

Review

Raewyn Connell

Southern theory. The global dynamics of knowledge in social science, Polity Press, Unwin, 2007, 271 pp., ISBN -13: 978-0-7456-4248-2

by Wiebke Keim

Raewyn Connell, based at University of Sydney, has been recognized so far as an international scholar in gender studies (among others: *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995; *Gender*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2001). She has now published a book in the field of general sociology and epistemology, where again, her main interest is in uncovering schemes of domination. The book consists of four parts.

The first part, "Northern theory", contains three chapters that follow the development of sociological theory in a historical perspective. "Empire and the creation of a social science" presents an inquiry into the very origins of sociology and scrutinizes the writings of a variety of early classics. The author's main objective here is to emphasize the role the global South has played in the creation of the discipline. Usually the emergence of sociology is contextualised as an endeavour of modern Europe, as a reflexive effort at times of social transformations related to the industrial revolution in the 19th century. Connell points out in how far this represents a reduction of the history of the discipline: what is just as obvious from early texts is the significance of the colonial project that European thinkers were accompanying – and partly justifying – with reflections on societies outside of Europe through "*grand ethnography*", within evolutionist frameworks. Early sociology is much more global in scope than current general theory.

The next chapter analyses the writing of three current representatives of general theory: Coleman, Giddens and Bourdieu. Apart from the topics addressed, and despite their ambition to achieve highly generalized accounts of society, the particular conditions of their actual location heavily impact onto their conceptualisations. Connell shows that, e.g., by highlighting the concept of the social actor in Coleman's approach which she takes for a "picture of the person and social relations that is drawn from recent European and especially North American social experience, reflecting the hypertrophy of the market" (Connell 2006: 244). The third chapter outlines in how far globalization theory, although looking at phenomena of a global scope, suffers from the same restrictions, i.e. context-boundedness and a European frame of thought.

The second part's main aim is to firmly locate Australia – a country that due to its history as an early industrialised settler colony has often been

left outside of the North-South-divide – within the global South. This is achieved by a double perspective on the history of the continent itself as well as on the history of Australian sociology. The latter shows very similar characteristics to the ones that Connell's colleagues have earlier pointed out for African, Asian and Latin American sociologies: intellectual dependency on the "centres of knowledge" production, "captive mind" and marginalisation from the "mainstream" of the global sociological enterprise.

The third part contains four chapters focussing on the sociological traditions of four world regions, namely Africa, the Muslim-dominated countries with a focus on Iran, Latin America and India. Each chapter traces the specific regional theory development, always highlighting the discussions of local realities versus imported theoretical frameworks and thus the struggles for intellectual emancipation from the dominant paradigms of Europe and North America.

This third part represents a considerable effort to pull together and put into perspective the many contributions to critiques of Eurocentrism and alternative theorizing that have occurred at a global scale. Connell shows how the African debates have mainly focussed on issues of cultural identity, indigeneity and the importance of social knowledge contained in the oral culture of the continent. The only critique that one could mention regarding this chapter is the omission of the recent works of Sitas who overcomes the limitations of the indigenization project initiated by Akiwowo – that Connell adequately points out – in his parable-project. The calls for islamisation of knowledge represent a specific form of indigenization in countries with Muslim majorities. Connell focuses on three central figures of Iranian social science: Al-Afghani, Al-e Ahmad and Shariati. The three have taken up in original ways the challenge of developing social science as a means of modernizing their region. Their idea of modernity, however, was not the conventional Western modernity. On the contrary, they wanted to modernize from a position of Islamic strength, as Islam represented the single cultural force that had resisted colonisation and was thus taken as the starting point for socio-political emancipation as well as for critical theorizing and autonomous development in various ways. The Latin American debates are probably better known to a European public, as they are among the few, if not the only ones that have succeeded in imposing themselves onto the mainstream agenda of the social sciences. Connell deals with Cepalism and dependency theory and follows regional debates right into García Canclini's cultural sociology. As for the Indian achievements, the chapter entitled "Power, violence and the pain of colonialism", starts with subaltern studies and ends with Das' works on sociology's failure to account for colonial violence and other critical, incomprehensible events that point to the very limits of the discipline's explanatory power.

