

CONVERSATIONS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The South on the South Interview with Raewyn Connell

In the first of a series of conversations about the Global South, Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South editors Lisandro E. Claudio and Karl Cheng Chua (STJGS) speak to Raewyn Connell (RC) about the generating conversations about the Global South in the Global South.

STJGS: A lot of people ignore the concept of the Global South. Why is that?

RC: Many social scientists have been educated in Britain or have done PhDs in the United States, and they think, “That’s theory! That’s Bourdieu, that’s Habermas, that’s Marx, that’s Weber.” People educated that way, wherever they are educated, are not likely to talk about the Global South. They’re not interested in colonial and post-colonial societies. Why should they be? Bourdieu, Habermas, Durkheim—that’s theory. That’s the disciplinary framework that so many of us have learnt.

STJGS: Many scholars and commentators equate the Global South with the Third World. In your work, however, you discuss Southern Theory in the context of Aboriginal Australia. People don’t really think of affluent Australia when they discuss the Third World. Is your conception of the Global South, then, a departure from previous definitions?

RC: My usage of the term “Global South” in texts like *Southern Theory* (Connell 2007) is based on previous uses, though I’m trying perhaps to do something different with the concept. The language of “Global South/Global North” came into use largely in the 1960s in the context of United Nations discussions about trade and development. This was in the days when the UN trade negotiations led by Raul Prebisch were getting underway, with the impulse from what was called the “G77”—seventy-seven developing countries who had an agenda for economic development and needed a trade policy.

So the term “Global South” began in the context of the geopolitics of development, of post-colonial development. That’s important to note, because it means the concept of the Global South is not a static concept, and not an abstract one. It refers to an economic and political process in which the interests of societies and countries in the post-colonial world are sometimes opposed to those of the former colonizers (the rich countries of the Global North).

So that’s where the language came from. That was a little bit different from the language of the “Third World,” which came out of the 1950s. There was an attempt to define a third position in world politics, which was neither the Soviet bloc nor the United States’ capitalist bloc. The famous Bandung Conference illustrates that. And then the concept of the “Third World” was picked up in development studies, in the context of debates about global poverty and the unequal distribution of global resources.

So I mostly use the language of Global South and Global North. Sometimes I refer to “metropole” and “periphery.” That is also a language with problems, because what was periphery does not always remain periphery!

But that terminology is also useful, because it allows you to think of a case like Australia, which is quite interesting. Australia is a settler colonial country with an indigenous population, which was massively impacted by colonization. The indigenous population is mostly poor and marginalized, with major health problems and lower expectation of life than the settler population. A lot of the settler culture in Australia has, for the last hundred years or so, essentially ignored indigenous people and indigenous culture. We have acted as if we were the 51st state of the United States, or an extra county of Britain, or an extra province of France. There has been a massive cultural denial of being a settler colony.

There is also a cultural problem in Australia of relationships with the metropole. An Australian literary critic of sixty years ago devised the term “the cultural cringe” to describe the attitude of Australian intellectuals towards Europe. The cultural cringe is the assumption that our culture is always inferior to European culture, that we should look to Europe for taste and theory and wisdom, and that our own stuff is always second rate.

Now, in the academic world, that takes a form that we have a name for. It has been called academic dependency, or, even better, it is what the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (who, I think, is a very important philosopher) calls “extraversion.” That means the attitude of intellectuals in the post-colonial world of looking at the Global North as the source of intellectual authority.

Hountondji’s work is important (see Hountondji 1983, 1997, 2002). After a critique of popular misunderstandings about “African philosophy,” he began to develop a global political economy of knowledge. He pointed out that, under colonialism, there was not only a material economy of exploitation of the colonized. There was also an economy of knowledge, where the colonized world became a source of data for science (natural science and social sciences alike), and that data was taken back to Europe or North America. There, it was processed by *theory*. The result was that *theory* was located in the metropole, while a great deal of data collection occurs in the colony. You still see the survival of that process in the botanical gardens of the North, which collect botanical specimens from all over the colonized world. You see it also in anthropological museums, art museums, and so forth.

