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Rockefeller Foundation and the development of Global Health: local contours and international circulations

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From time to time, historiography undergoes transformations that impact the work of historians and lead to reassessments in terms of theoretical, conceptual and methodological perspectives. These are reconfigurations in the modes of knowledge production, which alter the dialogues between members of a fieldⁱ and produce new relationships with other areas of knowledge.

The dossier we present in this issue of *História: Debates e Tendências* discusses the role of the Rockefeller Foundation in health from a historical perspective – with the contribution of researchers from different generations of studies about the international agency – and under the lens of two concepts that stand as challenges today: Global Health and Circulation.

The Rockefeller Foundation was created as a philanthropic institution in the early years of the 20th century and contributed to the development of health in various parts of the world, such as Latin America, Africa and Asia. Through the *International Health Commission* (IHC), between 1913 and 1916; the *International Health Board* (IHB), from 1916 to 1927; and the *International Health Division* (IHD), from 1927 until its closure in 1951, financed schools of Hygiene and Public Health, the training of health agents and campaigns to eradicate diseases such as hookworm, yellow fever and malaria (FARLEY, 2004, p. 2; CUETO, 1994).

It would not be the case here to make a historiographical balance of the perspectives of analysis on the performance of the philanthropic agency, which has already been done with excellence in other moments by Cueto (2015a, 2020)ⁱⁱ. In summary, the first studies on the Rockefeller Foundation were carried out by its former employees, whose motivation was to celebrate the humanitarianism and universality of its philanthropy. In the 1970s, research was marked by a critical perspective, which saw the institution's performance as a tool of the imperialism of US foreign policy and, in a subtle way, of the expansion of a cultural hegemony. Such ideas were influenced both by dependency theory, which thought

that metropolitan centers impeded the development of “peripheries”, and by Marxism present in the links of early studies between science and imperialism. In the 1980s and 1990s, new research emerged that questioned especially three dimensions: they refuted the exaggerated emphasis on the issuing side of the philanthropic relationship; they fought the idea that science in the so-called “periphery” would be peripheral to universal knowledge; and, finally, they dismantled the authoritarian assumptions of the donor agency (CUETO, 2015a, p. 10-11).

Each of these analytical perspectives was forged in specific contexts, guided by the very way in which international relations were interpreted throughout the second half of the 20th century and by the ways in which their respective authors read the world. With serious researchers engaged in the production of scientific knowledge, these studies allowed the formation of a highly specialized area, based on consistent assumptions. Undoubtedly, debates on theoretical and methodological perspectives provide the basis for the complexity of a field, in this case, that of studies on the Rockefeller Foundation.

The publication of a dossier on an international health agency, at a time when the Sars-coV-2 (Covid-19) pandemic is still impacting the world, provides a reflection on global governance forms and the role played by international institutions. The first efforts in the area of international health were linked to the intensification of pandemics during the 19th century. The first cholera pandemic only affected Asia, but the second, in 1827, required many coordinated actions by different governments (CUETO, 2015b). Throughout the 1800s, the understanding was gradually shared that some diseases could only be eradicated with agreements between different nations, which also resulted in health conferences to discuss these diseases and their prophylactic measures.

