Chapter 11

Universalism and Indigenization in the History of Modern Psychology

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Problem of Coherence in the History of Modern Psychology

No historical study, whether of psychology or of something else, ever consists simply of a jumble of unrelated facts. Some thematic unity always ties the facts together. They may all have something to do with a particular person, for example, or a school of thought, or perhaps some form of psychological practice. Without such a unifying principle one would not be able to specify what any assembly of historical facts was the history of.

Where do these thematic unities come from? Unlike nuggets of historical information lying around in dusty archives, waiting to be collected, the thematic unities of historical discourse have to be constructed by the historian. Not that they are ever constructed arbitrarily. For the most part, historians follow in the footsteps of their predecessors and adopt unifying principles that have become uncontroversial by tradition. To be plausible, such principles must also appear to correspond to "natural" unities in the world whose history is being explored. Individual persons who have been active as psychologists, for example, constitute such natural unities. One can write their biographies or an account of their contributions without having to think twice about the propriety of one's choice of unifying theme.

But not all themes are so straightforward. Most unities have fuzzy borders, and this requires decisions about what to include and what to exclude. These decisions inevitably affect the definition of what one's history is about. The further back we go in time the more intractable these decisions become (Smith, 1988).

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However, in the modern period, during which psychology became a discipline practiced by professionals who saw themselves as scientists and employed technical procedures they regarded as scientific, psychology has had a solid institutional basis in the form of laboratories, clinics, scientific journals, accreditation procedures, regularly organized conferences, professional associations, and so on. Although the forms of these institutions have varied quite a lot from one country to another, they have sufficient generic similarity to provide at least one plausible justification for treating the history of modern psychology as a unitary topic.

Surprisingly, histories of modern psychology have seldom emphasized the institutional sources of such unity as the topic possesses. To do so would have suggested that the factors which constitute psychology as one discipline were essentially external to the content of psychological knowledge. What most histories of modern psychology prefer to suggest, however, is that the existence of the discipline depends on some intrinsic coherence of its subject matter. This is because such histories have usually been marketed as aids in the professional socialization of aspirant members of the discipline. The assumption of intrinsic coherence of subject matter is an important unifying force countering dangerous centrifugal tendencies within the professional community.

When a particular assembly of historical information is presented under one set of covers as the history of modern psychology, there is a clear implication that everything in this assembly belongs together as a reflection of a complex but ultimately unitary and distinct part of the natural world. However, there are two sets of facts that are both undeniable and awkward for this approach. First, there is the evident heterogeneity of the subject matter of “psychology”; second, there is the lack of unity associated with the territorial dispersion of the subject.

At different times different places have been prominent in the accumulation of psychological knowledge, and the nature of that knowledge has sometimes differed profoundly from place to place.

How has the historiography of psychology dealt with these kinds of diversity? The short answer is that it has dealt with them by privileging certain aspects of the historical picture at the expense of others. As regards heterogeneity of subject matter, the classical example of this move is provided by E. G. Boring’s A History of Experimental Psychology (1950), where the traditional experimental parts of the discipline are at the center of attention and everything else becomes a matter of relatively peripheral interest. It has been suggested that this bias was connected to the author’s
involvement in intradisciplinary politics where he represented the interests of the experimentalists (O'Donnell, 1979). More generally, historians' own affiliation with a particular part of the discipline might well lead them to assign a central, unifying role to that part, even substituting the history of that part for the history of the field as a whole.

This certainly applies to the way in which national diversity is handled in standard accounts of the history of modern psychology. Such accounts usually present modern psychology as originating in Europe in the late nineteenth century, then going from strength to strength in the United States, and possibly undergoing some growth in the rest of the world in the latter part of the twentieth century. This account is more remarkable for what it leaves out than for what it puts in. Its tendency is to depict the international circulation of psychological knowledge in terms of quantity and geography. There is explosive growth in one place, the United States, slow growth in some parts of the world, and extraordinary ups and downs in others, notably Europe and parts of East Asia. As long as progress is equated with growth, there is certainly progress, even if most of the overall growth was contributed by one country. That makes it easy to equate the progress of modern psychology with its progress in the United States and to present an essentially linear historical trajectory.

