

THE DISSEMINATION OF NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN AN INTERNATIONALIZED SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

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'Science knows no country' (Louis Pasteur 1876)

This current issue of the Canadian Journal of Sociology studies the dissemination of social science and humanities (SS&H) national literature. Contemporary scientific exchanges—thanks to technology—are instant and global, and the pace of scientific production and dissemination has accelerated like never before in history. What are the consequences of these dramatic transformations for researchers working in SS&H? Two key vehicles for the dissemination of scholarly knowledge in those fields—journal articles and book reviews—are explored here. In particular, how do national journals fare in the new digitalized and globalized era? As expected, and as the current special issue shows by looking at three case studies of journal dissemination (Spain, Poland, and Serbia), and of one of book reviewing between three countries (Canada, United Kingdom, and United States), the question of national literature's evolution is complex. There is no straight answer and multiple variables must be taken into account, including disciplines, language and countries.

By its very nature, science calls for greater exchanges, collaboration and cross-fertilization (Gordin 2015). From the European network created by the exchange of letters between scholars working in Florence, Vienna, Cambridge, Paris, Leipzig and other dynamic centers to today's world-wide interconnected scientific field, one can witness the expression of a singular drive toward a universalism that, at least in its ideal and pure form, ignores national and ethnic boundaries. "Science," declared Louis Pasteur in 1876, "knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world." While Pasteur may have been too bold in saying that science illuminates the world,

he was right to claim that the knowledge it produces defies national frontiers. As far as methodology is concerned, scientists are stateless and nationless.

Yet, we know that the production and use of science is not neutral. Just like any other field, science is subjected to intense and ongoing power struggles. On the one hand, certain research domains might be overcrowded with resources, while others remain relatively untouched since they do not address as much political and social demands. Research oriented towards military needs—for which the United States alone invests about 70 billion dollars annually (National Science Board 2018)—are a good example of the politicisation of science. Many researchers wouldn't work for the army if it were not for the formidable funding opportunities it provides. On the other hand, scientific knowledge may be put to a variety of usages. Nuclear reactions can both be used to produce electricity or a nuclear explosion, and the science 'that illuminates the world' was instrumental in building death camps and destroying the ozone layer. In other words, while scientific claims can be considered as value-neutral, their dissemination and use are not.

This is particularly true for SS&H. In a manner much more important than natural and medical sciences, SS&H are rooted in specific socio-historical contexts (Kyvik 2003; Nederhof et al. 1989, Whitley 2000). Their level of indexicality (contextually bound meaning) is higher. If an atom has the same properties in Tokyo or Lima, or in this or that century, the same cannot be said of divorce laws or crime rates. The objects that SS&H study are not inert and unresponsive, and modify their behaviours and attitudes in countless ways. No one believes that what is true for Socrates is true of all humankind – except in the most basic and generic manner, such as Socrates is mortal, eats, drinks, dreams, speaks, feels. When moving beyond these general and trivial statements, one is astonished by the richness and complexity of societies and cultures. Eating habits, traditional mores or political organizations in Morocco differ from those in Canada in at once profound and subtle ways. It is these differences that ignites scientific investigations, and that make SS&H disciplines relevant.

Some disciplines (psychology, economics) have lower levels of indexicality, while others (literature, history) remain deeply rooted in their sociohistorical context. Sociology stands somewhere in the middle. It lends itself to vast, worldwide surveys, while keeping a firm footing in national contexts. The teleological perspective of its founding fathers (Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies, Herbert Spencer) has long been abandoned, and contemporary sociologists recognize the need to respect human societies' intrinsic diversity. They cling to the opinion

that sociology is a science, but they know that they cannot produce a universal knowledge without overcoming some serious challenges linked to the situatedness of their object of study. The middle-range theory approach precisely draws its appeal from the need to find the right balance between the necessity to formulate theoretical models while never losing sight of empirical reality. More perhaps than other SS&H disciplines, sociology is torn between abstract and ‘supreme’ (C. Wright Mills) intellectual constructions, on the one side, and dry and insignificant data, on the other side.