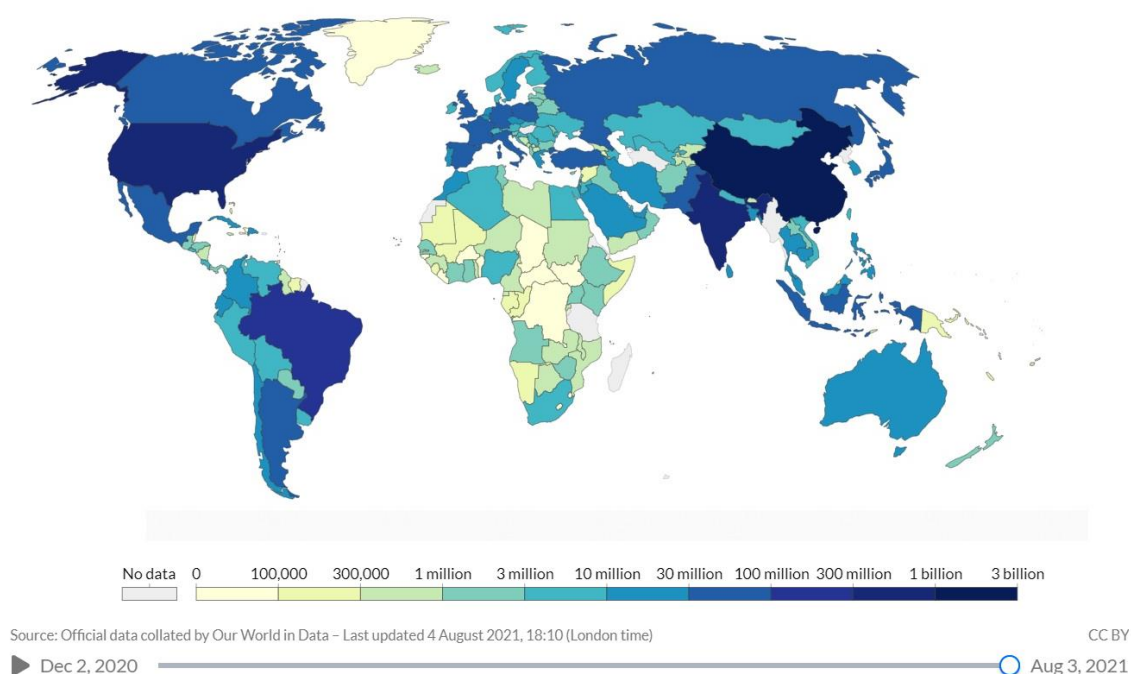
Multilateral health agencies gained prominence and global influence during the 20th century, especially the World Health Organization (WHO), created in 1948 with the mission to “guarantee the highest possible level of health to all peoples”, without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic status or social distinction. Cueto, Brown and Fee (2019, p. 1) identify two perspectives of WHO that have marked its history: during its first decades of existence, the institution was recognized as an international leader in health and disease issues, in addition to occupying the center of a global network of scientists, physicians, and public health policymakers; but, in the late 1980s, the agency was accused of inefficiency, lack of transparency and irrelevance, with a serious questioning of its authoritative role in health coordination.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, historians and social scientists are being called upon to discuss and better understand the histories of multilateral health agencies as these institutions once again gain global importance. These agencies work on validating scientific

knowledge about the virus that affects the world, coordinating trials and distributing vaccines, so that rich countries are not the only ones to immunize their populations and reduce the number of deaths as poor countries suffer.

Despite the relevant role they play, multilateral agencies cannot be seen as tools of “global salvation”. Historical experience demonstrates that their actions were not devoid of interests, tensions and limitations related to the contexts in which they worked. Currently, the *Covax Facility* program, for example, launched as a response to the pandemic by WHO and philanthropic entities in April 2020, has as one of its goals to help all nations to have access to vaccines in a fair and equitable manner. Even so, it could not prevent, at this time, African countries from being those with the lowest rates of vaccination compared to countries with greater economic powerⁱⁱⁱ.

Figure 1 – World vaccination map on August 3, 2021.



Source: World Vaccination Map... 4 Aug. 2021.

This dossier is also part of its organizers' commitment to the history and historiography of health and science. In recent years, these researchers have dedicated themselves to producing about the work of the Rockefeller Foundation, influenced by concepts such as International Health, Global Health and Knowledge Circulation^{iv}. This interest is the result of the fertility of studies on the Rockefeller Foundation, which have been constantly growing since the 1980s in Brazil. Not by chance, a country that received large sums from the international agency for the eradication of diseases and that was awarded scholarships for physicians and health professionals, especially in the United States (SANTOS; FARIA, 2003).

