

EPILOGUE – TRAVELING THEORY

DRAFT

In her *Southern Theory* (2007) Raewyn Connell problematizes the canonical works of metropolitan theory – from the so-called classics of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim to the contemporary theories of James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens – whose silence on the South portends a distinctively Northern perspective disguised as universalism. Instead Connell presents us with a “counter-hegemonic” project that foregrounds social thinkers from the South who have not made it into the main sociological tradition – from Africa the Dahomeyan philosopher Paulin Hountondji, from the Middle East, three Iranian thinkers al-Afghani, Al-e Ahmad, and the more contemporary Shariati, from Latin America the Argentinian economist Raúl Prebisch, the Brazilian sociologist Fernando Enrique Cardoso, the Mexican anthropologist García Canclini, from South Asia subaltern thinker, Ranajit Guha, anthropologist Veena Das, and public intellectual Ashis Nandy. From South Africa she chooses Sol Plaatje, writer, politician, historian, and newspaper editor. He was the first General Secretary of the ANC and author of *Native Life in South Africa*, a denunciation of the 1913 Natives’ Land Act. Around such forgotten or overlooked thinkers Connell proposes to build an alternative social science.

There is no doubt about the importance of this intervention – the latest in a long history of contestations against Northern hegemony in sociology. Connell perhaps goes further in combining an assault on “classical theory” with a global search for alternatives to Western and Northern social theory. She, thereby, underlines just how narrow are the sources of “recognized” or “legitimate” sociological theory, both in their canonical and contemporary incarnations. However important is her frontal assault, her sketch of “Southern theory” is not without problems, especially when faced with the unevenness in the distribution of resources – the concentration of the most lavishly funded universities and research establishments in the North where working conditions are incomparably superior. As the more privileged nations in the South seek to develop their own “world class” universities, they underline existing prestige hierarchies, channeling faculty into publications into “world class” journals that are generally located in the North and that publish in English, and thereby exacerbate the divide between center and metropolis both globally but also within countries. Poorer nations are increasingly dispensing with their own universities, training their own experts abroad, i.e. usually in the North, or simply importing them from the North. To opt out of this world order is to risk invisibility, poverty and martyrdom, reproducing the selfsame hegemony.

Even Connell’s chosen Southern theorists, if they are not trained in the North, spend time in the North. Thus, there is a lot of circulation and borrowing between North and South, so that we cannot think of them as hermitically insulated bodies of thought. Thus, Bourdieu’s social theory is inspired by his experiences in Algeria and by his collaborations with Algerian intellectuals. Indeed, one might say, the distinction between North and South, or West and East misses the underdeveloped regions within Northern academia just as it misses the polarization within the South. It is not just polarization in terms of status and resources, but also with regard to social theory itself, so that we can say that Northern theory contains multiple strands, many of which context dominant tropes – Connell herself has made major contributions to feminist theory that challenges mainstream orthodoxy in sociology. Indeed, Pierre Bourdieu himself was very much

the critical sociologist, attacking pillars of hegemonic thinking in France and elsewhere. In placing all Northern sociology in the same trash can Connell risks committing the very error she levels against Northern sociology, namely false generalization. Equally, in the South the field of sociology, like other academic fields, is a terrain of conflict, reflect serious divisions within nations and regions -- something Connell largely ignores as she plucks her chosen theorists out of their historical and political context.

While resurrecting Southern theorists demonstrates that the soil of Southern theory is not barren, its focus on individuals does overlook the truly distinctive social theory that has actually grown up in the South, social theory that grounds the work of an institute like SWOP. Indeed, the distinctiveness of SWOP lies in the way it appropriated Northern theory, even the more conservative social theory, associated with the functions of conflict, to deploy it against the apartheid state, arguing that violence can only be constrained if institutions, such as trade unions, are created to channel grievances. Such apparently innocuous Western theories about the institutionalization of conflict became, in the hands of South African sociologists, a radical challenge to apartheid South Africa. Indeed, their defense of such theories placed Eddie Webster on trial and contributed to the killing of anthropologist David Webster and philosopher Richard Turner. When theory travels, as Edward Said noted long ago, its meaning can be transformed in a radical or conservative direction. Indeed, when Southern theory travels north it often loses its radical edge, becoming domesticated in the jaws of the university.