Part IV, "Antipodean reflections", makes a contribution to the debate from the Australian point of view. "The silence of the land" follows the logic of the third part of the book, with the considerable difference that

here, the author does not review theory produced by others but makes herself an attempt to add relevant insights drawn from the Australian historical and social experience to sociological theory building as such. The last chapter, "Social science on a world scale", pulls together the different arguments of the former chapters. For social science internationally, this shows the need to problematize global centre-periphery-relationships within the discipline, to encourage South-South communication, to analyse the functioning of the metropolis as the global centre, and to recognize the limited validity of what has up to now been declared "universal theory". The author also mentions central topics that are broadly missing in mainstream sociology, such as the destruction of social relations, historical discontinuity, dispossession and suffering, the role of the land and loss of land for social relations and imagination, as well as the agency involved in the devastating experiences of much of Southern humanity, from colonial times right through to the neoliberal era.

"Southern theory", despite its fascination and globally favourable review of the most diverse endeavours in sociology outside Europe and the US, remains a critical book. By no means does the author idealize southern initiatives, on the contrary, she insists, among others, on the conservative and reactionary logic of some of the responses to Western domination. Furthermore, she systematically criticizes the absence of female outlooks and voices. "Southern theory" represents a critical contribution to current debates around the internationalisation of sociology and gives an overview over relevant initiatives emerging out of the global South. One weakness, however, may be criticized: the fact that the book does not proceed to the direct confrontation between northern and southern theory. The critique of context-boundedness of Northern theory remains separate from the collection of southern voices that make up for the larger part of the book. This is probably too much to ask for in a single book. But one might argue that the on-going discussion around Eurocentrism and self-reliance in the South can now, based on this book and others (Cf. Alatas 2006, Lander 2003), leave declarations of independence behind and pass on to critically scrutinizing what really happens when different strands of theory confront each other in the field of sociological practice. Connell herself indicates the need for such concrete and detailed analysis, to take up the above-mentioned example: "It would be interesting to see how Coleman's 'sovereign individual' would survive within a cultural presumption of 'Tawhid', the unity of the divine and of the world, which has been seen by some intellectuals as the foundation for an Islamic approach to science" (Connell 2006: 260).

It seems important to note that "Southern theory" is not a call for fragmentation into localised, indigenized or endogenized sociologies, but a powerful argument for a serious international debate on an equal footing, where the experiences and perspectives emerging from the South have to be fully acknowledged and might correct, complete, amplify or supplement existing general theory, where necessary.

Review

Anthony Giddens

The Politics of Climate Change, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, 245 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0745646930.

by Alejandro Pelfini

When an established author, who normally dedicates himself to other topics, writes about an issue which brings together the interest of a public broader than the one of social sciences, it happens because the topic already is well established; it is part of the *mainstream*. As climate change today is on everybody's lips it wasn't long until some social scientist, as well one of the *mainstream*, started to examine it. It is also not startling that the author in question uses his own categories – proved in other contexts – for the analysis of less known subjects. The book opens with the application of the “Giddens paradox”, named by and after the author himself, to the problem of climate change: as the risks generated by climate change still are intangible, mediated and invisible in daily life, very few confront them seriously in spite of their severity. Sitting down to wait until they are acute and visible, it may be too late to resolve them.

Instead of adopting the tone of moral appeals normally used when dealing with this subject, the book does not only put forward to call attention about the severity of global warming, but primordially aims at posing the necessity of introducing the problem to all kinds of politics at once to confront the problem of climate change. Giddens takes a realist point of view: although he recognizes the sceptical positions which do not expect that big changes in confronting the problem can be achieved from scratch, he considers that there is a margin of action in the social order given to reformulate elements of the valid political thinking; this implies working with the actually existing institutions and respecting the parliamentary democracy.

Understanding the focus of Giddens, his originality, but also his reflections to analyse a subject in a register which alienates him a bit from his most rigorous works in social theory, we are obliged to remember his position as a European social democrat, as an inspirer of Tony Blair's “Third Way” idea. In my opinion, this is the key to explain how, even within a field which used to be focussed on globalism and international governance, Giddens privileges the perspective of the nation state. Evidently, he is doing it neither from a popular-nationalist angle of a nationalist Latin-American left, nor from a realist conservatism based on national interests which deduce from a territorial view and translate into determined geopolitics. The social democratic view grants him primacy in the institutions of representative democracy

and the possibility to find convergence between politics, the market and civil society under the ideal of modern environmentalism. On the one hand, and this is one of the principal theses in the book, Giddens awards a central role to the regulation instruments originated in the state. This applies to solutions centred on the market – like those which inspired the Kyoto Protocol – or in relation to a civil environmentalism based on NGO action and social movements of a global reach. On the other hand, the problem of climate change is tackled from a perspective which Ulrich Beck labels “methodological nationalism”: a concept which sometimes alludes to unconscious territorial fixity of the political actors and the scientific analyses at the limits of the nation state, as if the societies completely coincide with the political designations of the countries. For Giddens specific nations and not the institutions of global governance – and this is the second thesis or the fundamental proposal of the book – are appealed to implement the policies which can respond most efficiently to the challenges of climate change.

