The Southern Theory of Social Science: What, How and Why

Liu Yan & Raewyn Connell

Abstract: Raewyn Connell is Professor Emerita at University of Sydney, a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, a recipient of the American Sociological Association's Award for Distinguished Contribution to the Study of Sex and Gender, and of the Australian Sociological Association's Award for Distinguished Service to Sociology in Australia. Among her many publications are: *Gender and Power: Society the Person and Sexual Politics* (1987), *Masculinities* (1995), *Southern Theory* (2007) and *Gender: In World Perspective* (2009). This conversation was conducted via emails between September 2017 and March 2018. In this conversation, Professor Connell explains the idea of Southern Theory, including the meanings of some key terms, her chief argument and the diversified responses that she receives from worldwide. She strives to map an alternative way of doing social science, especially based on the experiences of the former colonised countries and regions, thus challenging the current knowledge system established by the Euro-American metropole. She thus offers some concrete suggestions and resources to help the reader to understand the variety of the Southern perspectives of academic research. In recent years, Chinese intellectuals have been striving to construct critical discourses of Chinese academics, notably represented by the ethical literary criticism elucidated by Prof. Nie Zhenzhao. Both their efforts re-visit the Euro-American critical discourse, enrich the current theoretical frameworks, and open up new spaces for cognition and interpretation in humanities and social sciences.

Keywords: Southern Theory; social science; globalisation; post-coloniality; critical discourse

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标题：社会科学的南方理论：何为、如何与为何

内容摘要：瑞文·康奈尔是悉尼大学荣休教授，澳大利亚社会科学院研究员，曾荣获美国社会学学会颁发的杰出贡献奖和澳大利亚社会学学会颁发的杰出服务奖，其代表著作有：《性别与权力：社会、人以及性别政治》（1987 年）、《男性气质》（1995 年）、《南方理论》（2007 年）和《性别：全球视角》（2009 年）等。本对话以邮件形式完成于 2017 年 9 月至 2018 年 3 月间。在对话中，康奈尔教授深入分析了南方理论的核心术语和主要论点，介绍了其理论在世界各地遇到的不同反响。她主张针对前殖民地国家和地区的独特经验，建构社会科学的另一种研究方式，从而挑战欧洲和北美的知识体系。在对话中，康奈尔还提供了许多具体的建议和学术资源，帮助读者更好地理解南方学术视角的多样性。在近些年，国内学界致力于建构中国学术批评话语，尤其以聂珍钊教授倡导的文学伦理学批评为典型代表。二者的学术努力从不同视角重新审视欧美学术话语，丰富了现有的批评维度，为人文和社会科学的认知与阐释开辟了崭新的空间。

关键词：南方理论；社会科学；全球化；后殖民；批评话语

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Liu Yan (hereafter as Liu): I am happy to come back to you a few years later, Prof. Connell, after our conversation in men and masculinity studies (Liu 2013). I appreciate your willingness and kindness to engage in another conversation with me, with respect to the perspective on Southern Theory you have developed.

Against the current trend of globalisation, Euro-American academic discourse has also been popularised. Many scholars worldwide have been adopting the critical discourses proposed by European and American intellectuals in their interpretation of the texts produced locally. However, in *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (2007), you clarify your stance as outside the European and North American metropole in an attempt to construct a theoretical threshold that is truly global. I find it interesting to observe the clear geographical, if not political or cultural, perspective that one assumes in addressing academic issues. The Chinese, for example, would refer to ourselves as part of "the Orient." As a social scientist in Australia, having working experiences in the United States and other parts of the world, you speak on behalf of "the South."

What problems do you see with the dominant European and North American centre of academic research? What is the significance of adding a Southern perspective, as it means that the Euro-American centre has already been accepted and only by making "theory" plural can the other foreground their local experiences? Do you think geographical nomenclature, such as the East, the West and the South, suggests some common concerns in this region?

Raewyn Connell (hereafter as Connell): My argument in *Southern Theory* is that we should not "add" Southern perspectives to Northern social theory. Theory from the postcolonial world, built on the experience of the *majority* of the world's population, should have at least an equal place in the construction of world social science — indeed, should probably have more.

This involves a critique of conventional social science, which greatly prioritises theory from Europe and North America. I suggest developing countries should *not* simply model their academic work on the universities of Europe and North America but should strike out in new directions. This is not an argument for focusing only on "indigenous knowledge," though that is a valuable resource.

Rather, *Southern Theory* argues that the experience of colonialism and empire, over the last five hundred years, creates new bases for social knowledge and allows the emergence of radically new perspectives on social life. In the book, I give many examples of thinkers from Latin America, Africa and Asia whose creative contributions need much more recognition and on whose work we can build.

Further, I think this is valuable *for the North* as well as for the majority world. Yes, there are common concerns across the world, in a globalized economy and power structure — peace, the environment, gender justice, social equality, education, health, are all shared issues. My argument is that we cannot understand these issues without a huge input of ideas, experience, research and theory from the global South as well as the North.

