




Cold War Social Science

Transnational Entanglements

Edited by Mark Solovey · Christian Dayé



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*To our partners, Marga and Manuela, who have supported us through
thick and thin.*

FOREWORD: THE COLD WAR AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

The development of social science as a field of human inquiry is intimately connected with the origins and conduct of the Cold War. Although the concept of applying scientific methods to the study of human behavior originated in the early Enlightenment era, it was in the late nineteenth century that the ambition to quantify and thereby better understand all aspects of societal development flourished in full. The timing coincides almost exactly with the origins of the Cold War as an ideological conflict, seen through the first global economic crises, the radicalization of the labor movement, and the expansion of the United States and Russia as transcontinental empires.

Over the century that followed, the idea that science should be used to understand and, increasingly, to govern society took hold on a global scale. Though the origins were very much European, through Weber and Durkheim, key centers of knowledge were located in the United States and in the Soviet Union.¹ The American and Soviet preoccupation with social science was connected to the pretension of each to be a universally applicable model for development. On the American side, figures such as John Dewey and Robert Park established schools of thinking in sociology, psychology, and education that saw—though in no way uncritically—the United States as laying the foundation for a rational and scientifically minded society, which would produce new technologies for development and governance. A main preoccupation of American social science from its very beginning was to rationalize capitalism and the market as part of the productive success of the US experience, and as part of a cohesive ideology

of social mobility and uplift. In this sense, much of early US social science already pointed toward modernization theory and its pendant, dependency theory.²

The Soviet social science experience was, of course, from the outset linked to the evolution of Marxism worldwide.³ The most appealing part of Soviet social theory was that Marxism in its very origin is an attempt at developing scientific laws for human development. The Soviets were therefore often seen—and not just by radicals—as having an advantage in analyzing society, at least in the first decades after the Russian revolution. Problems occurred later on, as the Stalinist dictatorship attempted to prevent social scientists from applying their tools on Soviet society. Since that society was managed by the Communist Party, no social science that did not confirm the validity of the party's policies could be allowed.⁴ As a result, Soviet social science not only wilted from its own roots, but was increasingly cut off from any cross-fertilization by more vibrant Marxist approaches outside of Russia. Ironically, Soviet conformism meant that radical Marxist thinking by the 1960s probably had more influence in the West, at least in academia, than it had in the Soviet Union.

From the 1960s on, ideas of an eventual social, economic, and technological convergence between socialist and capitalist societies became more visible among some social scientists. One argument was that the complex problems of managing high industrial society had much in common between East and West. Another was that many challenges, from urbanization, to environmental degradation, to youth disenchantment were similar, even if state ideologies differed. Transnational exchanges between social scientists—and especially economists, sociologists, and psychologists—sometimes transcended all Iron Curtains; by 1972, there was even an International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis set up in Vienna with the participation of both US and Soviet experts. The purpose was to investigate pressing concerns such as educational needs, overpopulation, pollution, and the use of energy.⁵

As several of the chapters in this book point out, concepts of modernity and modernization were at the core of Cold War social science all across the world.⁶ The common central idea was that industrial modernity, based on technology and regularized, large-scale production, should be the aim of both state and society. One issue was which system would bring about such change the fastest: Socialism or the market. A second level of competition, harking back to Hegel and Marx, was to read the inexorable

direction of social development correctly. Soviet Marxists and US modernization theorists both saw the social systems they preferred as unavoidable in the long run. How to get from here to there was first and foremost a political issue of avoiding the other side hijacking “natural” social forces for their own gain. Social scientists in government employ on either side produced designs for counterinsurgency or, in the Soviet case, for militarized vanguard parties to prevent such artificial interventions against the natural course of history.⁷

As different versions of modernization theory became influential during the 1950s and 1960s, they fed a reaction among other structuralists.⁸ Some of these, often lumped together as dependency theorists, agreed with the aims of industrial modernity, but questioned why the fruits of development were so slow in materializing in Latin America and in post-colonial countries. The reasons, they argued, were structural impediments put in place to serve the interest of countries that had already industrialized. These produced unbalanced economic structures both within “peripheral” societies and between them and the centers of industrial development. While some social scientists preoccupied with dependency—especially some of those working in the United States—moved towards a Marxist critique of underdevelopment, many Latin American and other Third World theorists concentrated on issues of state autonomy and import substitution. Some of their analysis was not miles away from that of a few modernization theorists, who also underlined state regulation and investment, along with capital controls, as steps toward home-grown industrialization and equal participation in international markets.⁹