One problem with this linear scheme is that the discipline did not develop from a single seed sprouting in one specific location. One would have to go not only to Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig but also to Galton's anthropometric laboratory in London, to Charcot's clinic in Paris, to the Bureau of Salesmanship Research at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, and to many other places if one really wanted to trace the roots of modern psychology. Different versions of modern psychology appeared at more or less the same time in a number of countries. Nor did these versions undergo a progressive fusion. On the contrary, during the three decades between 1915 and 1945 the gap between different national psychologies did not narrow; it widened.

It is certainly true that international exchange has been a feature of modern psychology from the beginning. As soon as the first psychological laboratories appeared scholars from other countries began to visit them. Some came for relatively brief periods, others stayed for years and obtained doctorates at the end. Textbooks of the new science were translated into other languages, experimental apparatus was copied in other countries, and soon World Congresses of Psychology were being scheduled at regular intervals.

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But at the same time the discipline exhibited a profound localism in that virtually all significant contributions were deeply marked by the cultural context of their place of origin and were therefore not easily transplanted. Before World War II there had been very marked differences in the kind of psychological knowledge that predominated in the major national sites for its production. These differences were referred to in terms of distinctions among "schools" of psychology, the language of "schools" being a way of fudging the fact that there was fundamental disagreement about the subject matter of psychology and the appropriate way of studying it. All of these schools had unmistakable local roots, and their attempts at proselytizing were often unsuccessful. The relative predominance of these schools varied from country to country, and their exportability varied considerably. Germany was the place where Ganzheitspsychologie (holistic psychology) flourished, of which Gestalt Psychology proved to be the only exportable version. Behaviorism was an American phenomenon that was then not taken seriously anywhere else. British psychology was recognized for its strong tradition of mental testing and the kind of faculty psychology that it supported, but though this was exportable to North America and the Commonwealth it was either rejected or changed beyond recognition elsewhere. Differences of national style operated not merely on the level of theories and concepts but also on the level of research practice. The paradigmatic psychological investigation looked quite different as one traveled from one national school to another.

Yet all schools of psychology made explicit or implicit claims to universal validity. What they all agreed on was that there was one underlying psychological reality and that there were right and wrong ways to come to grips with it. They simply differed about which way was right and which was wrong. Somewhat ironically, the prewar school of psychology that had the strongest claim to be truly international, namely psychoanalysis, quite commonly found itself on the wrong side of the discipline's boundaries.

**Intellectual Geography of Center and Periphery**

After World War II, these differences became far less pronounced or disappeared altogether, to be replaced by a neo-behaviorist synthesis of U.S. origin that prescribed how empirical psychological research was to be carried out, how research questions were to be formulated, and what kinds of data were scientifically relevant. The leading position of the United States in
terms of quantitative measures of knowledge production had already been established earlier, but by about 1940 this lead was overwhelming. The social resources that supported psychological research and practice were of a different order of magnitude in America and in the rest of the world. Combined with American economic and political expansionism, this led to a pattern of international exchange of psychological knowledge that was very different from what had existed earlier in the century. Instead of a somewhat limited traffic among a number of more or less autonomous centers, we now find a great deal of unimpeded traffic from one center to many other places that form a kind of periphery around this one true center.

During the last half of the twentieth century, the international flow of scientific psychological knowledge ballooned, mediated by regular international conferences, mass circulation of journals and marketing of textbooks, foreign teaching and research missions by established figures, graduate training of large numbers of foreign students, research collaboration across frontiers and oceans, and many relatively informal contacts. That there was a lot of traffic, a great deal of traveling, and a huge flow of information is beyond question. But most of this flow was not so much an exchange among more or less equal local centers but essentially a one-way flow from one national source to a number of national recipients. In the West the source was of course the United States, and the recipients were found at various places in the rest of the world that were not in the Soviet sphere of influence. There was some other traffic as well, but it was dwarfed by this major effect. In other words, the flow of psychological knowledge was essentially asymmetrical. (This applied to the Soviet sphere as well, though in psychology the amount of activity was minute compared to the West.) In each case, there was a geographical center and a periphery, and the flow of information was mostly from the center to the periphery and not back. In the West, if psychologists outside the United States remained poorly informed about developments there, they were at risk of suffering some loss of professional status, whereas American psychologists habitually ignored work done elsewhere with complete impunity.

This state of affairs was at its most extreme in the decades after the end of World War II. (Germany formed a partial exception because the legacy of its recent past imposed a certain delay before it too fell into line.) The consequence was an unprecedented degree of international homogenization in what counted as scientific psychological knowledge.

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The fact that the discipline seemed to have a recognizable geographical center imposed a particular structure on its historiography (Danziger, 1991). American textbooks on the history of psychology could ignore virtually everything outside the United States and still claim, with some degree of plausibility, that they were presenting not a history of American psychology but a history of modern psychology as such. Other nationally based histories would have to accept the status of merely local histories.

Moreover, the scheme of center and periphery was metaphorically applied to the internal structure of the discipline. Certain areas of the discipline, usually involving particular methodological commitments, were designated as “basic” or “core” areas and others as areas of “application.” In the core areas experimental research was to discover universal principles of psychological functioning, while in the peripheral areas less rigorous procedures might suffice to study local manifestations of these principles. The basic principles were always conceived of as asocial and ahistorical, and their investigation was typically pursued in a decontextualized manner. Examples of such principles are the so-called laws of learning or the principles of cognition. There is supposed to be nothing intrinsically social about these laws and principles; they are thought to apply to individual organisms and individual minds, irrespective of the social content of either learning or cognition. It is assumed at the outset that the laws of learning and the principles of cognition are the same everywhere and at all times. They have the same kind of universality as the laws and principles of chemistry. However, just as in chemistry, local conditions can affect the results of their operation. In psychology, these local conditions are generally social in nature.

So we get a dualistic model: on the one hand, basic processes that are regarded as inherent features of individual organisms and individual minds; on the other hand, local social conditions that affect the specific manifestations of these processes. The core of psychological science is constituted by the investigation of universally valid basic processes; the study of human psychology in social and historical context, however, is regarded as peripheral to this core endeavour, less important because its results are not universally generalizable.

There was always a very marked parallelism between core and periphery on the level of geography and on the level of disciplinary content. Those at the geographical periphery usually did not have the resources to mount major investigations of basic processes. That kind of thing generally remained the prerogative of those at the geographical center. Those at
the geographical periphery typically had to content themselves with being at the scientific periphery as well. If they claimed universal validity for their findings, they could expect these claims to be ignored. But more often they did not make such claims; accepting the leadership of a far away center, they accorded their own work a purely peripheral significance in terms of the discipline as a whole. They would take over the conceptual categories and the methodological imperatives of the center and try their best to apply them under local conditions that differed profoundly from those that prevailed at the center. They were subject to the limitations imposed by what has sometimes been called a "borrowed consciousness" (Easton, 1991).

Nowhere has this been more evident than in colonial, quasi-colonial, and postcolonial parts of the world. The export of modern psychological knowledge to these areas had begun on a small scale after World War I and occasionally even earlier. In the latter part of the century this export gradually gained momentum and also changed in content. The dominant position of American exports, already a fact of life in Western Europe, became even more marked in most of the rest of the world. A flood of graduate students from Asia, Latin America, and the British Commonwealth received their professional training in the United States and quite often returned to their home countries to teach and practice what they had learned in academic or nonacademic contexts. The prestigious journals of the discipline were published and edited in America, and ambitious overseas scholars would aim to publish there, while the reverse process was almost unheard of. Funds for research in developing countries dispensed by American agencies were frequently the only viable sources of research support in those countries. Because of this extreme asymmetry of resources, the standard of what constituted good scientific psychological research and practice continued to be provided by American exemplars. It was taken for granted that the conceptual categories and the research practices that had evolved historically within American psychology would provide access to those universally valid generalizations that were the goal of psychology as a natural science.

But this one-way transfer of psychological knowledge from a dominant center to a scattered periphery has not always gone smoothly. Localized doubts about the appropriateness of American notions of psychological science were often voiced, and in certain cases these doubts congealed into articulate attempts at opposition that sometimes took on the character of a movement. A relatively early example was provided by a movement in the 1960s and 1970s to dif

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in the 1960s and 1970s to differentiate a “European” from an “American” social psychology (Moscovici, 1972).

Later on, resistance to the forces of homogenization emerged with some intensity in several developing countries. The movement acquired a name, “indigenous psychology,” which in this context does not mean the “folk psychology” of ordinary people but a self-conscious attempt to develop variants of modern professional psychology that are more attuned to conditions in developing nations than the psychology taught at Western academic institutions. The first stirrings of such a movement followed the period of decolonization after World War II, gradually achieving some global visibility within the discipline in the 1980s (Moghaddam, 1987; Kim and Berry, 1993; Sinha, 1997; Yang, 1997).

Although part of the program of modern indigenous psychology may involve a greater openness to local pre-modern traditions, both scholarly and folk, the movement of indigenization itself is unambiguously a phenomenon of modern psychology. A critique of current Western psychological doctrines and practices forms the starting point of proposed reforms, the advocates of the reforms have been trained and professionally certified by Western academic institutions, and most public discourse about indigenous psychology is conducted via regular professional channels (Allwood and Berry, in press). In some cases indigenization involves relatively superficial changes to received disciplinary practices. Hitherto unrecognized variables of personality and social psychology may be added to those investigated in the West, or research may be directed at previously neglected or overlooked problems and problem areas. But in other cases the changes entailed by indigenization are more profound, leading to a fundamental restructuring of psychological research methods (Smith, 1999) and to a replacement of traditional psychological categories and concepts by apparently incommensurable alternatives (Enriquez, 1987, 1993; Nsamenang, 1992, 1995).

Historical Echoes of Indigenization

From the more recent literature on indigenization, one gets the impression that this is rather a new phenomenon in the history of modern psychology. It is true that the identification and labeling of the phenomenon is new, and this indicates a degree of reflexivity that is characteristic of this most recent form of indigenization. But the process now described as
"indigenization" is one that has been a feature of modern psychology from its earliest days. What became the universalistic science of psychology had its roots in distinctly local traditions of science and philosophy in nineteenth-century Europe. British evolutionary biology, French psychiatry, and German experimental physiology each gave rise to different ways of conceptualizing and investigating human subjectivity scientifically (Danziger, 1990), and the export of each of these forms was always accompanied by considerable modification of the original. This process had some elements in common with what is now referred to as indigenization, but when one turns from the circulation of psychological knowledge within Europe to the export of this knowledge to the United States one encounters indigenization on a massive scale.

Comparing the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century export of experimental psychology from Germany to the United States with the late-twentieth-century export of psychology from the United States to the ex-colonial world is instructive. In both cases the transfer of knowledge was unidirectional, from an academically more prestigious source to the periphery of the academic world. Also in both cases advanced students were the major carriers of this transfer. (Textbooks played some role in the earlier case but not as much as later, partly because of language problems and partly because textbook publishers had not yet become a significant economic force.) Then as now the flow of psychology students was part of a much broader flow that covered virtually all academic subjects. The University of Göttingen, for example, enrolled over a thousand American students between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (Sokal, 1981, p. 2)—an impressive total relative to student numbers in that period. There were published guides for the use of American students, who by the mid-nineteenth century had established a quasi-official colony with its own rules, regulations, and rituals (Sokal, 1981, p. 2). In psychology the flow of American students started almost as soon as Wilhelm Wundt had established the first designated experimental psychology laboratory at Leipzig University in 1879. Among the Wundt students who subsequently had a foundational role in the establishment of experimental psychology in the United States were James McKeen Cattell, Edward B. Titchener, Hugo Münsterberg, Frank Angell, Walter Dill Scott, Edward W. Scripture, and Lightner Witmer (Tinker, 1980). These all completed doctorates at Leipzig, but there were many, often somewhat older men, who spent time at Leipzig and elsewhere in Germany without both-
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ereing with the formality of a doctorate. Stanley Hall, William James, and James Mark Baldwin are well-known examples.