By "South" I mean the post-colonial world, not just the geographical southern hemisphere. The post-colonial world is immensely varied, of course; it includes colonies of settlement such as Australia, colonies of conquest such as India, and countries that were only partially colonised such as China and Iran.

I do not claim to speak "for" the South. I come from a settler-colonial country in the far South of the world, that is true. But no-one can speak for the South as a whole. What I have done, I hope, is to show what immense intellectual resources can be found around the global South, and to suggest how those resources can be more widely used.

Liu: Seen in this light, "the South" in your theoretical canon is closely related to the expansion of imperialism in human civilization, rather than a mere geographical reference. This clarification is important in reading your book, since the alternative ways of thinking and understanding the world that you strive to establish represent the efforts of those intellectuals who have discovered the limitations of the knowledge system of the metropole against the changing global context. Speaking of the word "metropole," I have been obsessed with the problem of translating it into proper Chinese. The same worry also happens to the word's adjective form, "metropolitan."

I realize that you borrow the word from French, referring to an imperial centre in contrast to the colonized empire (Connell, *Southern Theory* 9). Etymologically, the word is composed of "mater" or "mèr," meaning "mother;" and "pole," meaning "city." Therefore, the word is used to refer to "the mother city of a colony," which is believed to bring about the written history to the natives in terms of civilisation. However, the word can also be used interchangeably with "metropolis" to refer to a major city of a country, especially the capital city or an economically bustling city. Since the imperial powers in history are all highly developed economic countries, and the social science of the metropole is developed, as you observe, against the high tide of modernity and capitalism, the word "metropole" also carries connotations in relation to economic prosperity.

Do you think this second dimension of the word is also important in understanding the Southern Theory and should therefore be better transferred into another language in translation? Or, do you only use it in the first sense? Is it only a matter of strategy when you decide to use this word instead of some other words that mean roughly the same thing, such as "the coloniser" or "the imperial?"

Connell: Yes, "metropole" is a difficult word, but it was the best that I could find. In the old French empire, it referred to the society and state of mainland France, which occupied a central position in the empire with respect to the colonies. The French maintained a fiction that the colonies were *part of* France (in fact they still maintain this). Some of the colonies were defined as "overseas departments" of France. That is a useful point to remember, as it emphasises that the concept is not about the *contrast* between metropole and colony, but about the *relation* between them, and especially the attempt to subsume the colony in the imperial state.

That case provided me with an important insight into the way colonial empires worked, and also post-colonial and neo-colonial world hierarchies. The key issue is about power and authority, not about economic prosperity. At the time when the Spanish began to conquer the Americas, and the British began to conquer India,

the conquering power was *not* more prosperous or advanced (except in military technique) than the societies they conquered. But colonialism disrupted the societies that were conquered, and imperial power concentrated wealth and material resources in the metropole. So, the long-term result of the new empires was the economic "under-development" of the societies of the global periphery, and the gross inequalities on a world scale that we see today.

When I refer to the metropole, or the imperial centre, or the global North, I am referring to the whole society and its culture, not just the imperial state. When we are speaking about the realm of science, including social science, it is often the elite knowledge institutions of the metropole that are crucial. That means the universities, libraries, research institutes, museums, botanic gardens, databases etc. — and now, increasingly, the corporations involved in the knowledge economy, such as publishers, drug companies, management consultants, etc. In the global economy of knowledge today, this complex of organisations is the centre, and holds predominant authority. Harvard, MIT, Oxford, the Sorbonne, the Max Planck Institute, the CDC, and the research universities grouped around them, provide the point of reference globally for most academic disciplines in our world.

We need some term like "the metropole" rather than always referring to "the colonizer," because the latter refers mainly to the violent act of conquest, or the exercise of direct rule. In the arena of knowledge relations, the key is the long-term *institutional* predominance of the centre, the centrality of the rich institutions of the global North in the whole knowledge economy.

Liu: It is true that the European expansion over the globe, most notably from the thirteenth century onwards, has made a tremendous impact over the colonised countries in many fields, including education, society, culture and literature. As seen in the example of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), the British governance over India has changed the country and its people in many ways. What about the United States? Historically the country itself is not a colonial power, unlike Britain or France; rather, it is the result of European colonisation. However, as far as social science is concerned (maybe natural science as well), the United States has been a central power in shaping the knowledge system worldwide since the twentieth century. In the electronic age, the situation has become more and more severe since the Internet, mainly dominated by the US technologies and enterprises, has constituted a special kind of "technical colonisation" over the world.

When you outline the development of sociology in Australia in your book, you recognise a phase, roughly in the thirty years from 1950, in which Australian

sociologists tend to define a local phenomenon by using the metropolitan research techniques. The result of such studies appears in the form of *X in Australia*, all borrowing research methodologies from the metropole. Among the academic resources for the Australian sociologists, you include the researches conducted by American sociologists (Connell, *Southern Theory* 81-83). In what way do you see the United States as a metropole? In what way do the United States and Australia constitute a metropole-periphery relationship in academia?

