Global South

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Abstract: The so-called Global South occupies a rather peripheral position in German-language sociology. This owes itself mainly to an idea, dating back to the early days of sociology, that upholds the binary between modern and traditional societies, with sociology being the field in charge of analyzing the supposedly modern and diversified societies that are to be found in the Global North. With the rise of debates on globalization, development sociology, the only subdiscipline that had been concerned with the other parts of the world, experienced a rather paradoxical decline. This article shows how sociological contributions that acknowledge the complexity of the Global South and attribute agency to social actors who are otherwise often socially marginalized on a global scale have provided novel and important perspectives on these regions over the last fifteen years. These contributions also testify to how these perspectives are compatible with theoretical and methodological insights from development sociology and have advanced classical approaches by relating them to the effort to create a global, decolonized sociology. The aim of such a sociology is to reinstate a more critical and encompassing analytical perspective towards the Global South that overcomes Eurocentric and modernist views.

Keywords: Development, translocality, decoloniality, comparison, knowledge systems

1 Introduction

Sociologists often see the Global South¹ as the opposite pole to the “Global North.” It is obvious that this view originates in the idea that the two regions represent traditional and modern societies, respectively. This imaginary has lain at the heart of German-language sociology since its inception and dovetails well with the idea of industrialization ushering in the age of modernity. Since the decolonization of Latin America, Africa, and most of Asia, the dichotomous imaginary of tradition versus modernity has been transferred from analyses of historical processes in Europe to other parts of the world. The modernization theories of the 1950s presented this mode of thought in an idealized way, and it underpins so-called *developmentalism*, which views the Global South’s major challenge to be catching up with the Global North’s state of development. Still today, this viewpoint continues to structure our worldview and define notions of progress and development.

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¹ We use this term for pragmatic reasons, even though we are well aware that this concept has been criticized and is frequently seen by scholars from regions that have been subsumed under this term as an imposed Eurocentric dichotomy.

Over the last three decades, the sociology of globalization and world-society studies have sought to change this classical imaginary. Sociologists have discussed phenomena such as the concurrent erosion of borders, transnational and translocal entanglements, glocalization, and cosmopolitanism. International comparison has become a standard approach to theory-building, and big data has increased our knowledge of social inequalities on a global scale. Today, views like the modernist imaginary are met with the standard charge of being Eurocentric and have been questioned in many more ways. Additionally, sociology's tendency to locate modern society within the borders of a national society—an imaginary that has consolidated methodological nationalism—has been challenged in various ways. Still today, this viewpoint continues to structure our worldview and define notions of progress and development.

In the meantime, development sociology, the subdiscipline that used to be devoted to the study of the world outside Europe, has experienced a steady decline, particularly in Germany. At first glance, this is rather astonishing as this area of sociology has always engaged critically with modernist views (see Kößler, 1998). Development sociology has also conducted empirically grounded research on social structures as well as on processes of social, economic, and political change in African, Latin American, and Asian societies,² often in relation to global entanglements, and sometimes on the larger scale of their embeddedness in global economic and political systems. At the meso level, development sociology has investigated translocal connections and interfaces between knowledge systems in social configurations of all kinds, such as external interventions for the purpose of development (Bierschenk and Elwert, 1993). Always in close exchange with sociological knowledge production from all parts of the world, this body of scholarship has concentrated on relations of power and dominance, alternative views on political practice and social interaction, the social foundation of economic practices and structures, the transformation of gender orders, and on knowledge systems as the basis of interaction.

The marginal position of development sociology in German academia stands in sharp contrast to the fact that development research continues to be an internationally well-established field with significant prestige. Its minor status can only be explained by the observation that many issues that were once addressed exclusively by development sociology are now debated in the wider field of sociology and related disciplines. During the 2000s, this resulted in some decisive transformations. First, the aforementioned debate on globalization reinforced a further debate on the utility of sociological inquiry into particular, nationally defined societies and their transformation (Greve and Heintz, 2005; Beck, 1998) (Weiß, GLOBALIZATION AND TRANS-NATIONALIZATION, this volume). Second, while the homogenizing and often stereotypical category known as the “Third World” has been subjected to fundamental criticism, systems of dependency and coloniality prevailed. Development sociologists,

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² After 1990, the so-called *transformation societies* were added to these global regions.

meanwhile, suffered from the repercussions of the debate over the “failure” of the grand development theories that attempted to explain developmental successes and shortcomings with the help of very general assumptions. Even as the teleological assumptions, overgeneralization, and lack of accuracy of these theories were being discussed, sociologists, among other scholars, questioned the utility of *development* as a theoretical construct. Extending this delegitimization of the concept of development to the entire subdiscipline does not seem justified, however, as development sociologists have often taken different approaches into account.³ A third transformation concerned critical perspectives on development as a hegemonic discourse. This debate, which produced the post-development school, not only questioned views of the world as being divided into parts that are more and others that are less developed but also sought to abandon the notion of development on grounds of its disputable analytical value, thereby targeting the core of development sociology as such (see Ziai, 2007).