Speaking of concrete nation states, the author also differentiates the obligations and strategies which correspond to them. He dedicates the biggest attention to the industrialized states, precisely because he imputes the major responsibility in the generation of the problem of global warming to them. True to his regulative ideal and the idea of planning, Giddens considers that because of more complexity and levels that he can assume today, statehood should keep on being a welfare state (or what is left of it), the centre of all politics facing climate change. Clearly, this does not pretend to return to the glorious years of the European social state or legitimize “*top-down*” regulation mechanisms. In the current conditions, this state cannot be something else but an “*ensuring state*”, porous to the activities of the civil society and cooperating with a variety of agencies as well as with other countries and international organisms. The state for Giddens must be a facilitator, an enabler. The author does not exempt developing countries from taking part in politics against climate change. Nevertheless, he recognizes the imperative of development. Because they only contributed marginally to global warming, those countries should get the chance to develop even though this involves a rise of the carbon dioxide emissions, at least during a short time period. It will be by means of the technological transfer between the industrialized countries and the developing countries that the way already pursued by the former can be avoided. In developing countries the adaptation to climate change is more important than the mitigation of carbon dioxide emissions. The consequences of global warming will occur if the emissions are reduced or not in a short period of time. That is why the most urgent measures are the prevention of risks and catastrophes as well as the diffusion of scientific information.

In social democratic tradition Giddens maintains an intense debate with environmentalism. He keeps faith in progress, in economic development and in scientific and technical knowledge which confronts him inevitably with the most radical positions of the green movement, advocating for

the sufficiency and privation of consume and for limiting growth. In contrast, the author proposes a positive model of a future embodied in daily and ordinary life with low use of carbon. A model which implies the generation of transformations in life styles, but which is far away from a reactionary utopia of limiting growth. He retrieves the principle "the polluter pays" from the green thinking, beyond its difficulties of application, but he rejects the idea of "sustainable development" considering it an oxymoron, as well as the principle of "precaution" considering it biased and restrictive against the technical progress: the idea that no innovation must be introduced until certainty exists about the consequences it entails. In one word, less prohibitions and more incentives. This is where he introduces the idea of political and economic convergence. Because climate change is a complex and transversal issue, it is put on top or positively attached to other areas of public policy like energy security, technological innovation or life styles. To conclude, just in times of crises like the unbound one in 2008 the period of acritical deregulation would be over. It is time that the state and planning are more active, but on a basis of their re-significance. Per Giddens, the design of the economical reconstruction which follows the recession must consider investments of high scales in new companies and products as well as in technologies of low use and production of carbon dioxide. The recent book of Giddens constitutes an inescapable reading for everyone interested in the subject, although it is precisely because of being a mainstream topic and author that it is also a recommendable reading for a broader public. Having said this one should not forget that his optimistic and harmonic vision still is too affected by the spirit of the "Third Way" with all the limitations it had. If it is about confronting the problem of overdevelopment or overprosperity bound to the saturation of properties, services and displacement of persons and goods, how is this possible without serious conflicts, not about the distributions of goods – like the ones on the welfare state - but about the distribution of risks and costs? Conflicts which also are of a cultural kind, bound to life styles or to technical scientific knowledge which is far from being neutral. The nation state will fulfil a most important function which will currently be assigned to it, but difficultly it can face such a mission alone without the complementation of international governance institutions and of a globally looming civil society and public sphere.

Review

**Anand Kumar and Manish Tiwari (ed.)
Quest for Participatory Democracy: Towards
Understanding the Approach of Gandhi and
Jayaprakash Narayan, Rawat, Publications, New Delhi,
2010, pp. V-425, Rs. 895, ISBN-10: 81-316-0330-X.**

by Anjan Kumar Sahu

'*Lokniti*' (polity of the people) in lieu of '*Rajniti*' (polity of the state) was the climactic concern of Jayaprakash Narayan (popularly known as JP), a greatly acclaimed socialist figure of the post-independent India. He advocated the formation, legitimisation and efficacy of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by which the very substance of '*Lokniti*' can be materialised. This edited volume provides a consummate analysis of the development, implementation and effectiveness of the village panchayats in order to create and cement the participatory democracy at three levels: local, state and national. In addition to the introduction, the book consists of twenty six chapters divided in four parts to delineate the concept, needs and different facets of participatory democracy.