Journals are particularly useful to study the internationalization of research. They are the main mode for dissemination of knowledge in most disciplines, and the scientific capital they provide make them central to the reward system of science. Moreover, the metadata of the documents they publish contain precious information on the individuals and institutions behind a research piece, on the language used, and on the topicality of research—among other variables. Journals, therefore, allow for the study of the current trends affecting the production of scientific knowledge.

When considering publication practices, one need to start by distinguishing the internationalization and the universalization of science. Internationalization refers to the exchanges taking place between scholars belonging to different countries. It can be measured using various indicators, including language of publication (Buela-Casal et al. 2006; Rey-Rocha & Martin-Sempere 2004), audience (Buela-Casal et al. 2006), contributors’ affiliation (Pajić & Jevremov 2014, Wormell 1998), or editorial boards’ composition. Universalism refers to the various social contexts in which knowledge claims can be considered as true. Obviously, many papers published in so-called international SS&H journals are only applicable to specific regions, and small-scale, situated studies may have a large explanation scope. Conversely, discoveries published in peripheral and semi-peripheral periodicals may have strong universalist potential, and papers appearing in international journal may be very ethnocentric. In SS&H, internationalization and universalism don’t always go hand to hand—and one may even lag behind the other.

These are considerations that the push toward ever greater internationalization in SS&H too often overlook. Is it our contention that the internationalization of SS&H has been hastily encouraged before the conditions for true universalization were achieved, and even before the very issue of their achievability was raised (Keim 2008). Changing journal titles to appear more international (Buela-Casal, Perakakis, Taylor, & Checa 2006; Fortin 2006) doesn’t do the trick. Today, pressed by governmental agencies attached to the idea of globalization and scholars

seeking higher symbolic capital (Gutiérrez & López-Nieva 2001, Yue & Wilson 2004), journals will aspire to be international in their outlook and content. In Spain, in Poland, in Serbia, policies have been put in place to encourage the internationalization of national journals. Ana Bocanegra-Valle describes how the main reference for the assessment of journal quality in Spain (called the “FECYT requirements”) foster increased internationalisation in an attempt to widen the Spanish journals’ reach, availability, quality, and positioning. She shows how Spanish researchers “are encouraged to shift from national to mainstream, top-tier, high-ranking or prestigious journals published outside Spain (i.e. international) with a view to gaining scholarly recognition and boosting the scientific power of the country in the highly competitive global academic arena.” Similar standards are put in place in Poland under the name PRFS (Emanuel Kulczycki, Ewa A. Rozkosz, and Aneta Drabek). In Serbia, the Journal Bibliometric Report contains rankings of Serbian academic journals based on several indicators of bibliometric quality and impact, including the national impact factor (Dejan Pajić, Tanja Jevremov, Marko Škorić).

In such contexts, journals that do not take the “international” turn will suffer the consequences. Their journals will be regarded by many as parochial, lackluster, and unappealing. They will be seen as stepping stones toward the publication in more serious publications or as second-rated venues for unambitious or untalented scholars. The quest for publication in high-ranking journals, therefore, will lead to “mass migration of the best research articles to foreign journals” and increasing neglect of local journals (Žic Fuchs 2014: 162). Salager-Meyer (2015) has talked about the “domestic drain” to refer to those researchers who preferred “to submit their best papers (i.e. the most original, ground-breaking and/or scientifically robust ones) to [...] journals with a high impact factor” and the difficulties faced by national journals “to attract stellar research” (Salager-Meyer 2015: 21; also Salager-Meyer 2014). The internationalization of science acts as a wedge to distinguish between good and ‘not-as-good’ research.

