

Anne Kwaschik is an intellectual historian, chair of the history of knowledge at Konstanz University (Germany) and president of Comité franco-allemand des historiens. Her current research interests include the scientization of colonialism and the epistemology of feminism. Recent publications: “We Witches.” Knowledge Wars, Experience and Spirituality in the Women’s Movement in the 1970s, in: *NTM* (2023) 3; Mobilisations de femmes et savoirs médicaux depuis les années 1970 (= *Critique internationale* 99 (2023) (co-ed. with Emeline Fourment); Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Kolonialen als kultureller Code und internationale Praxis, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 28 (2020) 3, pp. 399–423; Der Griff nach dem Weltwissen. Zur Genealogie von Area Studies im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (Kritische Studien für Geschichtswissenschaft, 229), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2018.

The Call for Further Research into the Coloniality of French Social Thought in George Steinmetz’s the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought

Alexandre I.R. White 

Department of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA and Department of the History of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA

Email: alexandrewhite@jhu.edu

In George Steinmetz’s *Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought*, we find a meticulously researched and immensely detailed historical sociology text on the colonial origins of French social thought. In this review, I will discuss significant contributions that I think the book makes, before posing questions aimed not so much at critiquing the book as it stands but rather by making provocations about where sociological inquiry can build from this work toward deeper understandings of the colonial origins of French social theory and what these colonial origins mean for the development of the field.

Steinmetz’s wide and deep analysis of the history of colonial French sociology provides several important methodological and theoretical approaches for the historical sociology of knowledge production and the history of sociology more broadly. Choosing to focus primarily on the time period between the 1930s and mid 1960s, Steinmetz covers a deeply fraught period in French history from the Third Republic, through Vichy and Nazi-occupied France through to the Fifth republic (8). As Steinmetz notes, this was a period when decolonization especially reached greater importance in public, political, and scholarly debates (8). Steinmetz’s rich archival and interview-based research examined not only the key writings of sociologists but also the developments of academic departments, the dissertations, courses, and the work of students at a variety of metropolitan French and colonial universities and colleges across Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. The detailed, informative endnotes make up almost a quarter of the total text. The reasons for this approach are theoretically and methodologically grounded. Steinmetz puts forward in the introduction a model for a *Neo-Bourdiesian historical sociology of science* which calls for examining thinkers and their works both

individually and in relation to a series of more proximate contexts and more distanced socio-historical contexts (17). Critical to this are the fundamental analyses of the unequal distributions of power and resources that circulate within and outside of academic fields.

Steinmetz's methodology thereby makes some significant contributions by embarking on a Bourdieusian approach to the historical sociology of science through the five parts of the book. Each of these sections, by drawing on Bourdieu's methods of situated and contextualized research allows us a variety of novel perspectives on the field of French social thought as it developed. The first part provides a theoretical and historiographical justification for the work itself while also explaining how the colonial origins of French social thought may have been understudied and underseen. The second explores the wider political fields in which social thought existed within and is adjacent to before exploring the intellectual environments of the time. It is in this section as well as the final section which comprises four close studies of French sociologists that I feel the work personally makes some of its greatest contributions, connecting the theories and writings of thinkers like Bourdieu, Balandier, and others to one another and the wider sociological milieu of the time.

As sociologists today are confronting the colonial roots of classical and contemporary theory and methods, this book, like others such as Gary Wilder's *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Wilder 2005), Robert Vitalis's *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (2015), Earl Wright II's *Jim Crow Sociology: The Black and Southern Roots of American Sociology* (2020), or the significant works of Raewyn Connell (2007), Zine Magubane (2003, 2005), Gurminder Bhambra (2007, 2011), Julian Go (2009, 2013, 2016), Itzigsohn and Brown (2020), and of course Aldon Morris (2015) address the questions of what are we to do with the colonial legacies of our field? How have these legacies constructed what we consider to be social science and how have these legacies as a result, elided excluded or incorporated the ideas or thoughts of those beyond the metropole in the study of sociology?

Steinmetz demonstrates that French social thought and indeed the field of sociology would not exist in its present formation without the colonial production of social knowledge. Steinmetz highlights throughout the book that there was significant variation between the practices and knowledges produced through colonial sociology. Thinkers like Bourdieu, an ardent critic of the French colonization of Algeria existed at a very different pole from Chombart De Lauwe and his penchant for flying over Algerian towns in military aircraft conducting aerial studies of urban colonial space. At the same time, we cannot also lump liberal anti-colonial thinkers like Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad in the same camp as anti-colonialists such as Raymond Aron, for instance, who may have existed at the other end of the ideological spectrum. Steinmetz demonstrates that the perspectives that emanated from French colonial sociology were myriad, representing a host of divergent perspectives. This fills a gap in anglophone sociology by introducing non-French speakers to the thought of Georges Balandier, Jacques Berque, and others. Even so, this must proceed in conversation with other important works on pre- and postwar French intellectual struggles, including La Sueur's *Uncivil war*:

intellectuals and identity politics during the decolonization of Algeria (2005), as well as the already significant scholarship on Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad like Amin Perez's recent book *Combattre en sociologues: Abdelmalek Sayad et Pierre Bourdieu dans une guerre de libération coloniale* (2022).

Let us turn to several provocations.

The first regards efforts to further understand the political and intellectual milieu of early and mid-century France and its empire. In the book, Steinmetz notes that many of the critical sociologists in this text locate racism at the center of colonial power structures, but there is very little discussion of the nature or organization of colonial racism, the differing perspectives on how race and racism operates across the French empire or is understood differently between thinkers. Steinmetz writes in detail about Fanonian anti-colonial perspectives in relation to sociology, and the importance of the pan-Africanist and anti-colonial journal *Presence Africaine* emerges in particular in relation to the chapter on Georges Balandier. However, this work invites further assessment of the significant role of racism in modern France. Indeed, the work of Gobineau and other French scientific racists is hardly mentioned in this book. The role of race science in its interactions with sociology, or the shifting relations between the social and natural sciences, receives minimal discussion (in Chapter 6). It seems that much of the deeper thinking on racism in the French intellectual world was either conducted by those directly invested in anti-colonial struggles such as Alioune Diop, Frantz Fanon, Léopold Sédar Senghor, or Aimé and Suzanne Césaire (née Roussi) and by those who were more invested in intellectual debates and political struggles like Balandier and Berque. In a country whose political climate reflects and actively silences narratives that would suggest that France is anything but a colorblind nation, it remains important to trace the histories of the erasures of critical theories of race in France to an English audience. The political movements that emerged around this time in opposition to French empire and racist thought such as the Negritude movement are rarely if ever discussed in the book. Where do issues of racism and anti-colonial struggle fit within the political and intellectual fields of sociological knowledge production at the time?

My second provocation concerns the need to further explore the politics of publishing and intellectual production in mid-century France, especially in the moments surrounding the Algerian Revolution. Indeed, Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* was banned in France as was Bourdieu and Sayad's *Uprooting*. What does this say about the limits and potentialities of institutionalizing particular forms of social thought in the French academy? How did this affect what type of colonial sociology was produced and who was allowed to engage with it?

My final question regards how we define colonial sociology - by methods, by interventions, by theorizing and practice, or by degree? Steinmetz mentions in the book's introduction that the phrases *Colonial Sociology* and *sociology of colonialism* are interchangeable in the text, both referring to "all forms of sociological writing and research focused on overseas colonies and colonial phenomena and empires and imperial phenomena." However, given all the interconnections between and across intellectual and political fields that Steinmetz elucidates, I wonder, is this

