Institutions and Economies
Vol. 6, No. 2, July 2014, pp. 137-140

Book Review

Social Sciences and Knowledge in a Globalising World, edited by Zawawi Ibrahim, Petaling Jaya: Malaysian Social Science Association and Strategic Information and Research Centre, 2012, 499 pp.

This book is a collection of nineteen essays on social science discourses about globalisation. With contributions from a list of eminent scholars, the book debates some of the salient societal issues using the epistemological and methodological instruments that make social science scholarship interesting. The editor, Zawawi Ibrahim, provides the anchor by problematising social science knowledge and underlining the contested role of institutions, interests and the modes through which each of the contributors have dealt with these issues.

Clive Kessler begins the discourse in Chapter 1 with a critique on of globalisation and its manifestation in the everyday narratives. While arguing that accounts of contemporary globalisation that largely legitimise the process has been undermined by 'intellectual shrinkage' and 'debasement', he calls for the resurrection and elevation of social science discourse by bringing back into analysis the rich sociological concepts and critical engagement. In Chapter 2, Anthony Reid discusses how local research in the periphery can be elevated by making local publications international by using the Anglo American model.

Habibul Haque Khondker analyses in the relationship between social science and democracy with a special focus on Asia. By presenting the stark reality of what has become of the social sciences, he argues that the latter has deviated from the emancipatory role that Habermas had outlined, which has been - eclipsed by functional relativism with its component sub-discipline, economics, seriously impoverished by its departure from its mother discipline as noted by Amartya Sen, i.e., philosophy. Through a rich articulation of the contending and crisscrossing discourse of the Western with regional and local sources of knowledge using social and historical lenses, Goh Beng Lan discusses the crisis of area studies in Chapter 4. She argues for a need to enable an equal consideration of temporalities, spaces and disciplines. Relying on published sources, Hans Dieter Evers and Solvay Gerke provide evidence in Chapter 5 to argue that local knowledge production has kept pace with global knowledge production. Victor King explores the process of globalisation and

the responses in Sarawak from an anthropological and sociological perspective in Chapter 6. He argues that much of the work on globalisation in Sarawak lacks local grounding. Zawawi Ibrahim and Noor Shah problematise Malayness and Malay underdevelopment in Chapter 7 and examinean exhaustive range of works historically that is rich in social science epistemology to address the need for a critical understanding of indigenisation. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied in Chapter 8 theorises colonialism in the Malay world with particular reference to the work of Burhanuddin Al-Helmy. While recognising the flaws in Burhanuddin's work, Syed uses it cleverly to stimulate more substantive and critical work on colonialism in the Malay world.

Christopher Joll discusses in Chapter 9 the marginalisation of Islam in Southeast Asian studies. He argues that anthropologists have the methodological and theoretical responsibility to provide a more nuanced account of Muslims and their societies in Southeast Asia. In Chapter 10, Maznah Mohamad problematises the impact of Malaysian government's national policy instrument, the New Economic Policy of 1971, and increased globalization, on the fundamental issues Malay families face.Maznah contends cogently that behind the image of an idealised expectation of the Malay-Muslim family is the harsh reality of their impoverished existence with gender dissonance emerging as a strategy, as well as, an outcome of the process.

Wee examines a wide spectrum of disciplinary issues ranging from value systems to the Singapore model of governance in Chapter 11. Maung Zarni in Chapter 12 presents a lucid and critical account of how the Burmese view expertise, donor funding, political power and the organisational influence of foreign bodies. Maung argues that the introduction of a new framework for democratisation with Aung San Suu Kyu's cooptation is nothing more than a geopolitical drama to check China's ascendance.

Ien Ang discusses in Chapter 13 the evolution of cultural studies, including some of its complexities and contradictions, with a focus on the English speaking West. Ang rightfully questions the continued use of Western lenses and methodological instruments to analyse Asian culture. Chua Beng Huat discusses how the transnationalisation of knowledge flows has shaped studies on pop culture in East Asia in Chapter 14. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel explains in the following chapter how the diaspora and its processes operate within a national milieu by problematising the diaspora as expounded by K.S. Maniam; she shows how the concepts of ethnicity, identify formation, social relations and historical change are embedded in it. Benedict Anderson interrogates the expression 'colonial cosmopolitanism' with reference to the Sino-Indonesian satirist, Kwee Thiam Tjing, with particular reference to the Dutch East Indies in Chapter 16. Marina Rosman revisits Ading Kerah and uses a rich ethnographic

methodology to capture the individual, cultural and historical contestations of dreams and power of the Temiars by deploying an indigenous framework of knowledge in Chapter 17. In chapter 18, Harry Aveling examines indigenous Australian poetry and analyses new themes, images, and angry responses to the repressive conditions of the aborigines. The last chapter is a collection of articles commemorating the life and works of Yasmin Ahmad, including her take on love. Gareth Api Richards,Zawawi Ibrahim and Zaharom Nain contributed the remaining two articles to commemorate Yasmin's contribution to the world of art.

Zawawi Ibrahim must be congratulated for bringing together a rare collection of serious social science works that contest the processes of globalisation and informing us of the need for history, local structures and the normative elements. Amartya Sen has often reminded us philosophically over the bias we carry because of our own subjectivity in our quest to problematise and analyse social phenomenon. What is obvious in most of the contributions is the call for the elevation of contestations from the ground in defining the causes and consequences of the globalisation of knowledge. Relying particularly on meta-ethnographic lenses, the incisive chapters problematise and articulate their arguments critically and show why there is a need to start questioning the content and direction of the social sciences, which have been hijacked by the powerful forces of globalisation. The empirically grounded chapters of the book by Zawawi Ibrahim, Noor Shah and Maznah Mohamad for example, use appropriate qualitative research to address the problems as they attempt to interpret, rather than predict, the direction of social science discourse (Doyle, 2003). The attempt to question power in the Gramscian sense is indeed muchwelcomed. Perhaps two issues the editor may consider if and when a revised publication is planned, is to offer, one, greater thematic coherence to the volume so that the accounts from the disadvantaged masses are captured on a wider scale and epistemological problematisation becomes the core of each of the chapters, and two, the need to differentiate aspects of epistemology (the nature and scope of knowledge). Some critical works based on the direction of the scholarship of Gramsci's (1971) and Freire's (1970) action-based participatory research could have added other dimensions. For example, it will be good to include chapters capturing the increasingly important role played by civil society organisations challenging the role of authoritarian states and big businesses. However, this is no easy task.

Overall, this is a wonderful book as the conceptual and methodological pillars anchoring most of the chapters are rooted in rigorous sociological and anthropological instruments. It is hoped that the book will inspire the young generation to take social science discourse seriously by undertaking research on

critical societal issues using the instruments of meta-ethnography, as the world is now unequally dominated by research based on meta-physical methodologies.

Rajah Rasiah
Department of Development Studies
Faculty of Economics and Administration
University of Malaya
Email: rajah@um.edu.my

References

Doyle L.H.(2003)"Synthesis Through Meta-Ethnography:Paradoxes, Enhancements, and Possibilities", *Qualitative Research*, 3:321-344.
Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Herder and Herder.
Gramsci, A. (1971) *Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers.