michalski's perspective, a global sociology must be a scientific field separate from ideology and divorced from the impulses for social and political reform so central to the early years of the field. Michalski argues that a global sociology should abandon quasi-religious teleological schemes and reject large-scale unified theories that cannot be verified empirically. Finally, Michalski argues that the only feasible global sociology is a field in which sociologists have abandoned their national traditions to be able to embrace a global orientation, a controversial position even within our own volume.

In his article about African sociology, Claude Abé takes a contrasting position on these general issues, arguing that for African sociologists, the positivist sociology that Michalski defends has long meant a false universality and a partial understanding of local realities. Abé believes a global sociology is viable only if it reconsiders its tendency to abstract from local specificities. He also reminds us that by the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, modern social sciences had created an initial division of scientific labour. Precisely because the social sciences were prone to divide the world with binary concepts (such as the infamous organic-mechanic or even collective-individual divisions), the study of human societies soon divided between the study of "us" and "them." According to this initial division of labour, sociologists were to study their own national societies while anthropologists were left to specialize in the study of "exotic" societies. In this context, Abé sees African sociology as an effort towards the delocalization of sociological labour. Abé does not, it should be clear, argue for a sociology deprived of its scientific goals. He rather views a decolonized social knowledge-building in Africa as only being possible with strong ties between sociology and a contemporary self-critical anthropology in a context where social sci-

ence has moved beyond its 19th century division of labour and related conceptual tools.

It is clear that in any debate regarding the project of a global sociology, the status of “local” knowledge about society needs to be addressed. As Randolph Haluza-DeLay and Debra J. Davidson note, the lack of integration of local knowledge by contemporary sociologists is a serious problem, particularly in light of the global environmental crisis. Despite calls for sociology to be a universal and generalizing science, there is a lack of global consensus regarding questions of alternative and counter-knowledge. Could it be that the project of globalizing sociology will only succeed after we reevaluate our epistemological foundations, how we gather our data, and the tools we use to construct our reasoning? These are larger issues than can be dealt with here, but the diverse perspectives in this volume certainly raise epistemological questions worth serious consideration and debate.

#### QUESTIONING THE NATION

Beyond these epistemological issues, the articles in this volume also centrally address questions involving the social organization of social scientific knowledge around national boundaries, institutional arrangements, and identities. This is obviously related to questions of positivism; when the scientific status of the social sciences is discussed within our ranks, it is commonplace to hear the argument that there is no such thing as a Canadian, French, Ghanaian, or even Paraguayan way to do physics. That is, the argument that the laws of physics are the same for every place on Earth is transferred to the social sciences in order to make the case that a researcher’s national identity is irrelevant to their science. This assumption risks the confusion of nation as an object of study and nation as the space where both social life and knowledge about the social are created and sustained. While national borders are irrelevant when studying the laws of gravity, nations and regions are relevant territorial divisions for understanding social analysis; national institutional arrangements and identities partly explain differences in the social organization of knowledge production. Moreover, a historical and sociological investigation of Canadian, French, Ghanaian, or Paraguayan physics will surely reveal nation-based sites and organizations where scientific knowledge is manufactured. In this sense there is indeed a Canadian physics. While the object of this field of research is the same regardless of the location, the worldwide forms of research organization vary greatly. The national context is indeed relevant for understanding the social organization of both physics and the social sciences.

It is true, however, that contemporary sociology has abandoned many of the universal claims it made at the end of the 19th century, something less true in physics. A number of authors in this special issue specifically address the relevance of nations and nationalism in the process of globalizing sociology, leading to a lively set of disagreements and controversies. In his provocative argument for a scientific global sociology noted earlier, Joseph Michalski also claims that a truly global sociology has yet to be achieved partly because of the persistence of ways of thinking about “national traditions” in the discipline. Michalski’s global sociology is a positivist one that does not see the value of sociologists identifying with a local, national, or regional community. Instead, Michalski argues for a universal scientific agenda based on the model of the natural sciences.

Several authors are sceptical of the feasibility and/or desirability of this vision for sociology. Gregory Sandstrom, in particular, tells us the story of a Russian sociology during the 20th century that was strongly shaped by national changes within the Soviet Union. The history Sandstrom narrates suggests that national context is of the utmost importance for an appropriate understanding of “local” sociologies. From Sandstrom’s perspective, the organization of sociological work around national institutions is not the result simply of nationalism or group chauvinism but flows from historically rooted attempts to come to terms with unique national experiences and traditions.

Drawing on material from African sociology, Claude Abé agrees with this critique of sociological positivism and argues that each national sociology is always a local interpretation. According to Abé, African sociology has long been reluctant to adopt variants of Michalski’s approach. Abé demonstrates that for African sociologists, a positivist and universalistic oriented sociology has meant a partial understanding of local specificities. From this perspective, a global sociology must reevaluate its tendency to abstract local specificities into universalistic generalizations.

Philippe Boudes, in his article about environmental sociology in Québec and France, also argues that a globalized sociology must break from universalism in favour of a focus on social mechanisms and mid-range theories. From this perspective, a global sociology must be theoretically distinct from sociology as it was practiced at the age of strong nation states. Boudes further emphasizes how sociology tends to be structured by the scientific and cultural environments characteristic of a nation. Michalski would not disagree with this point; he sees links with nationally based government funding sources as a central block to his fully scientific project. This point raises important questions worth

considering, above and beyond the issues pertaining to the philosophy of science that divide our various contributors. How can we achieve a global sociology if our practice depends on public and private funding rooted in nation states? Does this mean that to achieve a global logic of social research we must find ways to emancipate our field from national politics? Is this realistic or desirable?

Leaving this larger issue aside, the papers by Randolph Haluza-DeLay and Debra J. Davidson and by Philippe Boudes explore the question of the environment, a case that inherently transcends national boundaries and definitions of social problems. Climate change is clearly global, whatever its cause, and our contributors suggest that it is intrinsically linked to the globalization of commerce. For both papers, the very nature of climate change transcends national perspectives, requiring a global understanding of the issue. The authors therefore argue that the sociological study of the environment prefigures an image of sociology in a process of globalization.

Environmental sociology also poses important questions for sociological praxis. For Haluza-DeLay and Davidson, the lack of sociological studies about the environment is inversely proportional to the potential interest they may have for the public and policymakers. Sociologists, from this perspective, have an important advocacy as well as scientific role to play as we envisage global governance informed by sociological ideas. Similarly, in their piece, Ronald Jacobs and Eleanor Townsley emphasize that global sociology could serve as an instrument for social change. But they insist that the project of a global sociology is distinct from the project of a transnational sociology associated with a larger project shared by nongovernmental organizations, political and state actors. They therefore partly answer the question we posed above regarding the possible emancipation of social sciences from politics by suggesting that a global sociology is concerned with global issues and it must work, inform, and act globally. In concluding his survey of French and Québécois environmental sociology, Boudes also suggests that contemporary sociology is already in part globalized in its capacity to react to global societal changes. Boudes sees the future of sociology as an equilibrium between local, national, and global sociologies.

Despite their conflicting views on nations and globalized sociology, the authors of this special issue all agree that the status of nation is a key question for contemporary sociology. Nation may be seen as an object or a series of institutions influencing the organization of sociological work. This is true even if we share different view points, seeing ourselves as global, transnational, positivistic, or rooted in historically specific and interpretively oriented theoretical and methodological traditions.

## LANGUAGE AND A GLOBALIZED SOCIOLOGY

If sociology is to transcend national boundaries, as surely it must, this raises the all important, but sometimes neglected, question of language. If the globalization of sociology is a process in which both the object and the reach of sociology becomes global, then we must look at how the interaction between sociologists from various origins and the circulation of ideas from various sources depends greatly on communication skills rooted in specific languages. The relatively recent expansion of electronic communication should not blind us to the fact that human communication depends on shared language. The sociological community's collective professional identities historically crystallized largely around English, French, and German near the end of the 19th century. New important languages within the sociological community have been introduced during the 20th century — sociology is not exclusively a Western European or North American phenomenon, particularly in relation to Arabic, Russian, Portuguese, and Spanish-speaking associations.