Connell: The United States is certainly an imperial power and has been for about two hundred years. For the last hundred years it has been the major imperial power in the world. The state began as a group of overseas English settler colonies in the seventeenth century. In the late eighteenth century these colonies revolted, won a war of independence, and set up as an independent state, the USA. This new state immediately began the *overland* conquest of most of their continent, which the Americans euphemise as the "westward expansion." In fact it was a military conquest, in which most of the indigenous population died, and new settler populations occupied the land.

In the late nineteenth century the USA began a further career of overseas conquest, which produced a maritime empire that soon included Caribbean lands (Puerto Rico, Panama, etc.), Pacific islands (Hawai'i, Samoa etc.), the Philippines, and protectorates over other regions. At the same time the USA was becoming the major trading economy on a global scale; by the mid-twentieth century it was the major capitalist power by far. In the second half of the twentieth century some of the earlier conquests were incorporated into the USA (e.g. Alaska and Hawai'i became states). At the same time, the enormous military machine created during WWII became a network of hundreds of US military bases and occupation forces around the world. Within this neo-imperial state framework, a period of global American economic dominance occurred, in which the economies of many smaller countries were re-organized around US-controlled corporations (that happened in Australia, for instance). In the most recent period, roughly since the end of the Soviet Union, US predominance has weakened in some areas (e.g.: direct political control), strengthened in others (e.g.: computers, the Internet, popular culture).

This is the background to the dependence of Australian sociology on US sociology, which I discuss in one chapter of my book. During the Cold War the Australian state was politically a satellite of the United States. Australian universities maintained their old connection with British universities, but increasingly transferred their allegiance to American universities, especially in new fields like sociology. What this meant in practice was that all Australian

sociologists carefully studied and cited American writings, and most of them adopted theoretical frameworks developed in the USA. Australian sociologists tried to publish in US journals, attended US conferences, and many travelled to the USA to do a PhD or to take study leave. We brought scholars from the USA to give keynote addresses at our conferences, and so on.

None of those practices was bad in itself. The key point is that this was a one-way traffic. US scholars did not come to Australia to study, did not seek to publish in Australian journals, did not usually cite Australian research, did not adopt Australian theoretical frameworks, etc. In fact, most US sociology totally ignored Australia, whereas the USA was the sun in the sky for Australian sociology. That is characteristic of the colony-metropole relationship. This dependence was called in Australia "the cultural cringe." It is now more contested, and Australian intellectuals always have some connection to the old metropole in Europe as well as the new one in North America.

Liu: Your description of the "westward expansion" in American history is slightly different from what I read in books, books written by American scholars. Whereas you view it as part of the European expansion, from over the sea to over the land, many American scholars regard it as the rise of capitalism and democracy, with a touch of "romance and heroism" (Nevins, Steele and Morris 301). Although some scholars admit that the indigenous people "suffered from hunger, disease, and exposure, and many died," they still describe the effect of this movement as a simple "removal" (181). I think I am coming to understand that the situation was far worse than I have expected before.

As far as I understand, you are conscious of two, among many, important hallmarks in human civilisation that have forced scholars to re-visit how knowledge is constructed and transmitted, or how truth is produced. One of these hallmarks is the collapse of colonisation on the global scale; and the other is globalisation. Both have driven the intellectuals outside the metropole to question the validity of social sciences in their curriculum.

In the case of the collapse of colonisation, I see that the intellectuals in the countries that have gained independence from the colonisers, such as India and some African and South American countries, by offering a critique of what has been in the critical discourse, challenge the ways of how their cultures and experiences are represented, in the hope of establishing a knowledge system of their own. I believe that this is an important gesture for these nations since intellectual independence is part of the nation's political independence. However, the colonial

experiences have already become part of the history and memory of the colony.

For example, intellectuals from the former colony have to rely on the coloniser's language, notably the English language, in order for their voices to be heard in the international community. How do you evaluate this gesture? Do you see advantages or disadvantages in having to use the language, sometimes terms and methodologies, of the metropole? Do you view language as a part of one's cultural identity?

Connell: I do not think the old colonial relations have collapsed, in the sense of vanishing entirely. Direct imperial rule has mostly gone — though it survives in some parts of the world, of course. New forms of power and exploitation have developed: transnational corporations, military interventions, political dependence, direct foreign investment, the arms trade, and others.

Intellectuals were prominent in the struggles against the old empires, e.g.: leaders like Gandhi, Nkrumah, Kenyatta and Ho Chi Minh. Intellectuals have been less visible in the more recent struggles, and that is worth thinking about. The "soft power" of the metropole seems to remain effective!

The issue of language is very important. The Lebanese sociologist Sari Hanafi, who has done excellent work on knowledge relationships in the Arab world, points to the dilemma for Arabic-speaking sociologists. If they write in Arabic, they can find a local audience but "perish" globally, because few scholars elsewhere read Arabic; or they can write in English and French, which means they will "perish" locally, as the public in their own countries do not read these languages. I think that is the situation in most parts of the world.

