

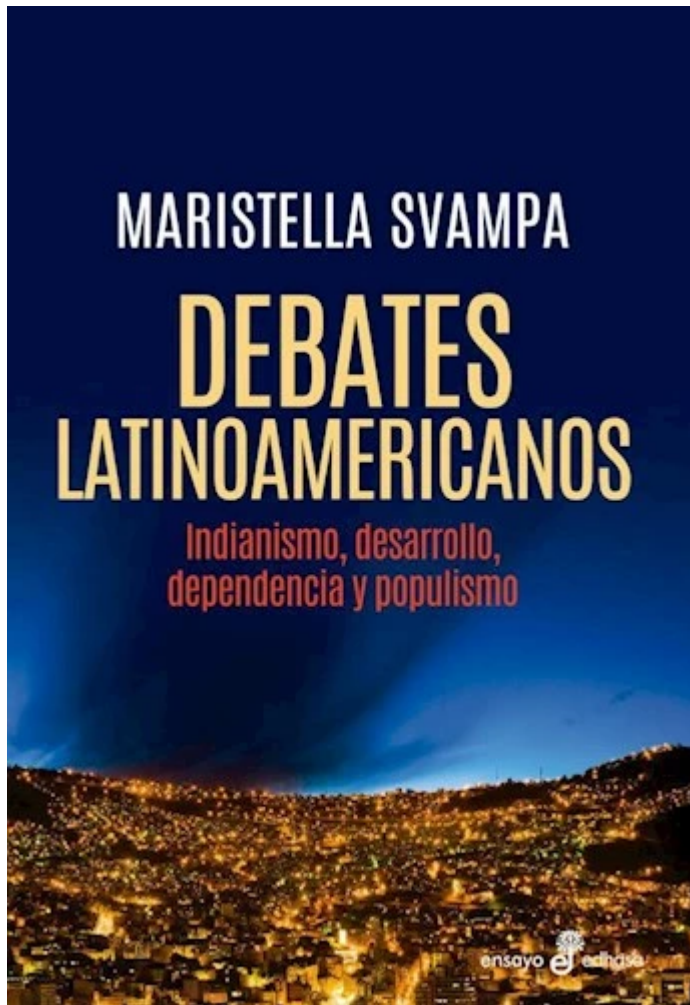
Doing Global Sociology: Why the circulation of knowledge matters?



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Introduction

In the 2016 book *Debates latinoamericanos*, Argentinian sociologist Maristella Svampa pointed out that one of the central dilemmas of Latin American social sciences is not the lack of production or originality, but constant attempts to subalternise its production and its fundamental debates. A result of this has been a kind of “accumulation deficit”, the product not only of deficient infrastructures and funding, but also of censorship, exile, persecution and marginalisation of voices throughout history.



Cover of Maristella Svampa's book on Latin American debates (2016).

In her studies on social science production, sociologist Fernanda Beigel (2014) has shown that Latin America as a “periphery” has its own centres or peripheral centers, with alternative circuits and logics of recognition, contested canons and infrastructures with

local, but also regional and global impacts. More than a lack of production of knowledge, the problem of Latin America seems to lie elsewhere: namely the question of its circulation. Can we move towards a global sociology without attending to the production of knowledge in the so-called peripheries? How to advance in this necessary opening of Eurocentric canons?

My proposal is to contribute to this challenge from a historical perspective, with a focus on showing the ways in which Latin America intervened in global debates in the social sciences. Theories and perspectives with Latin American components that have had a greater global circulation

and a more global scope are the so called “dependency theory” in the 1960s and 1970s and, a few decades later, the current “decolonial” critique. Both currents of thought had and still have an impact in Europe, although little is known about the practices and ideas they influence and the way they are interconnected. Along these lines, my contribution is to use these two paradigmatic cases of the circulation of Latin American knowledge in Europe in different periods to reflect about the challenges of a global sociology.

The dependency theory

From the Cuban Revolution in 1959, through to the experience of the Unidad Popular in Chile (1970–1973) and the Sandinista triumph of 1979,

Latin America experienced a period of unprecedented prominence in international politics. One consequence was the greater recognition of its intellectual and cultural production in Europe (Ruvituso, 2020a). This was the period in which Latin American social theory was able to circulate with greater intensity in south-south and south-north directions. This historical context explains the boom of translations of Latin American social scientists into English, French and German. The fact that most of the Latin American authors translated into German were published in the prestigious collection *edition* by Suhrkamp, the epicentre of the post-war West German intellectual field, is fundamental to

understanding the impact and scope of dependency theories in the Federal Republic of Germany. Publication in the *edition* Suhrkamp provided an unprecedented platform for the recognition of Latin American authors within Critical Theory. The mediation of the German sociologist Heinz-Rudolf Sonntag together with Elena Hochman from Venezuela explains why the first translations were books by the Venezuelan Armando Córdova and Héctor Silva Michelena. The political scientist Dieter Senghaas was in charge of mediating the translation of texts by Fernando H. Cardoso, Ruy Mauro Marini, Celso Furtado, Theotonio dos Santos (Brazil), Osvaldo Sunkel (Chile), Aníbal Quijano (Peru) and Rodolfo Stavenhagen (Mexico), among others.