Some of the contributors of this special issue are rightfully critical of the linguistic dominance of English in sociology, as they ask what languages are being used in Europe and North America as well as in emerging sociological communities in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In his article about Russian sociology, Gregory Sandstrom warns us of the danger that a global sociology might very well become a science dominated by the English language. If sociology's ambition is to understand and reach out to diversity, it is important to prevent English becoming a hegemonic disciplinary language. Sandstrom compares global sociology to a global market in which theories and works are exchanged. Sandstrom highlights the fact that some communities in this global market maintain a largely negative balance of payments, unlike the case of the Anglo-American sociological community which mainly exports its theories and imports far fewer foreign works and ideas.

In a similar fashion, Wiebke Keim questions the possibility of achieving a global sociology without reconfiguring the current global division of scientific labour. For Keim, the current distribution of prestige and recognition within sociology cannot be fully explained by the merit of the work, but rather by the persistence of an unbalanced power distribution. The English-speaking world's dominance of the means of communication and prestige hierarchies is apparent in a range of ways by which professional careers are evaluated. When hiring a new colleague, departments will tend to pay more attention to the Anglo-American publications and communications or a candidate's North American education. When national science councils evaluate a researcher's career, they

tend to disproportionately value their English language contributions. Keim uses the examples of Chinese and Japanese sociologies which produce a large number of publications which are largely ignored by Anglo-American sociology. Chinese sociology, in particular, produces the most publications in the sociological world today while remaining largely marginal in the global sociological community. Despite an impressive amount of scholarly output for its relatively small population, Japanese sociology is also widely disregarded within the Anglo-American sociological community. A truly global sociology, for Keim, should reevaluate the way it distributes prestige and recognition. If globalization is a process of shifting power relations, then a number of our contributors find the predominance of the English-speaking genre to be a problematic globalizing development.

As important as this issue is, however, it cannot be understood in a simplistic and one-dimensional way. In his survey of French and Québécois environmental sociology, Philippe Boudes demonstrates that language does not necessarily determine how sociology is conducted. Boudes concedes that a particular language is often associated with a specific scientific culture and a common literature: French and Québécois sociologies clearly share common grounds. But, Boudes' analysis shows that important differences exist between these two francophone sociologies due to different intellectual traditions and national histories. Consequently, one can ask if the predominance of one language is really at the core of the issue when the adoption of a shared language can hide the variety that exists in diverse scientific communities. Are the stakes in globalizing sociology really the transformation of scientific communities in broader ways? A globalized sociology dominated by English surely creates a bias in favour of native speakers, but it may be that a greater threat to sociology's diversity and intellectual vitality is a deeper homogenization of the ways of doing and organizing the discipline.

#### CANADIAN AND GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY

This issue is both an attempt to contribute to the globalizing of sociology and an indicator of its globalization. It has been edited by a Belgian-born PhD from a Québécois university while doing a postdoctoral internship in Mexico and a Scottish-born and Canadian-raised professor educated in the United States. With articles in French and English and contributors from half a dozen countries the scope of this issue moves in a global direction, although obviously so much more could be said from the perspective of Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Sociol-

ogy in Canada represents a relatively small intellectual community that can hardly take the lead in globalizing sociology. Nonetheless our discipline's complex relationship to American, British, and French versions of the field and the open access format of *Canadian Journal of Sociology* positions us in interesting ways in relation to the dominant national versions of our craft and science. We thank all the contributors to this special issue and the many reviewers who kept a critical, yet constructive, perspective on the submitted papers. We also would like to thank the editors Kevin Haggerty and his predecessor, Nico Stehr, as well as the staff at the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* Laura Botsford and her predecessor, Joanne Milson, for their support for this special issue.

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