But Hountondji also points out that this global relationship continued into the post-colonial era. We still, in most of the global periphery, send our bright students off to the United States to do a Ph.D., to Britain, to Germany, to France, for a higher degree. We try to publish in their journals; we get prestige and promotion if we publish in their journals. When we have leave, we go off to the Global North to spend some time in a laboratory there, or to work in a famous department in the social sciences.

This is normal practice in academic life. So that even today, fifty or sixty years after the main wave of decolonization, and a couple of hundred years after decolonization in Latin America, we still have this pattern of intellectual authority being located in the Global North. Theory production is located in the Global North. And intellectuals in

the periphery, to the extent they participate in the global economy of knowledge, do so in a subordinated position.

Now, that's true of relatively rich parts of the Global South as well as relatively poor parts. That's true of Australia as well as Indonesia. That is why I think the concepts of Global North and Global South are really useful for intellectual analysis. These concepts enable us to name a key axis of authority and dependence in intellectual life, and that's why I think it's important to use this terminology. They are a starting point; they're not the end, they're not the solution. They don't mean that either the Global North or the Global South is homogenous or static—far from it.

STJGS: As a leading critic of the universalization of Western and Northern knowledge, you contended that scholars view Southern knowledge as limited. Why is that so?

RC: This follows pretty much from the pattern that Hountondji identified. Scholars in the Global South tend to think of themselves as “local experts.” They see themselves as having empirical knowledge of their own society if they are social scientists, or their own fauna if they are biologists, or their own geology if they are geoscientists, etc. But they tend to think that the generalized knowledge—the broad picture, the abstractions, the *theory*—is produced in the top universities of the Global North.

So there is a tendency—it's not complete, but it's a strong tendency—for scientists, including social scientists, in the Global South to assume that they only have a local audience and that their knowledge is encapsulated or limited to the local situation. It is crucial that we change this attitude. We need to see the Global South as a source of intellectual authority, as a source of theory, as a source of general ideas which have the capacity to develop and spread and gain recognition elsewhere.

It's crucial for scholars in the Global South to talk to each other and not just to the Global North. If work gets published in the Global North, it gets read in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. But if it's published in Australia, it doesn't. Publications in the Global South don't circulate across the Global South. Very few people in Australia read African publications. Only area specialists read Latin American publications, or know about Latin American intellectuals, unless they're published in the Global North. So you get someone becoming

famous like Paulo Freire—the Brazilian educator, a very interesting educator concerned with literacy and social justice—who gets known in Australia because he was published in New York.

This is hard work, to build these links. But I think it is really important to have cross-fertilization across the Global South, as well as communication with the Global North. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we ignore intellectual production from the Global North—that would be ridiculous. But we do need to know, and scholars in the United States and Europe need to know, that theory from the North is not the only theory there is!

STJGS: Going back to what you mentioned early on about the metropole and the periphery: Even in the Global South there are structures of internal hegemony. For example, in the Philippines, if you publish in Filipino, there are still eight linguistic groups that may not have the capacity to understand endemic writing in the Philippines.

RC: This is absolutely true, and I think it's true everywhere. Australia, which has a relatively egalitarian academic system, is currently becoming more hierarchical, with some elite universities and other less-elite ones. We have some recent empirical evidence of that developed by a colleague of mine at the University of Sydney. In places like Brazil and India, those hierarchies are quite serious. There are some relatively well-funded universities and research institutes, a lot that are less well-funded where teaching and research are done under great financial difficulties. And then there are parts of the higher education system that have effectively no research capacity at all.

So I do agree that hierarchy within the Global South is itself a major issue. It has some resemblances to the structure of relations between the Global North and the Global South, and some differences. The language issue is important.

And this is connected with another set of issues that I haven't talked about yet, but which we do have to get into the picture: the relationship between the social sciences in general and popular audiences and social movements. The university world in general is a world of relative privilege. Most working-class and peasant young people don't go to university, and can't possibly afford to. Yet the knowledge that we produce in social science should be relevant to them, and should become available to them.

So, how we connect knowledge production in elite, privileged institutions with the education needs of the “popular classes” (as they are called in Latin America) is a really big issue. We haven’t been thinking about this very much within the university world. Of course, there are people and institutions who dedicate themselves to that kind of outreach, or that kind of service.