The end-result is a pursuit of internationalization that is not based on the actual conditions of research, but on a desire to conform to abstract criteria of how SS&H should ideally operate. Emanuel Kulczycki, Ewa A. Rozkosz, and Aneta Drabek emphasize that “using a simple parameter to regulate and transform the publishing practices has always various unexpected and unintended consequences. Implementing a wrong parameter can not only bring no desirable results but – what is more important – can worsen the academic situation in a given country.” In their conclusion, they remind us of the so-called Campbell’s Law: “The more

any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor” (Campbell 1979: 85). Such ‘undesirable’ or ‘perverse’ effects of internationalization are manifold. To start, it is obvious that the most prestigious international journals have two things in common: there are English and heavily concentrated in a few countries (USA, UK, Holland). To be international, therefore, researchers will need to adopt the new *lingua franca* of science (López-Navarro, Moreno, Quintanilla, & Rey-Rocha 2015). National journals will increasingly welcome articles in English to boost their appeal to foreign contributors and readers. The scientific market will be globalized to the extent that it is *Englishified* (Lancho-Barrantes, Guerrero-Bote, & Moya-Anegón 2013). Such a ‘translation’ is never neutral and may distort scientific discussions. We all know the adage ‘*traduttore traditore*.’

Also, it will be tempting to consider the Americanization of SS&H as another name for its internationalization (Salager-Meyer 2015). Such temptation is at odds with the book review analysis performed by Julien Larrègue and colleagues. Comparing reviewing practices of Canada, United Kingdom and United States, and specifically analysing the homophily between the national topic of books reviews and the affiliation country of reviewers, their paper shows that, over the last few years, the majority of reviews are made by researchers from the same country. This is particularly true of the most active country SS&H research, the United States: over the 1975-2016 period, 81.7% of books about the United States were reviewed by other scholars from the same country. Therefore, conflating United States’ research with international research only leads to reinforcing the country’s dominant position in the SS&H landscape. Such conflation is also observed at the level of scholarly papers, where papers focusing on the USA will appear international, while those focusing on more marginal countries will not.

As a consequence, scholars are encouraged to spend less time studying domestic issues, and more time researching countries that promise high-rewards in terms of publication opportunities. Because most ‘core’ conferences and publications in the field entertain only passing interest in non-American or non-European contexts, scholars belonging to peripheral or semi-peripheral regions are tempted to skew their research interests towards those of foreign academics for fear that failing to do so will lead reviewers to reject their manuscripts or conference proposals as irrelevant to the American or European audience. This phenomenon has been observed for China by Jonathan Murphy and Jingqi Zhu (2012), as well as You-min Xi and Wei Han (2010). Nkomo (2009) and

Hanafi (2011) have also noted that South African and Arab scholars, pressured to conform to the expected international career path, tend to turn away from journals focusing on national topics. In Canadian journal of sociology, the variation in the proportion of articles bearing the word 'United States' or 'America' in their title or abstract substantiates the claim that a growing internationalization favors the study of dominant societies (Warren 2014). While the proportion of articles focusing on Canada plateaued from 1993 to 2012, the proportion of English Canadian sociological articles focusing on the USA is mounting. Less than 5% of all articles published by English Canadian sociologists focused at least partly on American society in 1983-1992, a proportion that has almost tripled in more recent years to reach 12%.

In their attempt to become international, national SS&H journals may end up inhabiting a sort of 'no man's land.' They will have lost touch with their local community, without being recognized by the global community (Pajić & Jevremov 2014). Dejan Pajić, Tanja Jevremov and Marko Škorić speak of a potential glocalization of social sciences and humanities field, SS&H becoming neither truly global nor local. "Researchers in SS&H are already torn between the pressure to globalize their production and the need to communicate with their colleagues locally. [...] Serbian journals in SS&H fields have managed to attract some attention at international level but this growing trend is aligned with the decrease of national citations count." Other researchers have noted that even articles signed by prominent international scholars are being ignored when published in local journals (Mangez 2012).

As this special issue shows, scientific communication is one of the multiple venues where one can analyse the manifestation of power struggles within the scientific field.

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