Many colleagues try to handle this by a two-track publication strategy. They write for world audiences in one of the imperial languages (increasingly, that means English, since English has become the language of transnational business), and for local audiences in a local language. In a country like India, which has many local languages, that is even more difficult.

The two-track strategy applies even within one language. In a recent research project about knowledge-making in Brazil, South Africa and Australia, my colleagues and I have interviewed researchers in the HIV/AIDS field, in gender studies, and in the climate change field. Many of them write for global-North journals part of the time, to reach an international audience; but they also write, part of the time, for local journals, newspapers and magazines, to reach a non-technical audience at home. Indeed, that is what I do.

I think of language as a means of communication, more than a question of identity. I know that other people have a different view, and I am conscious that I

am a native speaker of the world's dominant language, i.e., English. I have tried to learn other languages, and I can (with the aid of a dictionary) read four other languages, and I have a slight acquaintance with three or four others. But I cannot conduct a conversation in any language except English. I think that is a significant handicap.

Liu: The two-track strategy sounds effective for intellectuals from outside the metropole to make their studies known to a larger audience. Kenyan writer and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discusses the cultural alienation that a colonial child experiences, especially in education, because the child is "exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself," and therefore, he finds it difficult to form cultural identification with the colonial language (Thiong'o 443). The issue of language is a complex one and I think it needs to be discussed further in each particular case.

Nonetheless, English is the language that most people around the world are now using, partly because it is the language of the Internet. The advancement of technology has promoted globalisation, characterised by "the existence of global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant" (Steger 6). You also talk about globalisation in your book, especially in the example of "McDonaldisation," which suggests not a passive acceptance but an active embrace on the part of other countries to follow the life-style and cultural practice of the United States (Connell, *Southern Theory* 58). Against such a homogeneous tide, why is it important, or maybe more important than any period in human history, to assert one's difference? Can you cite an example from your research or your reading to show how a sociologist is able to keep a balance between the global and the local?

Connell: As you will see from Chapter Three of *Southern Theory*, I am very critical of the concept of "globalisation" and the idea of a global/local polarity that goes with it. There is a definite ideology of "globalisation." This ideology pictures a featureless, boundaryless world in which trade, capital, and technology flow freely, there is no centre or periphery, and cultures are all mixed and homogenized. This is the world as imagined and hoped for by transnational corporations and their tame intellectuals, because in such a world, corporate capitalism would take over everything.

But this is not the world we live in! The real world is marked by huge economic inequalities, from the obscene wealth of billionaires at the top, to

desperate poverty at the bottom. There are powerful, nuclear-armed states in some places and there are weak, demilitarized and sometimes disintegrating states in other places. Economic and political elites in different countries are composed differently, as I have argued in an article for a Mexican journal (Connell, "100 Million Kalashnikovs"). There are persisting regional differences of culture, language, religion, ethnicity, gender orders and other features of social life. Where a particular technology is shared — for instance, cell phones — its social uses and meaning differs from one region to another. There is continuing warfare in some parts of the world, continuing social violence in others.

I doubt that the people in most countries want to follow the life-style and cultural practice of the United States. Many people reject the racism, economic inequality, violence and religious intolerance that are so prominent in the United States. Certainly, there are some people who desire the benefits of American wealth, and those people are highly visible: the bourgeoisie of other countries often imitate the American bourgeoisie, in consumption patterns especially. I think that *most* people, in *most* parts of the world, want safety and security, good public education and public health, and a cooperative economy, more than they want a US life-style.

Where I agree with your statement is the idea that people in the global South do not have a homogenized global culture imposed on them, but actively adopt practices from the global North (such as the building of schools as distinct institutions, or more recently, the use of cell phones). This is true for intellectuals too. In the recent research project mentioned earlier, we have been studying research workers in new fields of knowledge. A report from this project is called "Negotiating with the North," and we emphasise the active responses that intellectual workers make, within the structures of global inequality (Connell, Pearse, Collyer, Maia and Morrell).

That idea of *negotiation* is the key. We negotiate power relations, we do not simply lie back and let power wash over us. Yet power is power, wealth is wealth; the structural positions from which people negotiate their lives are significantly different. This is the way I would approach the question you pose: not as a local/global balance, but in terms of the way different groups (including sociologists) negotiate their positions in global structures of wealth, power, authority, and the circulation of knowledge.

Liu: One of the many features of globalisation is postmodernity. M. B. Steger roughly classifies the development of human civilisation into the pre-historic, the

pre-modern, the early modern, the modern, and the contemporary (Steger 19-33). In his analysis, the postmodern does not refer to a progressive phase. What I see important, however, with the postmodern ideology is that the grand narrative in almost all fields is being questioned, which leaves a space for the (racial, gender, political and other) minorities to speak their own voices. How is postmodernity understood in sociology? How useful is the postmodern outlook in social science? In what way does the postmodern constitute a conspiracy with the postcolonial in understanding the world?