After these men returned to the United States, they founded laborato ries modeled after Wundt’s and filled with apparatus that was either im-
ported from Germany or copied from German models. Inspired by the journal that Wundt had begun to publish in 1880, *The American Journal of Psychology* made its appearance in 1887, followed by others a few years later. In the pages of these journals there were reports on experimental investigations whose problems and methods were very similar to their German models. The number of psychological laboratories in the United States expanded very rapidly, and many of Wundt’s students quickly began training the next generation of experimentalists who dominated the field in the early twentieth century.

But in spite of the massive early influence of German experimental psychology American psychology soon took a very different turn and developed along lines that were actually antithetical to the vision of scientific psychology that had motivated the work of men like Wundt (Rieber, 2001). By the 1920s many American psychologists had come to regard the kind of experimentalism that had been imported from Germany as a model of how not to do psychology, and soon the figure of Wundt, the once highly respected forefather, had come to represent the negative alter-native for a discipline that was desperately trying to establish its scientific credentials in America. After a relatively brief period of academic colonial-ism American psychology had become well and truly indigenized.

It is only to be expected that when a science is transplanted from one part of the world to another there will be some shift of priorities, some change in the topics that receive the most attention, some adaptive modification of the techniques considered most appropriate. Some would con-sider even this to constitute indigenization. But I doubt that we need a special category to describe such everyday events that raise no fundamen-tal issues for the historiography of science. However, the transformation of the discipline of psychology in the course of its trans-Atlantic migration does seem to raise such issues. In the first place, this was a transformation that changed the very object which the science was set up to investigate.

Experimental psychology had been invented in Germany as a system-atic investigation of individual consciousness with the help of standard pieces of physical apparatus. Soon different views emerged regarding the most appropriate categories for conceptualizing the life of individual
consciousness, but throughout all these debates there was tacit agreement on the object to be investigated, which remained the individual conscious mind. Consequently, there was also basic agreement that the data of experimental psychology had to be based on self-report, though this did not exclude arguments about the boundaries of what constituted scientifically admissible self-report.

Neither the original scientific object of modern psychology nor its preferred method of data gathering long survived the transatlantic migration. Certainly, there were valiant attempts to reproduce something like the German psychology of consciousness in the early American laboratories. But this is not what provided the fuel for the rocket-like advance of the new science in America. That depended on the opening up of altogether different fields for the play of psychological expertise, fields like child study, education, clinical psychology, ergonomics, personnel selection, and more generally, the scientific study of individual differences. Interestingly, some of these fields were pioneered by the very people who had set off to sit at the feet of the German masters a few years earlier. And it was not long before some of the most prominent figures in American psychology began to raise doubts, not only about the value of defining the primary object investigated by psychology in terms of consciousness but also about the value of data gathering based on self-report (Cattell, 1904; James, 1904). Shortly before World War I this gradual process of indigenization had given rise to the more radical form of a movement, a movement which called itself "behaviorism."

The discipline of psychology that emerged from this movement was based on a negation of most of the features that had defined the discipline in its earlier Central European incarnation. Overt behavior replaced the inner consciousness as the primary object of psychological investigation; psychology became "the psychology of the other one," as one early behaviorist put it (Meyer, 1921), and "responses" whose form and meaning were determined by the investigator, not the subject, became the sole source of legitimate psychological data.