Dependency theory is a good example of how social science became increasingly transnational during the Cold War, not just in East-West terms, but also South-North. In ways similar to science and technology, social science method and knowledge did not lend themselves easily to national or bloc constraints. As several of the chapters in this collection note, this interaction is not just because theory can easily transcend borders, but also because of similarities in thinking among proponents of different social systems. The main concept here is not just modernity, but also notions of the international, especially as promoted by educational and research institutions. The ability of America’s top universities to gradually diversify their approaches to social science, supported by ample funds, meant that these institutions became global meeting points for researchers who varied widely in methods and aims. This over time set US

academia in a predominant position intellectually, but it also meant that thousands of non-Americans could draw on time spent in the United States to further their own research.

The decline of absolute certainties in social science approaches intensified as the Cold War came to an end. The plummeting fortunes of modernization theory is a good example. So, as demonstrated in this volume, was the demise of Soviet cybernetics.¹⁰ The cyberneticists' effort to introduce quantitative methods of inquiry into Soviet psychology and education through informational interactions between the human and the machine was, for a while, a star exhibit of Soviet social science. Its promoters, such as the Finnish-Italian former Red Fleet submarine commander Aksel Ivanovich Berg, who headed the Soviet Scientific Council on Complex Problems in Cybernetics, and his disciple Lev Nakhmanovich Landa, were superstars. But some of the cyberneticists' predictions about human behavior were not to the Party's liking. With the discipline in decline, Landa in the late 1970s ended up as a business consultant in New York, running a company he called Landamatics.¹¹

The story of Cold War social science is a story about transnational transformation. It shows how intellectual projects intended to confirm a certain vision of the future of humanity began to fray under the weight of contrary evidence and new forms of thinking, often coming from outside national borders. Its history is remarkably instructive, not least for those who want to query and critique hegemonic intellectual constructs in our own time. This volume is therefore an excellent starting point both for historians and for today's critical social scientists.

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Odd Arne Westad

NOTES

1. Though when Émile Durkheim became the first European professor of sociology in Bordeaux in 1895, this came after the establishment of departments at the University of Kansas (1891) and the University of Chicago (1892).
2. See David C. Engerman, "Social Science in the Cold War," *Isis*, 101, 2 (2010): 393–400.

3. For early Russian sociology, see Elena Kukushkina, *Russkaia sotsiologiia XIX-nachala XX veka* [Russian Sociology in the nineteenth and Early twentieth Century] (Moscow: Moskovskogo universiteta, 1993).
4. For fascinating examples of the tension built into Soviet domestic applications of social science for development purposes, see Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).
5. See Leena Riska-Campbell, *Bridging East and West: The Establishment of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in the United States Foreign Policy of Bridge Building, 1964–1972* (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Science and Letters, 2011).
6. There is now a significant literature on modernization theory and the Cold War; see, for instance, David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, and Mark H. Haefele, eds. *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); idem, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and US Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); David H. Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Begüm Adalet, *Hotels and Highways: The Construction of Modernization Theory in Cold War Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Christian Dayé, *Experts, Social Scientists, and Techniques of Prognosis in Cold War America* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). For overviews, see also Joel Isaac, “The Human Sciences in Cold War America,” *The Historical Journal*, 50 (2007): 725–46 and Nils Gilman, “The Cold War as Intellectual Force Field,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 13 (2016): 507–523.
7. For this, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
8. See Margarita Fajardo’s chapter, “Latin America’s Dependency Theory: A Counter-Cold War Social Science?”
9. For recent discussions of dependency theory, see Cristóbal Kay, “Modernization and Dependency Theory,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Latin American Development*, ed. Julie Cupples, Marcela Palomino-Schalscha, and Manuel Prieto (Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2019), 15–28.