Connell: I do not find the idea of "postmodernity" very useful. It was formulated by the French philosopher Lyotard in an attempt to understand the dilemmas of intellectuals — specifically, universities in Québec, in Canada — in the 1970s, when an upheaval in established systems of thought seemed to be happening. The idea was then greatly generalised, by other people, to describe a new era of society and culture generally.

If this idea has any use at all, it is only relevant for discussing culture in Western Europe and North America. And even there, the idea of postmodernity exaggerates the degree of change. When I look at the metropole's university system as a whole, I see a remarkable degree of continuity. Harvard, Oxford, the Sorbonne are still the elite, just as they were a hundred years ago; some grand narratives might be questioned but the institutional hierarchy is much the same. Natural science does not seem to be in crisis, nor is social science (though social science is gradually being reduced in importance).

The biggest change in the university world is not a crisis of modernism, but the commercialisation of universities, the managerial takeover of the academic world, the dominance of vocational training, and the increasing reliance on fees and the commodification of knowledge. That is destroying universities from within; but the modernist episteme is actually reinforced by those trends. Post-colonial thought and Southern theory represent a challenge to mainstream universities as they are now.

The whole picture of societies being in turn pre-modern, modern and post-modern seems to me a Eurocentric, indeed a colonialist, idea. Colonisers constantly appealed to the idea that the colonised peoples were primitive, pre-modern, backward, etc., and needed to be brought into modernity by force. That attitude, basically racist, resulted in horrifying violence, genocide, and continuing racism. Its legacy can be seen in the ideology of the Trump administration in the USA now.

Liu: Talking about university system, I recall a dispute which happened at Yale in

2016. More than 160 students signed an open letter requiring to change a course on "Major English Poets" into an elective course. The course used to cover major English Poets from Chaucer to Wordsworth; however, the students believe that the course neglect many other important poets in English history, especially women poets and poets of other ethnicities. The event finally escalated into a "culture war" and Yale had to change its curriculum in April 2017, including two other elective courses, one of which cover Asian American literature, Indian Literature, African and Caribbean literatures. From the change in the curriculum, we can see the change in people's vision about what is "canon." I am sure that in this respect, there are many things to be done.

Edward Said once criticises the Euro-centric tendency in comparative literature, contending that "the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literatures at its centre and top" (285). He suggests that Jane Austen should be read together with Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral in order not "to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments" (Said 292). When you develop the Southern Theory in your book and other essays, you call attention to the social thinkers from sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Iran, India, and Australia, including, for example, Paulin Hountondji (Benin), Raul Prebisch (Argentine), Ali Shariati (Iran), Sonia Montecino (Chile), Veena Das (India), and Ashis Nandy (India). If Said speaks within the North Atlantic realm, you are speaking outside it. Do you regard your theories as part of this post-colonial tradition? In what way do you think the Southern Theory you strive to construct similar to or different from postcolonial studies in other parts of the world?

Connell: A beautiful example of Said's point is Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which re-tells a very famous English novel, *Jane Eyre*, in the light of its colonial engagements and presuppositions.

Edward Said was an expatriate Palestinian, and while he worked in New York, he kept an involvement in the struggle of the Palestinian people against the occupation. That is a practice I greatly respect, and I recognise also in other intellectuals whose work I respect, including expatriate feminist thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak who have maintained a practical concern with global inequalities.

I would make a distinction between postcolonial studies as a branch of literature and the humanities, and on the other hand the social sciences. I'm a sociologist. I do empirical research as well as try to theorize social structures, and my argument is mainly about the building of social knowledge on a world scale. I believe that a really democratic society (which we do not have in any

part of the world at present) requires accurate knowledge of society as a vital tool of democratic life. That is true at all scales, from the local to the global. That knowledge cannot be generated from only one region of the world, or from only one cultural background. Hence the need for the Southern theory project.

There are, as you suggest, different non-colonial, non-Northern, perspectives from which we can draw. "Post-colonial studies" was developed mainly by expatriate scholars from India and the Arab world. The "de-colonial" perspective was developed mainly by scholars, both expatriate and local, concerned with Latin America. In sub-Saharan Africa there are "Afrocentric" approaches to knowledge. In the Arab world and Iran there are attempts to formulate "Islamic science," including social perspectives such as *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence, which is interesting and impressive. In the Pacific region, and some other areas, there are movements to valorize "Indigenous knowledge." So, there is now a rich array of different perspectives. We live in a world of multiple knowledge formations, not just one.

Liu: You make me realise how diversified the post-colonial studies outside the metropole look like. In a similar way, Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues also notice the diversity of the postcolonial literary theory. In their book, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), they mainly discuss four of these kinds: Indian, African, Settler Colonies (US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and the Caribbean, although some of the linguistic strategies that the post-colonial writers may share similarities.

When you develop the Southern Theory, you are very conscious of your connection to Australia, especially to the Hawkesbury sandstone country: "My connection with this country is a significant part of what grounds me, gives me a sense of continuity and a capacity for resistance, and it has played a part in my intellectual life" (Connell, *Southern Theory* 202-203). Could you further elaborate on this? Does this sense of belonging provide you with the basic peripheral understanding of the world?