The concepts of Global Health and Circulation have gained relevance in contemporary discussions about health agents, knowledge, practices and institutions in a global perspective. Far from being a resolved issue, the concept of Global Health is an “open door” for discussion, based on the different ways in which it is used. According to Cueto (2020), the idea of Global Health surpassed that of International Health, which was used to refer to diseases, organizations and global programs related to health, and which had hegemony with the creation of multilateral agencies such as the United Nations (UN) and the WHO in the second half of the 20th century. Accused of being a tool in the hands of neoliberal governments, the concept has come to be used to denounce social and health injustices, including those emanating from the neoliberal stage, but it still needs to overcome issues such as methodological nationalism, mastery of different languages and access to the collections by researchers, among other issues.

On the other hand, the concept of Circulation appears as an important perspective in the deconstruction of the center-periphery binarism, which for some time was at the center of analyzes that focused on the emission and reception of actions, practices and knowledge in health. Kapil Raj (2007) is one of the authors contributing to this discussion. The author demonstrates how the creation of modern science was historically attributed to Western Europe, disregarding the contributions of other peoples^v, such as the Chinese. When problematizing the idea that a “diffusion” emanates from the center and reaches the periphery, Raj warns how the moral and political values of modern science have been questioned and how the diffusion of these values to the rest of the world is currently being called into question. In contrast:

These understanding, however, are changed by experience in a constantly shifting process in which both sides participate, and that makes such encounters complex historical events and moments of Discovery. Finally, historians, sociologists, and philosophers of science have in the past decades radically undermined the traditional understanding that modern science has its own logic of development based on rigorous, immutable, explicit, and empirically tested rules and methods which lie beyond the pale of social historical analysis. Moving away from a conception of science as a system of normal propositions or discoveries, these recent studies seek to understand the making, maintenance, extension, and reconfiguration of scientific knowledge by focusing equally on the material, instrumental, corporeal, practical, social, political, and cognitive aspects of knowledge. Systematically opting for detailed case studies of the process through which knowledge and associated skills, practices, and instruments are created in preference to grand narratives or ‘big-picture’ accounts, they have demonstrated the negotiated, contingent, and situated nature of propositions, skills, and objects that constitute natural knowledge.

When considering the knowledge and performance of “mediator” individuals, it is possible to understand the process of circulation of knowledge, savvies, practices and ideas. It is through the interaction between different cultures specialized in the production of new

knowledge that scientific knowledge is understood in what the author defines as a “contact zone”. Having asked the questions that guide the organization of this compilation of texts, follow the presentation of the articles that comprise this issue.

Darwin Stapleton's text opens the dossier with a study on the main aspects and results of the scholarship program offered by the Rockefeller Foundation and its impact on the globalization of knowledge in public health between 1915 and 1940. According to the author, it was expected that the scholarship holders increase their knowledge and skills and contribute to the national public health in the return to their country of origin. Stapleton analyzes the trajectory of scholarship holder Lidia LaFace Antinoro, an Italian entomologist who graduated from the University of Rome. Antinoro not only received guidance from the Rockefeller Foundation but tried to shape elements of the scholarship on his own terms. In addition, the article discusses the importance of Rockefeller's laboratories and field stations, visited by scholarship holders, with an emphasis on the experience of the station in Andalusia, Alabama, United States.

Next, Josep L. Barona analyzes the role played by the Rockefeller Foundation and the League of Nations (LN) in the health of Europe in the first half of the 20th century. For the author, the international philanthropic intervention expanded the commitment of political authorities to notions of public health, civil rights, well-being and progress, in a context in which the development of social medicine accompanied the growing formation of independent authorities, health specialists. International diplomacy has become an essential tool not only for political stabilization, but also for negotiating solutions to transnational health problems such as the containment of epidemics and the formation of exchanges of health professionals.