10. See Ekaterina Babintseva's chapter, "'Overtake and Surpass': Soviet Algorithmic Thinking as a Reinvention of Western Theories."
11. After arriving in the United States, Landa's response to a question about how he can compute a company's savings through the use of his method is worth quoting: "I have developed a method of determining and computing the cost of inexpert performance of employees due to their errors, low speed of doing tasks (low productivity), and other factors. At the end of each project, I always conduct a test (demonstration experiment) which shows what novices equipped with algorithms or trained algorithmically can achieve. Since the demonstrated reduction in errors, the increase in the speed of performing tasks, etc., leads to the reduction of the original cost (and the degree of reduction can be precisely measured), the difference between the original cost and the resultant cost is the expected savings that the company will enjoy if the developed materials are implemented" ("Landamatics Ten Years Later: An Interview with Lev N. Landa," *Educational Technology*, 33, 6 (June 1993), p. 17).

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Introduction: Cold War Social Science, Transnational Entanglements

Mark Solovey and Christian Dayé

The Cold War has usually been understood in terms of a deeply polarized global order that emerged in the early post-World War II years, due to intense geopolitical, economic, and ideological conflicts between the United States and the Soviet Union—the two superpowers—along with their allies and satellites. The end of this global order only came into clear sight with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and finally arrived two years later with the demise of the Soviet Union itself. While it lasted, the Cold War became such a pervasive and influential phenomenon that it was, and often still is, widely considered to be a distinctive era in world history.

As a large body of scholarship has made clear, the conflicts between the two superpowers had deep impacts on science, society, and culture. During

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the last decades of the twentieth century and continuing into the early years of the present one, historical accounts concentrated mainly—though not exclusively—on the Cold War’s importance for the physical and environmental sciences as well as weapons-related technologies.¹ More recent scholarship has expanded the scope of inquiry, such that studies now include the medical sciences, the biological sciences, and allied areas such as science education, science studies, and science diplomacy.² Within this expanded purview, we can better appreciate both the enormous range of scientific activities involved and the broader significance of Cold War-inflected science in world history. As the historians of science Hunter Heyck and David Kaiser put it, scientific work in Cold War contexts “became part of projects for remaking not only war but also the world, state, society, and self.”³

As this last observation suggests, scientific studies of social and psychological matters became deeply entangled with Cold War developments as well. It is thus no coincidence that scholars have devoted increased attention to disciplines and fields of inquiry that concerned themselves with society and human nature. Based on these studies, we can now see how the social sciences, like many other sciences, became enmeshed in new patronage arrangements, political agendas, social aspirations, ideological warfare, and intellectual movements that were connected to the superpower rivalry and its expansion to all corners of the globe. Cold War entanglements helped to reconfigure social science objects of study, methods of inquiry, theoretical frameworks, disciplinary trends, interdisciplinary movements, and disciplinary subfields. These entanglements also had a profound impact on the social sciences’ access to resources, their influence within governments and other sectors of society, and their interactions with the natural sciences and the humanities. Furthermore, the Cold War context provoked considerable debate about the nature of the social sciences, their place in modern society, and their relevance to practical goals, such as their value in knowing the enemy, stimulating economic growth, promoting development in so-called developing countries, creating good citizens, raising healthy children, and tackling racism.⁴

This volume advances historical understanding and analysis of Cold War social science with a special emphasis on its transnational dimensions. Adopting a transnational lens is valuable, and even seems to be a necessary next step, because it brings into focus movements, exchanges, and influences that have often received at best marginal consideration. This can be seen in the great bulk of studies on the Cold War era that emphasize

developments within the US context, sometimes despite the fact that the events under consideration involved peoples and nations in other places around the world. The history of the social sciences is no exception. Here, one also finds limited attention to transnationalism; histories in this area have much more often taken a national setting to be of fundamental importance. As John Heilbron, Nicolas Guilhot, and Laurent Jeanpierre have observed in a programmatic article on social science transnationalism, “historical accounts of the social sciences have far too easily adopted a nation-centered view uncritically accepting national traditions as a more or less self-evident framework of analysis.” Somewhat paradoxically, this situation has also meant that in many cases, “national traditions themselves are not well understood.”⁵

Focusing on social science transnationalism does not imply, however, that we will, by some trick of the mind, imagine the power of nation states during the Cold War into oblivion. Rather, in examining transnational developments, the studies presented here duly recognize and explore the realities of national power, the aspirations of national development, and the centrality of nation states at many levels in the development of the social sciences. Our very interest in transnational entanglements thus takes place against our understanding that nations and national borders did, in fact, matter a great deal, though those borders were also porous in various ways.