Connell: I am not arguing for just one "Southern Theory," but for taking account of many. I use the singular "Southern Theory" to name a broad category of social thought, within which there are many theories and perspectives.

Some perspectives are based in a particular place, a particular culture, and a particular landscape. This is something I learnt from indigenous people in Australia. As I show in Chapter 9 of *Southern Theory*, Australian Aboriginal knowledge systems are closely connected to "country," which is a powerful term in Aboriginal

language. This can be seen in Aboriginal art of the central desert in Australia, which is now a famous art movement. The paintings are connected with ceremonies and stories that relate to specific places and routes through the country.

I am not Aboriginal — I am descended from Irish, Scots and Welsh settlers in Australia — but I respect Aboriginal cultures. While thinking about them, I realised how closely I felt connected to the country that I grew up in, the "Hawkesbury sandstone" country around the northern part of the city of Sydney. That is where I was born, and it has been a very important point of reference for me throughout my life.

Australia is a settler-colonial country. It was colonised by the British about 200 years ago, overwhelming indigenous societies which had existed here for about 60,000 years. It is a rich colony, and because of its wealth Australia is sometimes presumed to be part of the global North. Our political leaders have constantly aligned themselves with the imperial power, first Britain and now the USA. But it is actually a colony, a rich enclave in the global South. Australia's wealth has depended on migration, mining and agriculture, and its economy is still massively dependent on exports of raw materials (e.g.: coal, iron ore, wheat and sheep).

That is my background, and it is certainly relevant to my work on Southern theory. However this does not give me a privileged access to all perspectives from the periphery. The historical experience of other parts of the periphery has been very different. Some anti-colonial perspectives are not concerned with specific place at all.

For instance, Islamic philosophy, and Gandhian perspectives on civilisation, are both intended to have universal relevance, not just local relevance. My concern is that we should be able to learn from multiple knowledge formations, wherever we are located, rather than to learn from only one.

Liu: Although you are conscious of your cultural connection, you are not restricted your vision to Australia alone. You cite extensively from studies in many other peripheral countries and regions. When envisioning the future of social science, you realise that "[m]ethods for cooperative intellectual work across regions and across traditions of thought are not yet well established" (Connell, *Southern Theory* 232). How important is it to establish an academic community among the peripheral? What specific gestures could you offer for the intellectuals of the South to take in order to form a research frontier?

Connell: The best place to start is with initiatives that have already begun. An excellent example is CODESRIA, the Council for the Development of Social

Science Research in Africa, based in Dakar, Senegal. This has provided an important meeting-point for the humanities and social sciences across the African continent. It publishes a number of journals on-line, and has a good website, easily accessible: *www.codesria.org.* Another impressive initiative is CLACSO, the Latin American Council of Social Sciences, *www.clacso.org.ar.* This links hundreds of research centres in the region and has a specific programme promoting South/South connections.

There are regional organisations in other fields of knowledge, and other areas. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, began mainly as a global-North forum but over the decades has supported many of these links in the South.

My advice to intellectual workers in the majority world has four points:

1. Look for resources that come from other parts of the global South; read them, and learn from them. There is magnificent intellectual work done in the South, but usually it is not known outside its immediate region. Most of us still tend to think the important ideas and advances come from the metropole. Some do, of course, because that is where most of the elite institutions are located. But when you add up all the regions of the periphery, the intellectual output of the South too is formidable. For instance, when I went looking specifically for research and theory about gender relations, I found a wealth of ideas and research from feminist work around the global South (Connell, "Rethinking").

2. Travel in the global South. Most intellectual workers in the South, if they can travel, go to the global North; we need to break this habit! There are great centres of research and intellectual work around the global South, and most of them are very welcoming of visitors.

But of course, many intellectual workers in the South do not have the money to buy an airline ticket. In that case, travel via libraries and the Internet! Look hard, and you will find good work. Most of the bibliographical tools (e.g.: Web of Science) are focused on the global North; but with patience, you will find other tools and sources. An example is SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online), a bibliographical database originating in Brazil, which highlights intellectual work from Latin America and the Caribbean and is now extending to Africa. See www.scielo.org.

3. When reading materials from other parts of the periphery, look specifically for common ground, common experience, common problems. These may be historical, social, cultural, environmental, developmental; they may concern violence, agriculture, climate change, industrialisation, language problems, and so on.

For instance, when I first read Bina Agarwal's wonderful book *A Field of One's Own* (1994), about gender relations and land ownership in India, I began to see parallels with the issues of land in Aboriginal politics and art in Australia. That made me think differently about land struggles such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra in Brazil, the movement of landless workers that is an important political force in that country. It also made me reconsider the importance of questions of land in the whole history of colonialism. Land is an issue that combines economics, agriculture, environmental science, geographical science, sociology of the family, labour issues and more. (Significantly, land is *not* an important issue in global-North social science.)