Closely related to these changes were changes in the knowledge interests of the discipline. In its first incarnation experimental psychology had been intended as a way of shedding light on epistemological questions by empirical means: the a priori nature of space perception, for example, or the translation of physical energy into sensory experience. Wundt, its most prominent figure, was a prolific contributor to the philosophical literature of his day and made no secret of his strong opposition to the idea of psy-

chology as a practical rather than a theoretical discipline. By the end of World War II, this discipline had collapsed, to be replaced by a new and more practical approach, as described in the next section.
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chology as a practical rather than a philosophical science (Wundt, 1909). Yet, with only one or two exceptions, his American students showed no sign of sharing his philosophical interests and proceeded to engage themselves in various practical projects once they had established themselves back home. Cattell, who had actually become Wundt’s official assistant during his stay in Germany, soon became a purveyor of instruments for measuring individual differences to which he gave the name by which they have been known ever since, “mental tests.” Many of Wundt’s other American students drifted into practical applications of psychology that were not exactly what he had had in mind for the new science. Witmer founded the first psychological clinic; Judd went into educational psychology; Scripture studied speech disorders, and so on.

This is not to say that similar tendencies did not exist among some of Wundt’s German students. Ernst Meumann, for example, another of his assistants, ended up as an educational psychologist with a strong practical orientation and duly earned his mentor’s disapproval. But the spread of applied psychology encountered many obstacles in Germany and only succeeded under the Nazis in the specific area of military psychology (Geuter, 1992). As late as 1920 the German Psychological Society published a protest against the tendency to reduce the number of academic positions in psychology in favor of philosophy. But it defended psychology in terms of its philosophical, not its practical, value: “The reciprocal influence between psychology and philosophy has become steadily stronger, especially in relation to phenomenology, epistemology, and the theory of values” (Bühler et al., 1930). By then, there was little overlap between the content of the discipline of psychology in Germany and the United States.

Toward a Polycentric History

By the end of World War II, the world system of a seriously fractionated discipline had collapsed, to be replaced by a system in which there were still local differences but in which one local variant constituted the unchallengeable center of the discipline. Everything else constituted a kind of periphery, as described in the second section of this chapter. That state of affairs provided a convincing legitimation for a historiography of modern psychology that focused on the history of American psychology and treated everything else in terms of its relationship to this central narrative.

The history of modern psychology seems to be marked by recurring
tensions between the discipline's claims to the universality of its knowledge and the sometimes profound differences between the kinds of knowledge produced at different local sites. Insofar as psychology is regarded as delivering knowledge about the universal nature of human individuals, the places where this knowledge is gathered can have no intrinsic significance for the knowledge itself. However, insofar as psychology is regarded as a social project producing locally grounded knowledge, the characteristics of the sites for the production of that knowledge become quite important. Locally grounded knowledge is likely to vary in kind where the differences among sites of knowledge production are profound. But if such differences are regarded as irrelevant to the universal nature of psychological knowledge, which is everywhere the same, then it becomes very easy to identify one socially limited kind of knowledge with what is truly universal.

If this error is to be avoided, then the sites at which psychological knowledge is produced must be taken much more seriously, not simply as geographical locations but as sites of cultural and socioeconomic diversity. But recognition of the relationship between the results of psychological knowledge production and the local context for that production represents only a first step. If we go no further, we end up with a multiplicity of local histories that are usually of no more than parochial interest. Such romanticizing of the local only constitutes one side of the coin; universalist triumphalism represents the other side. Both need to be replaced by a focus on the interlinking of local influences, the changing interrelationships among centers, that have constituted the world history of the subject in the modern period. The real challenge for the historian is to do justice to the fact that, from the beginning, modern psychology was dependent both on diverse local sites for its cultivation and on organized international exchange of psychological knowledge, practice, and scholarship.