either too capacious or too constraining? Certainly, the violent practices of military airborne surveillance as sociological method stand in contrast to Bourdieu and Sayad's approaches to photography, even if both engaged a camera. Yet, similarly, can we confine Balandier to the field of sociology when he is one of the founders of *Presence Africaine*, a literary, social theory, and arts journal that is perhaps the most profound publication of anti- and postcolonial thought on the Atlantic world? Balandier wrote not just to sociology but in conversation with Jean-Paul Sartre, Richard Wright, Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, Leopold Sédar Senghor, the Césaires, and a host of others. He also wrote novels. Do we define Balandier as a sociologist and thus as a contributor to social theory while excluding these others? Or must we include Fanon, Édouard Glissant, and others as producers of social theory but existing and operating outside of the confines of social scientific fields because of epistemic and racial exclusions? Furthermore, what are we to make of critiques of sociology from anti-colonial thinkers primarily located outside the discipline? How did these inclusions, exclusions and critiques impact the development of the field?

Colonial Origins provides an opportunity to further pursue these questions. Too often, scholars who primarily publish in English lack the depth and breadth of analysis that this book provides. I sincerely hope the publication of this work yields some much needed analysis and further energy to examine the colonial origins not only of French social thought but also of all European and American sociology.

References

- Bhambra, Gurminder K.** (2007) *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (2011) "Historical sociology, modernity, and postcolonial critique." *The American Historical Review* 116 (3): 653–62.
- Connell, Raewyn** (2007) *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Go, Julian** (2009) "The 'New' sociology of empire and colonialism." *Sociology Compass* 3 (5): 775–88.
- (2013) "For a postcolonial sociology." *Theory and Society* 42 (1): 25–55.
- (2016) *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Itzigsohn, José, and Karida Brown** (2020) *The Sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line*. New York: New York University Press.
- Le Sueur, James D.** (2005) *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria*, 2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Magubane, Zine** (2003) *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, 1st ed. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- (2005) "Overlapping territories and intertwined histories: Historical sociology's global imagination," in Julia Adams, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Shola Orloff (eds.) *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 92–108.
- Morris, Aldon D.** (2015) *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Pérez, Amín** (2022) *Combattre en Sociologues: Pierre Bourdieu et Abdelmalek Sayad dans une guerre de libération (Algérie, 1958–1964)*. Marseille: Agone (L'ordre des choses).


Vitalis, Robert (2015) *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations. The United States in the World*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Wilder, Gary (2005) *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wright, Earl (2020) *Jim Crow Sociology: The Black and Southern Roots of American Sociology*. Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Press.

Alexandre White, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Johns Hopkins, Department of Sociology, and the Department of the History of Medicine. He is the author of *Epidemic Orientalism: Race, Capital and the Governance of Infectious Disease* (SUP 2023). He is the Acting Director for the *Center for Medical Humanities and Social Medicine* at Johns Hopkins.

Effects of Strangeness in the Production and Reception of Social Scientific Knowledge

Christian Dayé 

Science, Technology, and Society (STS) Unit, Institute of Interactive Systems and Data Science, Graz, Austria

Email: christian.daye@tugraz.at

George Steinmetz’s *The Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* marks a major contribution to a variety of literatures and scholarly concerns, including the history of the social sciences, the sociology of knowledge, and the inner mechanisms of empire. My commentary focuses on two elements of Steinmetz’s argument that can inspire further theorizing and reflection: the question of why colonial sociology has been marginalized in research on the history of French sociology, and the productiveness, in terms of social scientific reflection, of going abroad. In both cases, as I show, a sustained theorization of *strangeness* improves our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that, in these instances and beyond, inform the production and reception of social knowledge.

A more comprehensive etiology of erasure

At the end of chapter 2, under the header “The Etiology of Erasure,” Steinmetz presents “five factors that explain the obliteration of colonial sociology from disciplinary memory” (Steinmetz 2023: 44–46). First is the underdevelopment of serious research on the history of sociology. The field lacks sufficient academic establishment and profile, several topics are under-researched, and much historical writing is done by sociologists looking back at their own careers. Second, efforts to impose a certain gestalt of the discipline as presentist and neo-positivist hindered the development of historical research in sociology. Third, the repression of colonialism in European memory in general fostered the exclusion of colonialism as a topic for the historian of the social sciences. Fourth, the fear that a stigma can move from the