4. Make your own connections. Use email, or letters, to contact intellectual workers in other parts of the South and build your own networks. Tell them you have read their work, ask for copies of their publications, tell them about your own work. Ask them for advice, discuss possible joint projects, talk about conferences where you might meet. Do not rely on global-North websites to do this! Submit your own work to Southern journals — even if your managers want you to publish only in global-North journals. Talk to your managers about the importance of building up resources and connections across the global South.

Liu: Thank you very much for sharing with us these pieces of advice and these sources of materials. Many Chinese, if having an opportunity to conduct research abroad, would choose to go to central Europe and the US. I think very few of us realise that our minds are shaped by what we read and hear there, while neglecting a large proportion of the world's population and academics elsewhere. I agree with you in saying that this has to be changed.

Politically, economically and in many ways culturally, too, China participates in the international South-South cooperation. Now it is time to really think about academic cooperation with this region and to take some action now. In the course of having this conversation with you, I have found a few other attempts by intellectuals from outside the metropole to challenge the research methodologies established by the global-north, e.g.: *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012) by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (2010) by Margaret Kovach, both trying to differentiate indigenous research from the established "norms." I am sure more and more researches of this kind will come to our attention.

As far as I understand, the significance of your Southern Theory particularly

lies in this: Your critique of the social theories developed in the metropole challenges its knowledge hegemony, hence opening up a possibility toward a more democratic construction of knowledge. In this sense, the proposal of such a theoretical stance carries an epistemological significance, thus re-shaping how knowledge is produced and transmitted. I wonder how your theory is received in the metropole. From your lecture experiences, could you share with us what comments and attitudes that you have received from the listeners in Europe or the United States? And from Africa and South America? And from China? I realise that you have made several trips to Beijing and Hong Kong for academic exchanges.

Connell: That is a good question. The responses have been diverse, and very interesting.

First, especially in the global North and to some extent in my own country, there is a response of skepticism or even hostility. This is quite understandable. The Southern theory argument involves a critique of the established framework of knowledge and research, which is also the framework of many careers. Therefore, it can be experienced as a threat by people who have built careers in the current system.

From others, mainly in the South but also in the global North, there is a response of enthusiasm. This comes from people who have recognised the existence of the problems, but have not had a framework for analysing them, or have not realised the range and depth of postcolonial thought. In this case, my work has been to give people information or perspectives that they need. In giving keynote addresses at conferences, or contributions to journals, or visiting seminars in universities around the world, I have been able to support people who are working along similar lines in their own countries. I have been particularly pleased to see how my argument, which was presented as a general contribution to thought, has been put to use in areas of *applied* social science: including education, counselling, criminology, and more (Connell, “Using”).

There is also a response of curiosity and interest. Some people respond to the argument in the way they might respond to any new perspective or style of work in academic life (as, for instance, people responded to post-structuralism). They suspect this might be a new fashion in intellectual life, therefore they need to understand what it is about. I do not want this response, but I recognise that this is one of the ways that ideas spread. I hope people may move on from simple curiosity to a deeper engagement with Southern thought itself.

There are also responses that reveal a misinterpretation of the idea. For instance, I am sometimes accused of promoting a “binary” of North and South, and

assuming that all Southern thought is the same. I don't think anyone who has read *Southern Theory* carefully would think this: since I spend five chapters discussing five very different regional histories, and I present in some detail the ideas of at least sixteen different authors or groups, ranging from Raúl Prebisch to Veena Das. But that claim is a common way of rejecting or minimizing the argument.

Liu: I think you have explained very clearly in your book that the Southern Theory, although in single form, actually takes on multiple forms in different countries. However, I have another question for you: You understand very well that to develop a social theory, it is necessary to make generalisations, since theory is "the way we speak beyond the single case. It involves imagination, the search for patterns, the critique of data" (Connell, *Southern Theory* 225). Now that the Southern Theory has become a general term for the social theories developed in such peripheral countries and regions as South America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and South Asia, are you aware of its possible risks? What suggestions would you like to offer to the students and scholars who engage in social sciences concerning the possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation of your theory?

Connell: My answer to this question follows on from the previous question. I can see four risks.

1. First, the risk of identifying Southern theory simply with the geographical region south of the equator, or outside the North Atlantic. Place in itself does not produce epistemes. It is place *as historical experience* that matters. So the concept of Southern theory is social thought that grows out of the historical experience of empire and post-imperial global relationships, over the last 500 years. It is social thought that responds to the experience of colonisation, whether that comes from the colonised or settler populations; and social thought that responds to the situations created by neo-colonial relations and global inequalities since the end of formal empire.

2. Second, the risk of homogenising the experience of the colonised world, or the thought that arises from it. This is found in some Marxist-influenced thought, that treats all of the periphery as an economic unit; such as versions of "world systems theory" that looks for universal patterns in different "world systems." It is also found in some critical thought that homogenises "The West" as the only source of domination, and treats all other positions as abject, dominated or endlessly oppressed.