The story of Marxism – a mobile theory if ever there was one -- is itself an interesting one. Just think of the role of Marxism in South Africa, how in an early period it became a vehicle of a white supremacist labor aristocracy, later it became the basis of a nativist republic, then it led to subtle theories of internal colonialism and of the relation between race and class, original theories about the articulation of modes of production, the elaboration of the formation of dominant classes. Of course, there is a Marxism in South Africa that follows orthodoxy, that separates theory and practice, that resists any South African specificity, that sees itself as a world religion, but with the abolition of any originating center this dogmatic Marxism loses what significance it had. Bringing it into dialogue with sociology, in particular the work of Pierre Bourdieu, is intended to revitalize Marxism, just as the dialogue with Weber, Simmel, Freud, Croce revitalized Western Marxism.

All of which is to say that the dialogic moment is important and the struggle can as well take place on the terrain of Northern hegemony as well as against Northern hegemony. In the context of our conversations with Bourdieu, we are recognizing a dual dialogue – with the material context of its reception but also within the theoretical context from which it draws its meaning. As Bourdieu himself insists, theories position themselves in relation to other theories within the same “field.” So I have tried to elucidate a particular meaning of Bourdieu by bringing his writings into dialogue with Marxism, especially the Marxisms that deal with the three central issues of Bourdieu, namely symbolic domination, social reflexivity and public engagement. Bourdieu and Marxism clash, most fundamentally, over their divergent understandings of the depth of domination and the possibility of the dominated recognizing and contesting their domination. Although both Marxism and Bourdieu have their internal inconsistencies, nonetheless, in the final analysis, the roots of domination are shallower for Marxism than for Bourdieu. This has consequences for their opposed understanding of intellectuals, both their self-

understanding as well as their relation to other classes. The dialogue between Marxism and Bourdieu set the stage for Karl's engagement with Bourdieu.

Instead of seeking an alternative Southern Sociology, Karl's approach is to engage Northern sociology, in this case Bourdieu, on the terrain of South Africa? He challenges Bourdieu with the lived realities of South Africa, problematizing what he takes for granted – assumptions that might then call into question his understanding of France. As Karl says, ostensibly Bourdieu's concern with social order cemented through symbolic violence sits uneasily with a society of symbolic disorder such as South Africa. There is no singular symbolic order that Bourdieu claims for France, rather we have a society in which the symbolic order is in perpetual crisis. But, it is in crisis not only because the different fractions of the dominant class are fighting for supremacy within the field of power, but because there are continual insurgent symbolic orders emanating from below. Karl describes the cultural of resistance in the townships, in the unions, where residents see little difference from the old apartheid order, and so deploy the old rituals, songs, dances that were so effective in the previous era against the new administration. Nor does the state have a monopoly of legitimate means of symbolic violence. Karl shows only too well how the state is crumbles from within as it becomes an arena for struggle between concerns for racial justice on the one side and for bureaucratic and professional expertise on the other. While Bourdieu makes much of the idea of classification struggle, he rarely gives any convincing examples of such struggles. For that he would have needed to come to South Africa or some similar country undergoing transformation.

It's hard to make sense of the correspondence and dovetailing of habitus and structure in a society such as South Africa that has undergone such an upheaval in the last 30 years. Indeed, observing insurgencies from below Karl asks whether apartheid inculcated a habitus of defiance rather than a habitus of submission – a habitus that still flourishes in the New South Africa. Indeed, Karl turns to the Marxist analysis of dual consciousness found in Freire, Fanon and Gramsci, where an inner authentic self of good sense competes with bad sense internalized with domination. So Karl searches through Bourdieu's culminating theoretical work, *Pascalian Meditations*, for passages where habitus of the dominated renders not shame and humiliation but defiance and rebellion. He is hard pressed to find such reversals. The concept of habitus may be necessary but it has to be revamped.

In a world where physical violence is so common place how can one justify the Bourdieusian focus on symbolic violence. Here Karl makes a brilliant move, insisting on examining the interrelation of symbolic and physical violence. He shows how displays of symbolic domination inspire residents of townships to resort to physical violence. Perhaps even more than under apartheid, they show their displeasure by burning down symbols of their new-found dispossession – libraries without books, clinics without medicine, community centers without communities. Their rage is uncontrollable as they confront a new order that violates all their hopes and sense of justice. In other words physical violence is necessary bound up with symbolic violence.