The development of modern health in China is analyzed by Liping Bu, who discusses events such as the construction of the *Peking Union Medical College*, urban and rural health posts and the creation of a national health administration, giving visibility to local/global dynamics, to the negotiations and to the characters who acted in the elaboration and re-elaboration of health concepts, teaching programs and actions among the Chinese population. A highlight is the work of John Grant, who introduced the concept of medical efficiency, based on a combined practice of curative, preventive and state medicine, under government responsibility for people's health.

Lina Faria and Luiz Antônio de Castro Santos make an reflection on education models in Brazil, based on the notion of international health sponsored by agencies such as the Rockefeller Foundation, in the first half of the 20th century. The analysis turns to the Flexner Report and its influence on the reformulation of medical education in different countries. The authors consider that the recommendations in the document are still relevant,

especially regarding medical practice and experimental learning, but that the prevailing education model in Brazil has characteristics of that elaborated by the French physician, philosopher and political leader Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis, such as linear conceptual structures with a disciplinary curriculum, traditional formats of pedagogical practice.

The article by Rodrigo César da Silva Magalhães analyzes the implementation of the World Campaign to Eradicate Yellow Fever in the Americas and Africa, launched in 1918 by the IHC, of the Rockefeller Foundation. This program was essential to test the limits and possibilities of global health, in addition to being marked by constant changes in the understanding of vectors and forms of disease transmission, international research in laboratories and the production of new scientific knowledge, which had a direct impact on the bases of the campaign and its continuity.

Federico Rayez and Karina Inés Ramacciotti produce a historiographical balance of the activities of the Rockefeller Foundation in Argentina in the period between 1930 and 1940. The authors analyze the importance of the international philanthropic agency in the elaboration of projects to improve the training of doctors, nurses and scientists. Rockefeller's performance is analyzed in conjunction with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), building a space for promoting health, medicine and research in a transnational perspective.

Soma Hewa focuses on the Rockefeller Foundation's IHB involvement in a vast primary health care promotion program in Sri Lanka, long before WHO discussed this issue for developing countries. Hewa follows processes such as the hookworm control campaign – with a focus on immigrant workers in India – back in 1916; and the community-based health program, which encompassed disease prevention, health education, and child welfare services. Rockefeller's philanthropy arrived in Sri Lanka during European colonial rule in the early 20th century and was met with a hostile reception by the colonial administration. Foundation staff acted with caution and listened to local citizens in developing public health strategies.

The institutionalization of nursing in Colombia, through the National Directorate of Hygiene, is the object of study by Polyana Aparecida Valente and Denise Nacif Pimenta. Based on the trajectories of fellows Jane Louise Cary White, Carolyn Tenney Ladd and Paulina Gomez- Veja, they understand the complex relationships between the local and the global, the tensions between the aspirations of individuals and the broader projects that run through their lives. Paulina Gomez-Veja, professor, bacteriologist and the first Colombian woman to receive an IHB scholarship in 1926, had to deal with the gender inequalities that affected (and still affect) the lives of many health professionals. When she requested a trip

for a Ph.D. in Science and Hygiene at Johns Hopkins University, she was denied the request due to her involvement with the women's movement.

Rita de Cássia Marques presents the connections between the international training of biochemist José Baeta Vianna and the work developed in his laboratory in Minas Gerais, Brazil. From this experience, Vianna brought knowledge that was reworked in the formation of his followers. Based on written sources and oral records, the author analyzes the aspects that make up the work in the laboratory and the discoveries involving iodine and the treatment of endemic goiter.

The article by Jean Segata, Elisa Oberst Varga and Nathália dos Santos Silva connects anthropological research interests on public health policies that emphasize multispecies intertwining with the historical debate on the relations between the State, science and mosquitoes in Brazil. Based on a sophisticated ethnography, the authors analyze the implementation and consolidation of a policy to control *Aedes aegypti*, through the Surveillance Team for Rodents and Vectors (EVRV), an agency of the Municipal Health Secretariat of Porto Alegre (SMSPA). Past and present meet in this text to show that the mosquito is not just a vector of diseases, but that it drives science, technology, corporate interests and public policy models.