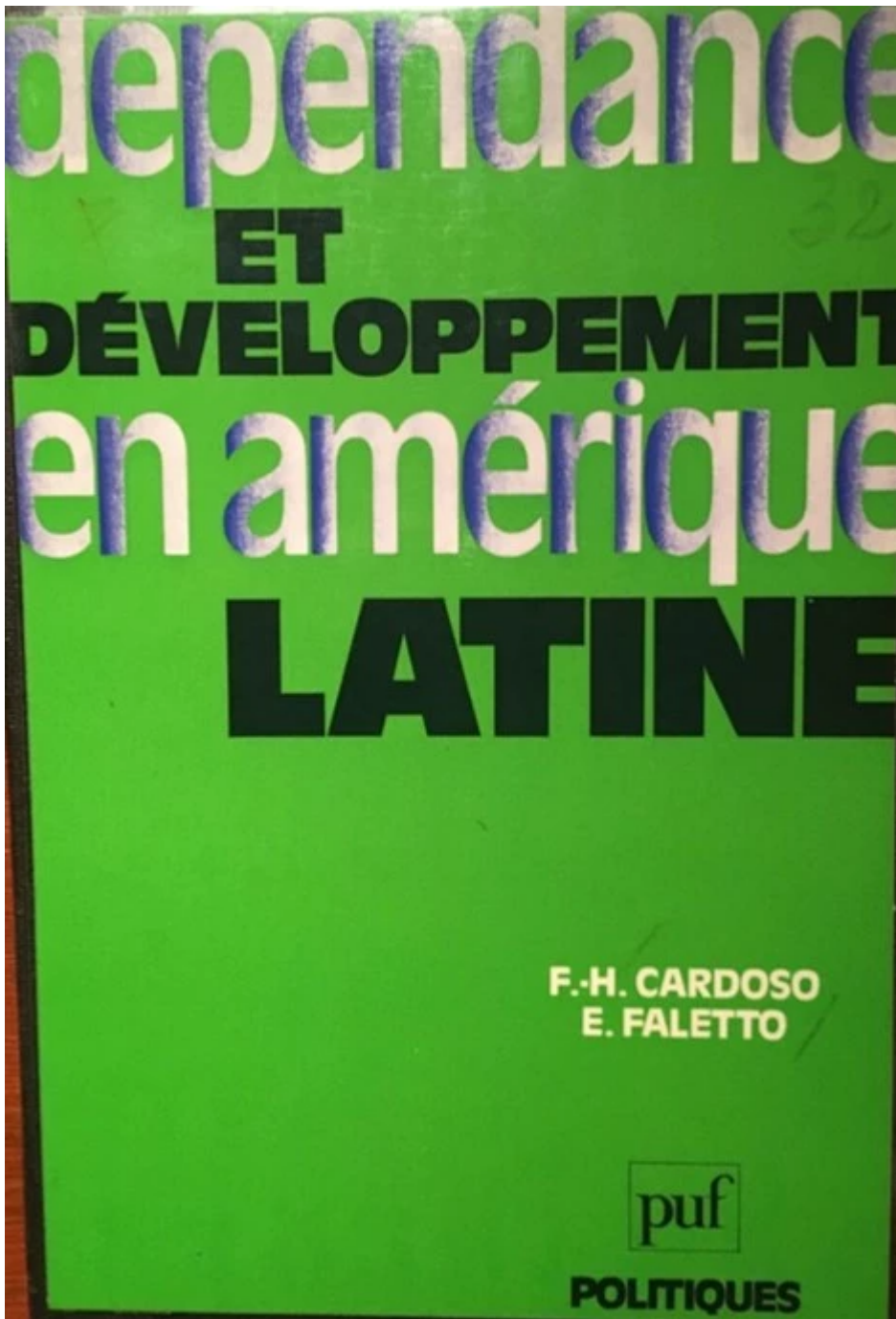
Fernando H. Cardoso,

Enzo Faletto

Abhängigkeit und Entwicklung
in Lateinamerika

edition suhrkamp

SV

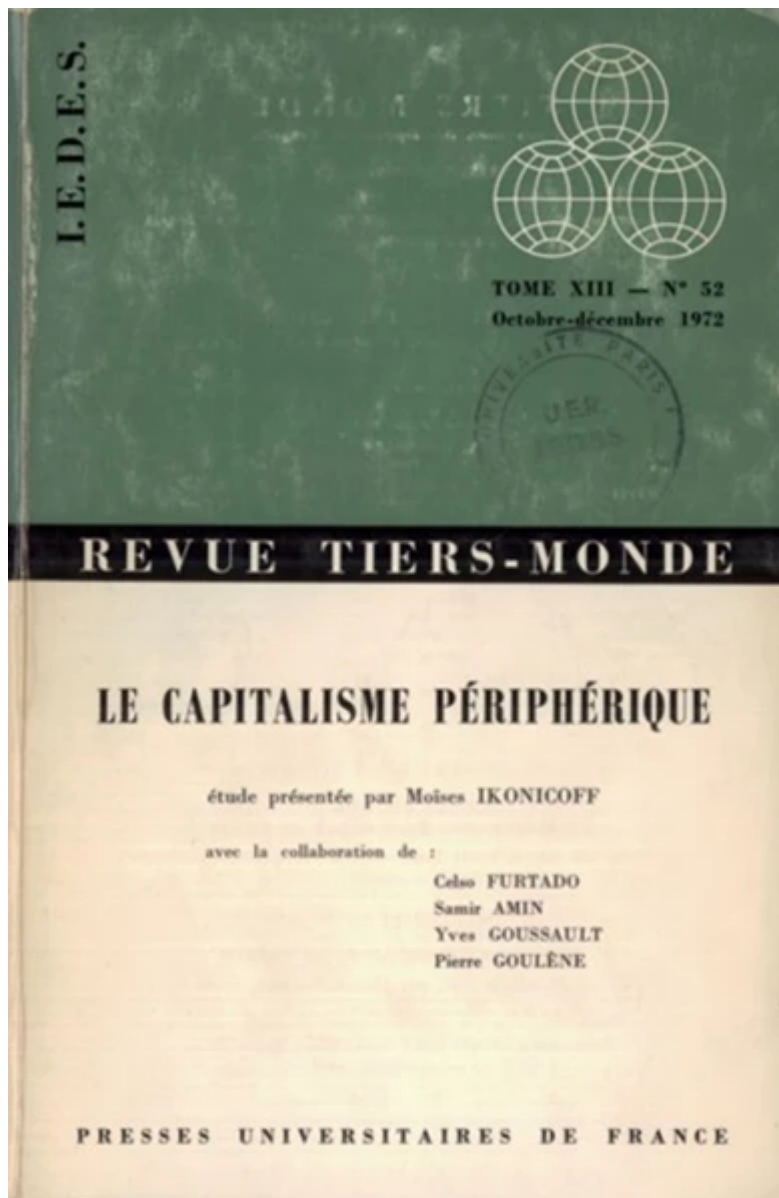


Covers of the German translation of “Dependency and development in Latin America” (1976) and the French translation of “Dependency and development in Latin America” (1978).

It is also noteworthy that the sociological essay “Dependency and

Development in Latin America” by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto was first translated into German (1976, *edition* Suhrkamp) and only two years later into French (1978, PUF), despite Cardoso’s close relations with France.

Publications of Latin American dependency authors into French started earlier and lasted longer, between 1963 and 1989. France was the European epicentre of Latin American intellectual formation and a central place of exile. Most of the publications of Latin American authors in French have taken place in academic publishers such as Presses Universitaires de France (PUF) and Anthropos and their respective journals: *Revue Tiers Monde* and *L’homme et la société*.



Cover of the French journal "Tiers Monde" (1972).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the works of many Latin American authors who took part in dependency debates were used as a theoretical-conceptual framework for empirical research. Particularly paradigmatic

was the case of the Freie Universität Berlin where the Institute for Latin American Studies (Lateinamerika-Institut, LAI) has been operating since 1970. The LAI produced numerous empirical studies from a dependency perspective, applying the concepts of centre-periphery, marginality, structural heterogeneity and internal colonialism to national or comparative case studies. In the section of Development Sociology of Bielefeld University the theory of "subsistence production" was developed in dialogue with the Latin American dependency theory (Evers, 1981). The relevance of the international dialogue and solidarity with Latin American social scientists, especially in the face of the Chilean

dictatorship since 1973, was key for the circulation of dependency theories (Ruvituso, 2019). With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the German institutional landscape changed considerably. Simultaneously, the idea of the “Third World” and thus dependency theories came into a legitimation crisis (Menzel, 1992). Eastern European studies became more relevant, and the development agenda shifted to issues of market integration and globalisation (Werz, 2016).

