

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**George Steinmetz.** 2013. *Sociology & Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline*. Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 632pp. \$34.95 Paperback (978-0822-35279-2).

There are certain historical moments that demand the appearance of certain kinds of books, and there are certain moments in the history of sociology that call for a new kind of intervention. The early 21st century, with the apparent and purported decline of the American Empire, the shift of global attention to the non-Western/non-Northern world, and an increasing presence of the former “third world” in and to the first, is that kind of historical moment. And the increasing prominence of post-/anti-/de-colonial studies, attention to cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism as modes of living with others and organising societies, and a burgeoning attention to the notion of the global as a frame of analysis, all appear to be converging on an evocation of a need to rethink the epistemic bases and purposes of sociological thought.

George Steinmetz has collected a wide range of articles into what I believe to be one of the most important anthologies to appear in recent years. *Sociology & Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline* dives deeply into the histories of sociology. This multiplication of sociology’s “history” is intentional; it is part of Steinmetz’s goal to divest sociology of the notion of its universality and its contention that it represents the objective “view from nowhere,” and to instead detail the ways in which that conception of sociology is itself grounded in very particular national, colonial, and imperial histories. Rather than treating the development of national sociologies as occurring in a vacuum or within the “container” of the nation-state, Steinmetz’s contributors position sociology in a dialectical, or at the very least a mutually reciprocating, relationship with the expansion of empires.

Following Steinmetz’s impressive comprehensive presentation of the variety of contributions to sociological understandings of empire from the 1830s to today, the book has three main sections. The first section is this deep dive into the national sociologies and their imbrication with the development of empires. The works here explore the ways in which the variants of sociology fostered in pre-Soviet Russia, Italy, Germany, France, and the United States were influenced by and influenced

the development of each empire. The second section is an examination of current sociological theories of empire, drawing from such theoretical positions as Giorgio Agamben's conceptions of sovereignty and the state of exception, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's work in *Empire*, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's examination of hegemony. These sections feature works from a wide variety of senior scholars, including Michael Mann, Krishan Kumar, Julian Go, and Fuyuki Kurasawa, and chapters here are theoretically productive and historically rich.

The third section features sociological analyses of colonial and imperial situations. Studies of imperial and colonial technologies of power abound, with in-depth explorations of the deployment of citizenship, economic development, urban planning, state formation, and the manipulation of space and autonomy. As well, the chapters in this section cover a large segment of the globe, drawing from the French, British, Japanese, and American empires, and India, Korea, Vietnam, Ethiopia, South Africa, Palestine/Israel, British Malaya, and the American Philippines as case studies. Raewyn Connell's closing chapter continues her past work on Southern social thought by examining the implications of these works and Southern critiques of Northern sociology for the future of our discipline.

The amount of source material that has gone into this 632-page collection is impressive in its own right, as reflected by its 73 page bibliography. And this massive amount of source material is put to excellent use. There is no "soft" chapter here, no major lapse in analytic rigour, and no chapter that fails to fulfill its stated purpose. As a student of imperial thought and of Southern social theory, I am emboldened and humbled by this volume: emboldened by knowing that I am not alone in my concerns for the imperialist and colonialist epistemes at the heart of our discipline; humbled by the expertise brought to bear by these scholars on the topic. My only substantive critique pertains to the apparent lack of decolonial reflexivity in the construction of the work. Interestingly, all of the "agenda-setting" chapters--those of the first and second sections--are by senior scholars working at major Northern universities, while half of the empirical chapters of the third section are written from the South (and nearly all are by more junior sociologists). While this may be an accident, it does raise an interesting line of critique, one that Connell's chapter begins to engage when it raises the need for theorising sociology and empire from below.

In much the same way as C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination*, Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* — perhaps even Talcott Parsons' development of a pure structural sociology — Steinmetz's *Sociology & Empire* has the potential to coalesce a range of

trends in historical, comparative, global, and theoretical sociology into a new line of analysis that will form the basis of 21st century sociology in both the global North and the global South. In much the same way that anthropology has had its symbolic turn (Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*), its decolonisation (James Clifford and George Marcus' seminal collection, *Writing Culture*), and its Chagnon crisis, perhaps it is fitting--and, I think, high time--that Steinmetz and his collaborators have called us out to decolonise ourselves and our sociology.

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