In fact there are many dimensions of power, different systems of exploitation, and we find in reality vigorous agency everywhere around the global South.

3. There is a risk that the critique of colonialism, and the critique of coloniality in the post-imperial world, will become complicit with cultural nationalism, religious essentialism, or outright racism. The "West," the "global" or the "cosmopolitan" is rejected as alien, and the local culture, religion or knowledge system is put in sharp opposition to that alien force. This can become a distorted ideology supporting local dictatorships which promote a cult of "authenticity." The Mobutu dictatorship in Zaire was a well-known example.

Really, the critique of Northern dominance provides no justification at all for patriarchies, dictatorships or local power structures.

4. There is a subtler danger which I would call the reification of Southern theory. This happens to Northern theory too, where an articulated body of thought becomes a kind of dogma, a closed set of ideas, words and arguments. Examples in the humanities and social sciences are the cults of Marx, Weber, Foucault and Bourdieu. Similarly, adopting a Southern theory perspective may turn into a search for a fixed set of propositions which can be believed and expounded. I think this has happened, to a certain extent, with the decolonial school concerned with Latin America, especially among expatriate scholars working in the United States.

I urge people to think of Southern theory as extremely varied, open, and capable of development; it is an active orientation to knowledge more than a fixed set of ideas.

Liu: You impress me deeply by remaining so clear-headed about how your study is and will be accepted by others. An important thing that I have gained from reading your books is that as a scholar, we should keep in mind that there is no one single knowledge system. We should always turn to our own history, to trace the origin and development of some of the issues, and to find ways of explaining them in academic research.

Now that Chinese President Xi Jinping advocates "cultural confidence," Chinese intellectuals are engaged in constructing critical discourses of Chinese academics. A notable example is Prof. Nie Zhenzhao who proposes the ethical approach to literary studies. He traces the origins of Chinese and Western literary traditions and interprets many literary classics from the perspective of ethics. This perspective, as he sees, "attempts to unpack the ethical values of literature, and the truth about social life depicted in literature from an ethical perspective" (Nie, "Towards" 100). It offers five aspects in literary reading and literary interpretation, including

1. the formation of the writer's values and their impact on their writings;

2. the social and moral values within the literary works;

3. the reader's values and their impact on the reading process;

4. evaluation of a literary work against the ethical literary tradition;

5. ethical interpretation of a literary work in connection to society (Nie, "Ethical" 19-20).

Different from Western scholars who propose ethical literary criticism, such as Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (2001), Nie invents many new terms in literary criticism, including "ethical knot," "ethical identity," "ethical selection," "ethical choice," "ethical consciousness," etc. For example, he explains Hamlet's hesitation in terms of "ethical dilemma" and "ethical choice" to revenge against the killer, or to follow the patricide taboo (Nie, "Literary" 41). In this way, he successfully re-visits the theoretical paradigms established by Euro-American literary criticism, thus offering some new interpretations that are not revealed through the existing frameworks.

Both your effort to draw our attention to the global South and Nie's focus on the ethical perspective in literary interpretation call for a re-examination of the Euro-American academic tradition and critical discourse. I believe that both your efforts are enlightening to scholars in the regions outside the metropole, especially with regard to epistemology and methodology, enriching the current existing theoretical frameworks and opening up new spaces for cognition and interpretation in humanities and social sciences.

The world has been changing tremendously since the "9/11" in 2001. What crucial topics or key issues do you think that the intellectuals worldwide should work on in order to face our common problems, such as ethnic migration and social polity?

Connell: Wow, this could be the whole conversation! In very condensed form, these are the issues I think most important for intellectuals worldwide to grapple with right now. I have discussed some of these in my book *Confronting Equality* (Connell, *Confronting*). On all of these issues, Southern perspectives are important.

1. Continuing wars, state violence more generally, and the growing risk of nuclear annihilation.

2. The unchecked growth of economic inequalities in most parts of the world, and the multiple patterns of exploitation and injustice that underlie this growth.

3. The growing environmental catastrophe that surrounds us — climate disruption, the extinction of species, the spread of toxic environments — and the irresponsible corporate power that is producing most of these effects.

4. The resurgence of patriarchy, i.e., institutionalized masculine power and the

subordination of women, both locally and in new transnational arenas.

5. The re-growth of racism and cultural/religious chauvinism as political forces, in all political systems, fuelling many forms of violence and fear — closing off connections between groups.

6. The prevalence of lying, distortion, and suppression of truth in mass media, universities, government, and other public arenas; this is of very intimate importance for intellectual workers.

All of these issues are sites of social and cultural struggle; all of them are areas of research; and I think that the growth of knowledge is essential, though by itself it is not enough, to solve these problems and move towards a world of peace and justice.

Liu: Thank you very much! You are so generous in further explaining your studies to me and in sharing with me a lot of research resources. It is true that the whole globe has never become so connected as today and many issues will have to be tackled on the global scale. In this sense, to understand the South and to allow people around the world to listen to each other's voices will remain crucial in the days to come.

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