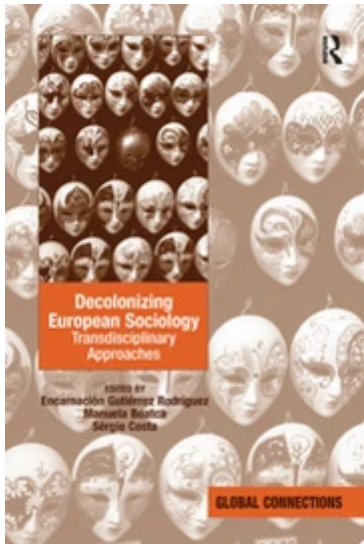
Decolonial/Postcolonial Critique

A new discovery of “Southern Theories” in Germany and France takes place in the context of the ongoing reception of postcolonial/decolonial studies. In

Germany, this reception started in the fields of history, cultural studies and sociology and more recently also reached political science. German-based academics have begun to express the need to put on 'post-colonial glasses', especially in Europe. In general, they share the following diagnosis: there is an analytical narrowness in the consideration of "modernity" as a Western achievement and European social sciences and humanities are still deeply marked by colonialism. A central point is the critique of the implicit teleology or universalism of theories in the social sciences and humanities in Europe. The results of postcolonial/decolonial research lead to the overcoming of a linear evolutionary history of modern

societies. Under Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2002) now famous premise of "provincialising Europe", postcolonial/decolonial critique allowed for a reflection on one's own point of view and different positions: "a self-reflection of the material-structural as well as symbolic-cultural and metaphorical localisation of one's own practice" (Reuter & Villa, 2010: 24–25, own translation). Within this framework, it is stressed that all positions must be problematised in order to break away from static, binary and essentialist notions of subalternity, hegemony, identity and difference. The following characteristics can be observed in this reception: a) Decolonial approaches (more linked to authors

from Latin America) and postcolonial approaches (more linked to authors from other peripheries, former colonies such as India) are not differentiated and included in the same perspective; b) the most visible authors are those based in centres of academic production in the global north: Walter Mignolo, Homi K. Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, with circulation and/or translation into English; c) the decolonial/postcolonial turn is not related to the critical lineage linking them to the dependency theories in the 1960s and 1970s.



Covers of the books “Decolonizing European sociology: Transdisciplinary approaches” (2010) and “Postcolonial sociology: Empirical findings, theoretical connections, political intervention” (2009).

Inequalities and power asymmetries

are reflected within the European circulation of postcolonial/decolonial studies: The authors currently circulating in the German-speaking world are those who already belong to the Anglophone 'postcolonial' canon, while similar voices, especially those from Latin America, receive little attention. These inequalities in the circulation of postcolonial/decolonial voices are reproduced when looking at the so-called precursors of decolonial thought. Here we find Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire and Edward Said. However, Latin American precursors (such as Rodolfo Kusch, Lélia Gonzalez, Beatriz Nascimento, Darcy Ribeiro) continue to be invisible. In the 1970s, dependency focused on the structural south-north

asymmetries in global capitalism and came directly to Europe from Latin America (especially Chile), accompanying the narrative of Third World and solidarity movements. Currently, the “decolonial/postcolonial” critique is received in Germany mainly through some voices institutionally grounded in the USA and England and puts the focus on an agenda that includes the question of subaltern voices, positionality, and intersectionality. While dependency argued for political-economic regime change, decolonialism promotes a more symbolic institutional policy, which support diversity and epistemic justice (e.g. through the return of objects from museums, renaming of public spaces, inclusion of different

perspectives in academic curricula).

For the circulation of both currents, the existence of area studies and the role of mediators was fundamental. If dependency contributed to the European Third World sensibility and solidarity on the basis of economic asymmetries, decolonialism adds a new and necessary sensibility on symbolic asymmetries. In my view, both perspectives together are necessary to build South-North ties in accordance with the political, social and environmental crises of the present.

How to achieve a global sociology?

The different initiatives and projects that seek to “open up”

(Wallerstein, 1996), “decolonize” (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2010) or “decentralize” (Brisson, 2018) the social sciences, as well as to “provincialise Europe” (Chakravarty, 2002), have made progress in making visible different inequalities (geopolitical, ethno-racial, nationality and language, gender) in the construction of south-north canons and asymmetries. The proposal of a global sociology is related to the recognition of global inequalities in knowledge production and the need to include approaches and perspectives from the South. Within this debate, I would like to argue for the relevance of thinking about the circulation of Latin American knowledge in a historical

perspective. With this approach, we can observe that despite the unequal and asymmetrical relations of North-South exchanges and Western hegemony in the production of social theory, Latin America is a heterogeneous space of theoretical knowledge production with the capacity to contribute to local and global debates, from a critical perspective and at the same time linked to difference and diversity.

Cite this article as: Ruvituso, C. (2024, September 10). Doing Global Sociology: Why the circulation of knowledge matters? Global Qualitative Sociology Network. <https://global-qualitative-sociology.net/2024/09/10/doing-global-sociology/>

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