The current difficulty is that we are now in a world of neoliberalism, market ideology. University systems around the world are very much impacted by neoliberal management techniques, by performance management. University managers have become obsessed with league tables, with competitive positioning, with quantification of output. When you look at the measures that are used, they are largely centered on the Global North—for instance, citation indexes, league tables for journals. We are supposed to publish in the top journals and, lo and behold, the top journals are all North American or British.

In sociology, for instance, of the top twenty journals in the journal rankings, nineteen are from the United States and the other one is from Britain. Nobody in the popular classes in the Philippines or India or Latin America is going to read them! The neoliberal dynamic in universities is pushing us away from the democracy of social science in a very disturbing way. We are encountering that issue, now, very sharply, but have hardly begun to debate it in a serious way. I find that very worrying. I have talked about these questions in *Confronting Equality* (Connell 2011). And I’m very interested in the potential of a journal like yours to serve as a focus for that kind of discussion.

STJGS: Do you think a label such as “public intellectual,” then, can serve a purpose or solve that issue with regards to popularizing the scholarship that is produced by academics?

RC: Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. Because people who become known as public intellectuals are not always active researchers, not the most respected researchers. Well, I don’t want to name names but—I can think of people in Australia who would be regarded as public intellectuals. They are thirty years out of date in terms of their knowledge of the field. But they are good communicators! I guess one has to be patient and think, “Well, some outreach is better than none.”

So I don’t criticize these people (at least not very much). But it is also important that the outreach be collective, not just individual. You don’t just want a small number of highly visible “stars” who appear on

television and have a Facebook following. We want a collective—a shared practice, which will operate in many different forms.

For instance, I very much respect some colleagues who work in adult education forums. One colleague of mine, a very good academic—an innovative and interesting researcher—has recently given up her professorship in one of our well-known universities and is now a school teacher in Aboriginal communities in the Outback. Terrific! That’s just one dramatic example. I have a lot of respect for people who do that kind of thing.

But look, there are lots of ways that academic social scientists can find audiences outside the academic world. We can work with social movements, with NGOs, with the unions. I think that’s quite an important forum, so I’ve done some work, for instance, with teachers’ unions.

Now that doesn’t get a lot of recognition in the university. You can put it on your *vitae* as “service,” “community service.” But it’s not counted very much for promotion. So there is some struggle to be undertaken within the university too. I want academics who do that also to be active researchers. It’s not easy, but combining an active research life with outreach and educational life is the pattern of academic work we need more of.

STJGS: You say that you’re sort of going with the idea that the term “Global South” is a very useful political tool. It is, for example, a category used to create solidarity among groups who oppose neoliberal globalization. But beyond political categories, how should one theorize the Global South?

RC: I think of all social science as essentially historical, so I always want us to think about social dynamics through time. And the biggest transformation of human society in the last 500 years is colonialism, European and then North American colonialism, both over-land and overseas. We should not forget that Russia and the United States were constituted by colonization—what the Americans called the “Westward Expansion” and what the Russians called “Eastward Expansion.” The story included the overseas colonization by the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the British, the French. The creation of colonial social orders was the biggest revolution in modern history. It was not the Industrial Revolution, not the French Revolution; colonization is the most massive transformation in recent history.

And then, with decolonization strung out over the last 200 years, we have the formation of post-colonial societies. This first happened in the Americas, in British and Spanish America. Then in the 20th century in other parts of the colonized world. And then we get the formation of post-colonial social orders, the creation of global markets, the global mass media, and so on. This is the dynamic that the social sciences are fundamentally about, in my view. The notion of Global South/Global North has to be theorized in that historical context of colonialism and post-colonial relationships.

South and North are not so much geographical categories; they are relationships. They are the name for a bundle of economic, military, and cultural relations marked by centrality and marginality, by global structures of domination. And like all major social relationships, this is not static. This is a dynamic relationship. The center of imperial power has shifted, as we know, from Spain to Northern Europe to North America. Different parts of the colonized world have broken free at different times.

There have been different projects of development, some of which have flourished, some have not. We've had in the later 20th century an extraordinary growth of the oil industries and the changed relationship between the metropole and the Arab and Caribbean worlds because of that. We have seen the rise of Japanese power—the first significant military riposte to European and North American colonialism and an alternative economic center of power. At the moment we have a second wave of industrialization from the formerly colonized world, notably among the Chinese and Indians.