In the introduction Kumar and Tiwari argue that the village panchayats in India have long tradition and history, but they were primarily working under the remit of traditional Hindu social order which is mostly dominated by the upper caste elites. It was Gandhi, in the pre-Independent India, Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), in the post-Independence period, who – at the grass-root level – espoused the institutional building. Majority of the authors cited the authoritarian regime of the Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, and the ensuing emergency gave impetus to JP to launch post-Independent India's largest ever political movement against Indira Gandhi's regime and eloquently pleaded for protest movements, direct action and participatory democracy.

However, Trivedi (Chapter 4) argues that it is the pervasiveness of globalisation that resulted into micro-movement at the grass-root area but Sahoo in chapter 20 pins down that globalisation has 'increased poverty, hunger, farmer's suicide and unemployment' (p. 287) and it undermines the very notions of democracy. In order to support his argument, Sahoo criticises Huntington who argues that the 'high levels interest mobilisation and political conflict' creates 'problems of governance and civic order' (p. 289). According to Sahoo,

"It is not high levels of mobilisation which have created problems of governance and social order; it is the problems of governance which has generated to high levels of mobilisation

by the marginalised forces in the civil society against the exploitative institutions of state and market" (p. 289).

Party-less and participatory democracy gives power to the people to participate in the decision making process of the government. It reins in money, muscle, caste and religious based party politics and bureaucratic rigidity. However, except a few successes, the very efficacy of India's institutional building at the local level has not been flourished. Rao (Chapter 2) noticed that it is the lukewarm response of the state and central governments which induces inactivity and institutional infirmities. Mathew in chapter 21 underlines that the dearth of integration of Gram Panchayats with the political and economic systems of state and centre, and the parochial and passive 'mindset of the political class, the bureaucrats and people' are the liabilities for the grass-root democratic movements (p. 300). But Verma (Chapter 13) says:

"Although, democracy in India was conceived as a much wider process, it has increasingly been confined to the political sphere where too it has not been functioning properly. Conversely speaking, the process of democratisation has been limited to increasing politicization of man in India with increasing consciousness of personal, sectional and group interest" (p. 165).

The book also ably elaborates the intensity and institutional building in South Asia along with Turkey. Hassan argues that India's sturdy democratic culture and 'Rule of law' differentiate its stand from neighbouring countries, especially from Pakistan (Chapter 24). The nascent political and democratic set up in Nepal and Turkey, as explained by Singh (Chapter 25) and Celik (Chapter 23) respectively, and the enduring military subjugation over civilians in Pakistan gives upper hand to the Indian democracy which has long tradition of democratic culture and values (Chapter 24).

Nevertheless, JP's ideas are not immune from the ideological tinge. Rao says, 'As a protagonist, JP [was] not an individualist but a communitarian like William Godwin, Josiaha Stamp and Leo Tolstoy' (p. 20). The linkage of '*Lokniti*' and village panchayat with communitarianism distorts the pristine dispositions of JP's objectives. JP averred the efficacy of participatory democracy by taking account of political, economic and social evils of Indian societies. Therefore, communitarianism, as a western concept, is unlikely to be fitted into the Indian societies. Another area of concern is that majority of the authors sorely lambasted the Indira Gandhi Government and her declaration of emergency in 1975. But a question begs attention: does the subsequent governments provided sufficient space for the process of democratisation of Indian social, political and economic set up? However, Mathew provides this answer when he observes that the

Ministry of Panchayat Raj was created by UPA regime but 'one wonders whether it was created just to satisfy the Panchayati Raj purists and fundamentalists' or for real democratisation of India (p. 302).

Despite the foregoing limitations, this book is a worthwhile collective work. Because, regarding the Indian sub-continent, it's thought-provoking arguments leaves an impact on readers' minds by strengthening and sensitising the people for participatory democracy. Finally, all the authors have meticulously looked into the development of democracy, in and around India, and the effective decentralisation of political and financial powers from the centre to the grass-root level with a fitting tribute to Jayaprakash Narayan. Therefore, I highly recommend this edited volume for general readers, researchers and South Asian scholars.