Karl enters the realm of masculinity, pointing to the progressive constitution and a wide array of laws protecting women, yet this takes place alongside the continuity of brutal physical violence.

Indeed, it seems that when the symbolic domination of earlier patriarchal orders are threatened so men resort to physical violence. Again one has to call into question Bourdieu's presumption that symbolic violence works smoothly without leading or having recourse to physical violence. When the symbolic world is in crisis physical violence all too easily fills the vacuum. Far from reducing physical violence democratization can unleash it as its stunts rather than opens institutional channels for expressing their grievances.

At the heart of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic domination lies education. Here again Karl tries to work with Bourdieu rather than reject him. Once again, in his critique of Freire and in his endorsement of Gramsci, Karl insists that effective symbolic domination requires symbolic violence. Disciplining the body as well as the mind is a necessary part of education, particularly the development of a critical consciousness. Bourdieu sees no alternative to conventional education, the inculcation of legitimate culture, but there's rarely a glimpse of contestation in his assessment of education. Drawing on the example of missionary education, Karl shows how legitimate culture can be turned against the domination it purportedly serves. Many of the leaders of the liberation movement, started with Mandela, learned how to turn legitimate culture to their own advantage, not just as individuals but in furthering the struggles of the colonized. When the apartheid regime replaces missionary education with Bantu education, it foments violent revolt, as in the Soweto student revolt of 1976, when it patently violates its training function. If education fosters symbolic domination, it can also foster rebellion against that domination. If it can happen in South Africa it can happen in France.

Extending education into the third tier, university education and the scholarly community, Karl takes up another plank in Bourdieu's armory, the matter of reflexivity, the importance of examining the conditions of the production of knowledge. Here Karl notes the continuing domination of white academics whom he presumes have an interest, not necessarily conscious, in that domination, and in the continuing supremacy of Western canonical thinking. Karl warns that they may be in for a shock as increasingly as other races begin to challenge the hegemony of Western thought, and that will be all for the good so long as dialogue continues to be possible.

Equally, Karl interrogates Bourdieu's conception of the public sociologist as someone who pursues the *realpolitik* of reason, engages in rational, enlightened discourse in some public sphere. He clings to the potential of such discourse in denaturalizing and defatalizing the taken for granted, the spontaneous sociology of the people. His commitment is not deterred by the imperialism of reason. Bourdieu wants to have his cake and eat it – reason is both emancipatory and justificatory. But his conception of public sociology is a very traditional one that does not engage preexisting conversations, discourses that are firmly held by partisan publics. This is consistent with Bourdieu separation of the logic of theory from the logic of practice, but leaves the sociologist in the stratosphere. Karl argues that by standing aloof from their constituencies public sociologists or public intellectuals condemn themselves to irrelevance. If they are to communicate, public sociologists have to take seriously the currents of discourses and their carriers, and also learn to compete with other voices in the public sphere. South African academics learned this lesson early on – they had a choice to be in direct conversation with various publics and compromise their independence or defend their independence by retreating behind the academic walls, where they might nonetheless education the organic intellectuals of tomorrow.

Here, indeed, we might take Karl's insistence on dialogue between theory and practice even further. What we have noted time and again is the gap between Bourdieu's theory and his practice, how he claims to be allergic to direct engagement with publics, yet he frequently does just that, that he recognizes the role of culture in symbolic domination and establishing distinction, but nonetheless defends it vigorously against the market, calls for reflexivity but deploys it against others by positioning them in an intellectual space, while never turning the spotlight on himself and his position. While theory and practice never come together, they are always out of kilter, the one outpacing the other, nonetheless there is no reason not to place them in dialogue. Even if one believes, as Bourdieu does, there should be an epistemological break between the two this is no justification for not placing them in a conversation of mutual enlightenment.

Indeed, Bourdieu's separation of the logic of theory and the logic of practice places the theorist above the people being theorized. Whether this take the form of gender, race, class or national domination or whether it is in the constitution of Southern theory, we cannot afford this separation of theory and practice. In bringing Bourdieu to South Africa we are making him earn his distinction. By putting Bourdieu into conversation with Marxist theories and social reality we are unsettling his foundations, and perhaps rebuilding his edifice. This is just the beginning. We will see how well Bourdieu travels to South Africa, whether on his return home he bears any resemblance to the Bourdieu he was before. South Africa does many strange things to foreigners, so we shall see what it does to Bourdieu.