So all of this is tremendously dynamic. It's not a static, top-bottom relationship, but a really complex, dynamic, and absolutely fascinating set of processes. Notions of South and North have to be taken as a starting point for what rapidly becomes a much more sophisticated, complex account of global social dynamics.

At the end of that account, maybe we don't need the terms "North" and "South" any more, if we have more complex analyses in place. But as a shorthand way of talking about all of these issues, I think these terms are still intellectually useful. They are useful for naming colonialism and post-colonial centrality and dependence as central issues for the social sciences.

And that really is a shift. If you look, for instance, at the discipline of sociology, the dynamic of colonialism and post-colonial change has not been intellectually central in the discipline. When we think of the

major sociological theorists, they're not centrally talking about this. Think of Parsons, Luhmann, Habermas, Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens. Immanuel Wallerstein made a serious attempt at global analysis, but his work turned into an odd form of systems theory, which didn't pay attention to the intellectual production of the Global South—a pity, because it was a very creative intervention at the start.

STJGS: Ever since Lenin, the broad Left has been tolerant of nationalism in the Global South. But in places like in the Indian subcontinent, there seems to be problems of First World nationalism—racism, xenophobia, essentialism—transposed to the Third World. How should we think of nationalism in post-colonial contexts?

RC: That's interesting and important. I would remark (without putting too much weight on this point) that it was actually Stalin who was the Bolshevik expert on nationality, because he was Georgian, not Russian, in origin. We associate Stalin so much with his later violent dictatorship that it's easy to forget he was the person who crafted the nationalities policy of the Bolsheviks in a relatively inclusive and tolerant way.

I wouldn't assume that such things as racist nationalism are just an import from Europe. The 20th century racism that came out of Europe is partly a product of colonialism itself. Racists took into Europe some of the patterns of exclusion, hierarchy, and the essentialization of difference, which had emerged through imperialism in colonial societies, especially during the 19th century, when racism hardened in most European empires. If you look back further into the history of imperialism, there was often racial tolerance in the earlier empires. Something happened within imperialism that produced modern forms of racism and racist nationalism. I don't know the full story.

Yes, if you look at India, for instance, or across the Indian subcontinent, the kind of exclusive nationalism that emerged in the partition (which was largely a British strategy) is extremely disturbing: for instance, the rise of Hindu nationalism in the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). I'm not close enough to the situation to give more than a very amateur interpretation. I have read arguments about Hindu nationalism which see it as a Europeanization of aspects of Indian culture—the transformation of Hinduism into a European-style religion with dogma, intolerance, and the rest of it.

I'm not sure that I can say much more than this, except that it should certainly tell us that the notion of the Global South is not a moral category. We cannot see the Global North as evil and the Global South as moral, pure, and oppressed. I don't think that at all. I remember when I began to publish the Southern Theory argument for the first time in 1997, one of the responses was to say, "This is a guilt trip. This is pinning guilt on Northern sociologists." It was certainly not my intention to raise questions of guilt or innocence.

I did want to say that a simple sociology of knowledge argument applies to sociology itself, and to all the other social sciences. Of course they reflect the social context in which they develop! It would be very strange if they did not. Unfortunately sociology as a discipline has not, for the most part, paid attention to the fact that the societies in which most sociological theory has been formed were the imperial centers, and that is a fact that matters.

If you look at the details of the history of sociology—not just the myth of the "founding fathers," but look at the textbooks and the courses of the first generation of sociology teaching—then you find something surprising. The world of imperialism was the world that sociology was talking about, and data from the colonized were very important in the formation of late 19th century sociology in the Global North. That's empirical fact; the data are there.

And my argument, essentially, is that we should pay attention to the reality of our own disciplinary history. Northern sociology did once speak about the world of empire. It did not, however, do so reflexively; it did not theorize itself as theory-from-the-metropole. That is a perspective we have now; and in my view it is a key to the development of social science.

It opens up the possibility of a great pluralization of concepts and perspectives, as theory-from-the-South is recognized and encouraged. That means a great enrichment and democratization of knowledge. There are many difficulties in understanding and practicing in such a world of knowledge, of course. But I would see this as potentially the most radical and exciting development in social science since the formation of our disciplines.

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