International relationships have always played a prominent role in the shaping of modern psychology, a situation reflected by the historiography of psychology only insofar as it adopts a global perspective. But the tradition of presenting disciplinary history in terms of "contributions" to a singular subject has led to a neglect of the changing relationships between local centers for the scientific production of psychological knowledge. What such a "polycentric" history reveals is a world of contested psychological objects and practices, successful and unsuccessful impositions and resistances, selective adaptations, and an incorporation of local values to which universal validity is often a convenient label for.

Indigenization in the wakal knowledge has happened. It has led to significant changes, in the choice and the methods applied to the subjects. It had a spectacularly successful outcome and sometimes the outcome in many developing countries. The events must be centric. It must work with consciousness, rather than titillation. Intellectual migration and procedures when did some of these prove to be creative? Did they change them, some useful and why? There are stories of misunderstandings and downright hostility that.

In general, a polycentric approach tends to contextualize historical one locally generated truth social roots of that truth we privilege, both on the geography of alternative accounts context. For a polycentric historian to criticize social context there are grounds in psychology face discipline's long-established theories human action altogether or ecological. It is often poorly analyzed and is often "ecology." There is a certain portance of cultural difference, being eroded at an unprecedented rate.
The universality of its knowledges between the kinds of insofar as psychology is reversal nature of human indifference can have no intrinsic er, insofar as psychology is grounded knowledge, the of that knowledge become is likely to vary in kind production are profound. nt to the universal nature of the same, it becomes of knowledge with what is.

ites at which psychological are seriously, not simply as socioeconomic diversity, the results of psychological for that production repre-end up with a multiplicity of an parochial interest. Such side of the coin; universal-th need to be replaced by a the changing interrelation-world history of the subject: the historian is to do justice psychology was dependent and on organized internaractice, and scholarship.
yed a prominent role in the lected by the historiography l perspective. But the tradi-s of “contributions” to a sin-ging relationships between psychological knowledge, world of contested psycho-successful impositions and portion of local values to

which universal validity is often attributed. The term “indigenization” provides a convenient label for this complex set of relationships.

Indigenization in the wake of the international transfer of psychological knowledge has happened throughout the history of modern psychology. It has led to significant changes in psychological concepts and theories, in the choice and the formulation of psychological problems, and in the methods applied to the solution of those problems. Sometimes it has had a spectacularly successful outcome, as in the German-American case, and sometimes the outcome has been uncertain, as is the case currently in many developing countries. A historiography that is adequate to the course of these events must necessarily adopt a viewpoint that is poly-centric. It must work with categories that seek to capture the interrelations among centers, rather than the characteristics of centers considered in isolation. Intellectual migration is perhaps the most obvious of these categories, not only in reference to persons, but, more significantly, in reference to concepts and practices. What happened to psychological concepts, theories, and procedures when attempts were made to transplant them? Why did some of these prove to be much better travelers than others? How did traveling change them, sometimes beyond recognition? Who found them useful and why? There are stories of successful transfer to be told here, but also stories of misunderstanding, mistranslation, total incomprehension, and downright hostility that are often more illuminating.

In general, a polycentric understanding of the history of the discipline favors a contextualist historiography. As long as there was an equation of one locally generated truth with the truth as such, the question of the social roots of that truth was not likely to be asked. But with the end of privilege, both on the geographical and the conceptual level, the intelligibility of alternative accounts rests on seeing them in terms of their social context. For a polycentric historiography the question of how to characterize social context therefore becomes crucial. Historians with a background in psychology face a particular danger here, because of the discipline’s long-established tendency either to ignore the social context of human action altogether or, more recently, to represent it in terms of poorly analyzed and often misapplied categories, such as “culture” and “ecology.” There is a certain irony in psychology’s awakening to the importance of cultural differences just as traditional cultural differences are being eroded at an unprecedented rate and cultural hybridization and interpenetration has become the norm (Hermans and Kempen, 1998).
accept that references to cultural differences can have a useful role as a kind of shorthand for complex factors whose full analysis requires separate treatment, the reification of cultures in terms of geographically based and essentialist entities no longer has a place in serious social science (Kuper, 1999).