In following developments in Cold War social science across diverse national contexts, including the United States and Soviet Union as well as many others around the globe, this volume is also inspired by recent scholarship that has urged us to rethink certain fundamental points about how we should understand—and thus how we should study—the Cold War itself. As we noted at the outset, the Cold War has commonly been understood in terms of an all-pervasive superpower conflict that produced a bipolarized world order. That picture, which was dominant in historical accounts up through the 1990s and which remains common in public discourse, has been contested on various grounds. To begin with, by the late 1950s China had become a major competitor with the Soviet Union for influence in the communist or socialist worlds. Historical accounts have also emphasized the need to examine the Cold War in relationship to post-colonial, nation-building projects in the so-called Third World. This line of analysis, while interesting in its own right, also reveals severe limitations in the picture of a global order wherein the original superpower conflict—between the US and the Soviet Union—was all-encompassing and all-consuming.⁶

Yet again, we do not mean to downplay the immense importance of the original two superpowers. Nor do we ignore their considerable influence on other nations and geopolitical regions, in the spheres of national security, economics, science, technology, education, and culture. Quite the contrary, for in this volume we are especially interested in understanding how transnational developments mediated, and thus helped to shape, social science activities within settings that include the Soviet and American contexts as well as other national contexts and larger geopolitical regions where the Cold War mattered.

Before proceeding, a brief note about the term social science is in order. During the past few centuries, a number of other general terms have also been used to refer to the broad area of scientific study concerned with such things as politics, economics, culture, and psychology. These terms include: the sciences of man, the moral sciences, the human sciences, and the behavioral sciences.⁷ Here, for the sake of simplicity and consistency, we have chosen to use social science(s), which, at least in the English-speaking world, has been quite common for a long time by now. Furthermore, we will use this term in a capacious sense, for we do not mean to exclude from historical inquiry any field of scientific study that might be more commonly associated with one of those other terms.

SCOPE, GOALS, ORGANIZATION

The authors in this volume examine an impressive variety of fields, including works from anthropology, area studies, economics, education, political science, psychology, scientometrics, and sociology. As for the geopolitical settings covered, we have also ranged widely, by considering episodes involving the United States, the Soviet Union, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Turkey, China, the Philippines, Brazil, and Latin America.

The central goals of this study emerged over time and through discussions with our authors. Back in the spring of 2017, we decided to bring together a group of scholars who were working on episodes relevant to the general subject of transnationalism in Cold War social science. Considerable diversity in our authors' areas of expertise—the history of science and social science, sociology of science, critical studies in psychology, history of political theory, philosophy of knowledge, history of immigration, and Latin American studies—enriched our thinking and the chapters as they took shape over time. This diversity also meant that we had to work hard in order to establish common ground, so that the final collection would be

more than the simple sum of its parts. Through many conversations, two panels at the International Sociological Association's World Congress in Toronto in 2018, and an intensive workshop at the University of Toronto in 2019, we settled on three central themes, reformulated here as three goals.

First: to examine the factors that enabled transnational movements and exchanges in the social sciences during the Cold War. Histories of social science usually focus on one or two primary objects of study, including individual scholars, ideas, fields of study, disciplines, instruments of investigation, institutions, and the context, however defined, of social science activities.⁸ While all of these receive attention in the chapters gathered here, the role of institutions in promoting transnationalism emerged as an especially important theme. What kinds of institutions promoted transnational exchanges in the social sciences during the Cold War? Why and how did they do so?

Second: to understand how transnationalism shaped the development of social science work in various Cold War-inflected contexts. Of particular interest are cases where intellectual debates, scholarly trajectories, and lines of research supported or challenged Cold War viewpoints and interests in Washington or Moscow and in newly independent, post-colonial nations.

Third: to see how transnationalism across different Cold War settings inspired debate over fundamental questions concerning the nature and meaning of the social sciences. The challenge here is to understand how scholars and other interested parties understood the intellectual foundations, social purposes, and practical impacts of the social sciences, and to see how they advocated for or pursued various projects in relationship to those understandings.

The individual chapters that follow contribute to one, two, or even all three goals, albeit to varying degrees depending on the particular topic and author's purpose. We will return to these goals later after first describing the chapters, which fall into four groups based on certain commonalities in their subject matters.

Exchanges across the Iron Curtain

In the social sciences, constraints on exchanges between the US and Soviet sides were often formidable, as the metaphor of the iron curtain suggests. On both sides, politicians, intellectuals, academics, and media

commentators criticized, ridiculed, and stigmatized scholarly work that came from the other side. Furthermore, as with scientific research more generally, national security restrictions controlled the circulation of certain types of social research so that they did not end up in the wrong hands. Yet, the iron curtain was not as solid nor as impenetrable as was sometimes claimed by supporters and critics alike. As the editors of a recent volume of essays about social science developments on the Soviet side point out, the dividing line between East and West was maintained by “rhetoric, censorship, and discipline,” but that line was also breached in various ways, including “by emulation and critique, with both sides implicitly or explicitly politicizing their arguments, mirroring and imagining the communist/capitalist Other.”⁹ The chapters here explore the nature and significance of Cold War transnationalism in episodes involving computer-assisted education, the management of scientific information, and the development of Western knowledge of Eastern Europe for propaganda and other purposes.

During the Cold War, the original two superpowers turned to education to promote their respective—and in many ways opposing—political, economic, and ideological systems. In this part’s first chapter, Ekaterina Babintseva shows us that the problem of strengthening the educational process by making the learning process itself more efficient also emerged as a more specific concern among policymakers and scientists on both sides. Although in a general sense, this concern was hardly new in the annals of education, the conditions in each country gave rise to novel ways of investigating and trying to make learning more efficient with the assistance of computers. In the US, the famous Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner spearheaded an effort, beginning in the 1950s, to develop a framework for computer-assisted learning called Programmed Instruction. Soviet educational experts, including the mathematician and prominent education specialist Lev N. Landa, took notice, but they opposed the scholarly basis of Skinner’s attempt—behaviorist psychology. In its place, they formulated an alternative approach to computer-assisted learning based on cybernetics, which also rested on a very different conception of human nature. Thus, the transnational exchange of scientific knowledge here involved selective adaptation and reappropriation, or, in Babintseva’s terms, a reinvention of knowledge, in this case from West to East.

Figuring out how to keep up with the exponential growth of scientific knowledge also became a huge worry for policymakers and scientists on both sides. This topic is of central interest in the second chapter, by Elena Aronova, which examines the development of the Scientific Citation Index

(SCI) in a context where both superpowers recognized that managing scientific information effectively was crucial to their respective cold war agendas. In the US, concerned science leaders and individuals, including the American library scholar and entrepreneur Eugene Garfield, concluded that traditional resources for retrieving and managing scientific documents were inadequate. In the 1950s and 1960s, Garfield developed the SCI as a commercial product—marketed by a small company of his—that promised to make tracking scientific references more efficient and thereby enable valuable new ways of studying historical and emerging patterns in scientific research. Although the SCI initially had trouble gaining traction in the US, Soviet researchers became interested in adopting Garfield’s product. During the 1960s and 1970s, Garfield was thus able to cultivate a crucial new market, located, surprisingly, in the communist sphere of power. After further development, the SCI finally attracted major funding within the US as well, including from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, and became an essential tool used by scientists in all fields of study.

The next chapter, by Simon Ottersbach, turns to the challenges involved in gaining valid empirical knowledge from and about one’s opponent, a matter of vital importance to government and military agencies during the Cold War. More specifically, Ottersbach examines the origins, development, and broader significance of Radio Free Europe (RFE), a pro-Western broadcasting entity established in the early 1950s and supported by the CIA. With its headquarters in Munich, RFE personnel collected and examined various sorts of information about life in the Eastern bloc as a basis for radio programs broadcast to the other side of the Iron Curtain. The underlying rationale was that communicating “truth” would be an effective way to counter propaganda that East European regimes used to deceive and control their citizens. Through transnational exchanges of information and viewpoints, RFE helped to open up the otherwise hermetically closed information circuits operated by the Communist parties in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. Moreover, Ottersbach argues that through its work, RFE became a major contributor to social science research and knowledge about Eastern Europe.

Modernization Theory Meets Postcolonial Nation Building

While the rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union played an enormous role in establishing the character of the new world order that emerged after World War II, so too did the dramatic changes in the