

Fernanda Beigel

Comment on Julian Go/1

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Comment on Julian Go/1

by Fernanda Beigel

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The paper “Globalizing Sociology, Turning South. Perspectival Realism and the Southern Standpoint” [2016] is an interesting piece, which main argument points out that social science’s concerns, categories and theories have been formulated, forged, and enacted of and for Anglo-European metropolises, but how to overcome this problem of “metrocentrism” remains a dilemma. It discusses the available literature in order to show how some suggest that tracking extensive connections or global “systems” can meet the challenge, while a different set of solutions comes from projects tending to “indigenize” or draw upon “Southern” theory.

The author argues that the Southern Standpoint approach proposed in the essay is a friendly extension of an already-existing intellectual movement partly emerging from the Global South. This movement can be variously called “Southern Theory,” “epistemologies of the South,” or “indigenous sociology.” It has received renewed attention of late, but it has a longer history. We could trace it back to some strands of postcolonial theory in the humanities, for instance, and before that, to the anticolonial thought of writers like Du Bois, Fanon, and Césaire. My first comment to this paper is that this history is, in fact, longer and wider. The Latin American traditions are virtually not brought into the argument, even when a renowned Latin American thinker is a relevant part of the paper. Just to mention two major contributions to indigenous social thought: José Martí’s *Nuestra América* [1891] and José Carlos Mariátegui’s *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* [1928].

The author deploys the project for global sociology and its attempt to transcend the provinciality of conventional sociology in Euro-American contexts and make sociology more adequate for a global setting. After describing the limits of this project, the author delves on a second current, that has suggested to unseat the canon entirely, turning to the experience, practices, and voices of subaltern populations and thinkers in the Global South to cultivate a more global sociology.

The author chooses to support this second interpretation but developing the “Southern Standpoint” as a basis for global sociology. In order to do this, he offers a philosophy of knowledge, perspectival realism, as an ontology and epistemology upon which to mount the Southern standpoint approach. He claims that this philosophical framework enables us to advance a Southern standpoint approach that draws upon the indigenous sociology and Southern theory movement without resorting to essentialism or relativism. According with the author, part of the reasons for the proliferation of criticisms against the movement is that it has not made its philosophy of social knowledge – its ontology and epistemology – sufficiently explicit, nor has it systematized it.

He explains its roots on “scientific perspectivism” in STS and the philosophy of sciences and articulates it with post-positivist standpoint theory in order to apply to social science. My second comment on this paper is precisely related with this ontology and epistemology that the author builds for the Southern theory/indigenous sociology movement. I don’t find at all clear which is the original contribution of perspectival realism nor its anchorage to Southern Theory, considering that no references are made to the long existing critical studies on science developed in Latin America during the 1970s by Oscar Varsavsky [1975], Amilcar Herrera [1974], and since the 1980s by Hebe Vessuri [1984] and others. If the contribution is mainly applying this perspective into social science or sociology, it should focus more clearly on this issue. His argument ends up blurring his most interesting point: that “the southern” is akin to the concept “subaltern,” which marks not a singular or essential subjectivity but a relational location from which to begin.

After a too extensive theoretical discussion, the author delves on two Southern authors: Frantz Fanon and Raúl Prebisch. My next observation to this paper is that this discussion is deployed isolating the contribution of these authors from the strong Southern traditions in which they are inserted and disclaiming local debate. There is an extensive literature on the work of Prebisch and his trajectory since it is a relevant part of Latin American academic traditions but also in the realm of development studies [Seers 1981; Sikkink 1988; Hettne 1995; Love 2004]. But these traditions and literature are not discussed in the text, and the author confuses “dependency theory” with center-periphery focus, thus without noticing the distance between ECLA

Structuralism and Dependency Analysis. Dependents assumed some of the premises established by Latin American Structuralism, particularly the idea of segmented labor markets and monopolies in land tenure, inherited from the colonial past. They argued that both the Center and Periphery were part of a single and long term international process and constituted a structure of dependence. Like Structuralism, Dependency Analysis articulated its position through historical essays. However unlike ECLA's scholars, dependents concentrated on politics and class struggle in order to explain underdevelopment. Their main concern was to determine the specificity of the relations between social/political factors and economic development. They examined the diverse national social formations by assessing the historical overlap of capitalist with pre-capitalist modes of production. In some cases, they singled out for analysis, different types of dependent relations that had evolved in Latin America during the nineteenth century, that of export oriented economies or enclaves based on mines or plantations [Cardoso and Faletto, 1969]. The sociological contribution of Dependency was, thus, to offer a new definition of underdevelopment combining the analysis of society with economy and politics, in specific historical situations.

Dependency was not seen as an external imposition, but as a *relationship* between industrialized and peripheral countries. In addition to the reflection on the Structuralist legacy, the heterodox readings of Marxism and the recourse to Weber, there was another theoretical and methodological tradition that came into play. I am referring to our local tradition of structural history, developed in Colonial Studies and the chairs of Economic History in Argentina and Chile. One of these relevant contributions is *Economía de la Sociedad Colonial* (Economy of Colonial Society) by Sergio Bagú [1949], where he argued:

It wasn't capitalism what appeared in America in the period we studied, but colonial capitalism. There was no servitude on a large scale, but slavery with multiple shades, hidden very often under complex and fallacious juridical formulas. Ibero-America was born to integrate the cycle of new-born capitalism and not to extend the agonizing feudalistic phase [Bagú 1949, 261].

Fair is to say that one important problem of our Latin American traditions is the fact that much of it has not been translated to English. But one of the main pillars of the "Southern standpoint" should be to recognize the existence of strong theoretical traditions that have been profusely discussed in the periphery, and account for them. I do believe that Prebisch can be considered a case of "Southern standpoint," but there is an abundant literature on the controversial Argentinian economist. The author's interpretation on Prebisch's contributions is dependent on Dosman's biography, while there are many other, less celebratory, studies available. A broader

analysis on the trajectory of Prebisch and the context of the different phases of his work would have revealed that his late dependentism is not even close to the radical perspective of Frantz Fanon. Of course this latter does not impugn the relevance of Prebisch but, from my point of view, his contribution can be highlighted with a deeper insight in the structural-historical method and a broader discussion of ECLA structuralism and Dependency Analysis.

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Abstract: This is a comment on the paper “Globalizing Sociology, Turning South. Perspectival Realism and the Southern Standpoint,” which main argument points out that social science’s concerns, categories and theories have been formulated, forged, and enacted of and for Anglo-European metropolises, but how to overcome this problem of “metrocentrism” remains a dilemma. It discusses the place given to the Latin American traditions in the text, the isolation of the contribution of these authors from the strong Southern traditions in which they are inserted and disclaiming local debate.

Keywords: Dependency Analysis; ECLA Structuralism; Prebisch; Latin America.

Fernanda Beigel is a Researcher at CONICET and Head Professor at National University of Cuyo (Mendoza, Argentina). Her most recent publications are; “The New Character of Intellectual Dependency.” Pp. 45-68 in *Cuestiones de Sociología* 14 [2016] and “Peripheral Scientists: Institutional Knowledges, Styles of Publishing and Circuits of Academic Recognition in Argentina.”, Pp. 215-255 in *Dados* 59 (4) [2016].