The tendency to conceptualize social context solely in terms of “culture” almost invariably goes hand in hand with a tendency to overlook the importance of power relationships. This may be acceptable within mainstream psychology, but it does not provide a good basis for historical work, especially in an international context. It is understandable that an interpretation of international relations in terms of cultural differences rather than inequalities of power and resources should appeal to those at the privileged center (both geographically and intellectually). But an adequate historical account would also have to reflect the voices from the periphery that interpret many aspects of the asymmetrical transfer of psychological knowledge in terms of “cultural imperialism” or “intellectual colonialism” (Ho, 1988; Oommen, 1991), and who chafe under the “exoticizing” of non-Western psychologies and the “orientalism” that has long disfigured the representation of colonized and previously colonized people by Western social science (Misra, 1996; Bhatia, 2002).

Another dubious but powerful convention of the traditional historiography of psychology is its marked disciplinary focus. The history of modern psychology is commonly identified with the history of the discipline of psychology, where the boundaries of the discipline are defined by academic and professional organizational structures, not by the subject matter. Whether some topic is regarded as forming part of the history of modern psychology depends on its reception by academic departments and professional associations. But this, too, is subject to local and temporal variation. Common examples of topics with a variable status are psychoanalysis, graphology, parapsychology, and much of social psychology. However, instead of being taken for granted, organizationally and administratively enforced boundaries become a major focus of inquiry for a polycentric historiography. The locally variable reasons for the erection of such boundaries and their historical effects constitute important features of variant developments in different parts of the world. Clearly, when the historical construction of disciplinary boundaries becomes an object of inquiry, the perspective of a purely intradisciplinary history has to be abandoned (Staeuble, 2004).

A polycentric historiography of psychology would have to explore the historical dependence of the discipline on culturally embedded practice (Danziger, 1997) the direction of a less autocratic practice. But localization is the other side involves the interference of common understandings. The past, certain locally gene types of a timeless “human natural methodological so-called” to empirical refutation. Psychology, however, offers the possibility of the universality of such universality for granted, specific historical conditions. Meanings emerge not as a restoration process” (Stompka, 1995).

The turn away from a univocalized polycentric history is not an enhanced link between that is likely to reduce the historical confusion of what passes for historicizing of psychological kn practices of the discipline to 2000). Who knows, one day vernacular psychology that actually psychological knowledge.

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historical dependence of the categories and procedures of scientific psy-
chology on culturally embedded beliefs and on local forms of institutional-
ized practice (Danziger, 1997). This is likely to reinforce existing trends in
the direction of a less autocratic, more self-reflective, form of disciplinary
practice. But localization is only one side of the historical process. The
other side involves the interaction of centers and the consequent emerg-
ence of common understandings, as well as renewed differentiation. In
the past, certain locally generated categories of psychological discourse
were often regarded as the only true descriptions of the universal attrib-
utes of a timeless “human nature.” Insofar as they were built into the his-
torical methodology of so-called cross-cultural psychology they were im-
mune to empirical refutation. A different approach to the history of psy-
chology, however, offers the possibility of another perspective on the ques-
tion of the universality of psychological phenomena. Instead of taking
such universality for granted, one could treat it as one possible outcome of
specific historical conditions that are open to investigation. “Trans-social
meanings emerge not as a result of methodological tricks, but of a real his-
torical process” (Stompka, 1990, p. 52).

The turn away from a unifocal linear history to a socially contextualized
dycentric history is not a matter of merely antiquarian interest. It
entails an enhanced link between historical reflection and current practice
that is likely to reduce the high level of ethnocentrism that disfigures so
much of what passes for core psychology. By encouraging a genuine his-
toricizing of psychological knowledge it would open up the categories and
practices of the discipline to hitherto unthinkable possibilities (Shweder,
2000). Who knows, one day we might even end up with a history of mod-
ern psychology that actually contributes to the further development of
psychological knowledge.

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