The dossier also includes a rich interview with Marcos Cueto, in which he recalls his trajectory as a researcher, his approach to the *Rockefeller Archive Center* and to *Casa de Oswaldo Cruz*. Furthermore, he problematizes concepts such as International/Global Health, discusses potential research movements on international philanthropic agencies and the latest trends in the historiography of health and science. In the Commented Sources section, the document *Yellow Fever Prevention: Ways and Means, Survey, Organization and Execution of the Work of the Yellow Fever Commission for Brazil* is presented by Christiane Maria Cruz de Souza, in a contextualized analysis, which reveals the existence of a strong division for the control of yellow fever, with professionals hierarchically distributed in different positions and functions and who worked in the former North (today Northeast) of Brazil.

Finally, an intimate dialogue with the history of science is carried out by Bráulio Silva Chaves when reviewing the book *O Feroz Mosquito Africano no Brasil*, by Gabriel Lopes. The analysis follows the traces left by Lopes in the introduction of his book, a dialogue with Ludwick Fleck and Carlos Alvarez Maia, and connects the reader with the possibility of interrelating microsocial and macrosocial factors, such as the national health agenda and the role of international agencies, with an emphasis on the Rockefeller Foundation.

This issue of *História: Debates e Tendências* also has four articles in the Free Section. In the first of them, Vitor Wagner Neto de Oliveira reflects on the Brazilian political crisis, starting from the June 2013 journeys, with an emphasis on left-wing tactics that defined the direction of the Workers' Party in its alliance policies. Then, Sandro Aramis Richter Gomes investigates the formation and dissolution processes of the Proletarian Claim Party of Paraná, between 1933 and 1934. The focus is on the internal organization of the electoral action of the minority parties that emerged in the Brazilian states during the Provisional Government.

Based on a bibliographical review, Jadir Peçanha Rostoldo's text exposes the economic debate on the theories of underdevelopment and dependence, having as reference the economic thinking developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America. And Gabriela Lima Grecco and Diego Sebastián Crescentino show how the literary source is important to understand imaginaries and representations in historical construction. They analyze the work *Sagrada Esperança* as a political tool of the dominated, during the process of independence in Angola, for an awareness and construction of identity.

We invite all readers to enjoy this edition of *História: Debates e Tendências* and to benefit from the vast knowledge shared by each of the authors in this issue, to whom we offer our sincere thanks!

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ⁱ For more information on the concept of the scientific field, see Bourdieu (1983).

ⁱⁱ In an article published in *Quinto Sol* magazine, in 2020, the author analyzes trends in the analysis of the history of global health, which closely dialogues with the ways in which the Rockefeller Foundation has been interpreted over time.

ⁱⁱⁱ Check: WORLD VACCINATION MAP... Available at: <https://operamundi.uol.com.br/coronavirus/67957/mapa-da-vacinacao-no-mundo-quantas-pessoas-ja-foram-imunizada-contr-Covid-19>. Accessed on: 4 Aug. 2021.

^{iv} For more information, see Batista (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), Batista and Silva (2020), Batista and Souza (2020), Batista and Ferreira (2021). In addition, Porto (2017, 2020a, 2020b, 2021).

^v From this cultural approach to science, the innate and universal character of knowledge production, typical of a Eurocentric vision, came to be questioned. It became important to think in terms of a conception of “postcolonial technoscience”, which proposes a symmetry of treatment in the analysis of science outside the Western axis. This presupposes an understanding of the ways in which technoscience is involved in the circulation of universal reason, in the description of alternative modernities and in the recognition of hybridizations, mixtures, boundary conditions and intersections between different scientific cultures (ANDERSON, 2002).