Ironically, the epistemological framework of German-language development sociology has fostered a critical discussion of development in the Global South (Kößler, 1998; Goetze, 2002). Other branches of sociology have tended to ignore these critical engagements by arguing that a division of labor exists between sociology and social anthropology.⁴ A closer look at recent works in German-language development sociology reveals multiple ways in which scholarly engagement with the Global South has been reframed and revitalized. Important approaches have rethought modes of connectivity between (unequal) regions of the world by engaging with theories and methodologies on transnationality and translocality, linking these to empirically grounded perspectives on societal processes—in particular those found in the societies of the Global South.

Drawing on a selection of five sociological contributions, we will first examine the potential of empirically grounded research to analyze the negotiation of so-called Western concepts at the local level. We will outline how scholars who have advocated for transnational comparison have also argued for systematic and thorough reflection both in methodology and theory-building and for refraining from making generalizable claims. Patterns that emerge from this careful analysis of specific cases can then be related to other cases through “thought experiments.” From a postcolonial perspective, social actors are seen as being knowledgeable and capable of working towards a transformation of the social world—a premise that has been applied to the Global South particularly by scholars who seek to look beyond stereotypical orderings

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3 The fall of the Iron Curtain also diverted attention away from the Global South, resulting in changing perspectives and priorities, including the reallocation of resources.

4 This line of argument was questioned when German-language sociology opened itself up to studies of globalization and world society and started to understand itself as contributing more to a “global sociology.” In the long run, however, early contributions to global and transnational research with a special focus on the Global South were largely ignored, and Eurocentric conceptions re-entered through the backdoor.

of social reality “from above.” In this vein, we will show how German-language sociological inquiry has contributed to our understanding of global social inequalities. As part of this effort, we will discuss two approaches that originate from different schools of thought. While one seeks to contribute a transnational perspective, the other makes an attempt to find a suitable theoretical framework to explain regional specifics and continuities. Finally, we will address decolonial perspectives that call for a thorough exploration of the power relations in which the relationship between researcher and research and unequal systems of knowledge production are embedded. We end by critically reflecting on positionality and discussing some of the implications that this might have for the future of a sociology of the Global South in the German-speaking world as well as its contribution to international discussions.

2 Translocal Comparisons

Since the 1980s, uneasiness over the transferability of Western concepts has prompted demands to observe “development under the microscope” (Neubert, 2001). Researching the interactions of everyday life and reconstructing the lived experience of groups or individuals in relation to larger processes and structures on the basis of empirically grounded mid-range theories has been the approach adopted by most sociologists involved in development research. The book *Negotiating Development in Muslim Societies: Gendered Spaces and Translocal Connections*, edited by Gudrun Lachenmann and Petra Dannecker (2008), responded to such demands for closer scrutiny by providing empirically grounded research on globalization. The volume presents findings from a research project, which also involved Salma Nageeb, Nadine Sieveking, and Anna Spiegel,⁵ that conducted three different case studies on the diverse ways in which women’s activists negotiate their positions and demands for readjusting the space of women in society. The activists constantly traverse the fine line between secularism and religion, Western and local ideals, change and tradition. Referring to Sudan, for example, Nageeb points out that women’s organizations have pursued their agendas in the context of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2004, which required them to negotiate the readjustment of political and social spaces amidst a complex actor constellation in which state, donor agencies, and religious institutions played a crucial role. In urban Malaysia, by contrast, female activists were confronted with an increasingly authoritarian state that was pursuing an Islamic development agenda. Spiegel analyses how women’s activists struggle for recognition of the definition of *discrimination* enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This was in stark opposition to the Malaysian government’s position that cultural differences justify a discrete

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5 The project “Negotiating Development: Translocal Gendered Spaces in Muslim Societies” was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation from 2005–2008.

“Malaysian perspective,” thereby effectively relativizing claims for universality. In the case of Senegal, Sieveking notes that women’s groups distinguish between granting equality or granting rights by relating the debate on women’s rights and gender equality to a “moderate religious ethic.” The conceptual framework of these diverse case studies is clearly established: They investigate the ways in which global developmental ideas are appropriated in relation to religion, which is regarded as a powerful factor; but it is not the only dimension of local conditions under which women’s activists seek to renegotiate their room to maneuver.

Apart from deepening our knowledge on global–local negotiation, the book edited by Lachenmann and Dannecker demonstrates how one can compare data collected under the premises of qualitative social research while adequately acknowledging not just the specific conditions found in the field but by reflecting on the differences between the actors and the modes of interaction insofar as they relate to social, political, and cultural contexts that are constitutive of variations and similarities between actors, concepts, identities, and spaces. Or, as Lachenmann stresses, “comparison does not entail regarding one logic as against the other but rather the construction of meaning from situatedness” (27). The act of comparison thus requires thorough contextualization before, during, and after fieldwork to ensure the adequate portrayal of the different processes of constructing meaning. In their understanding of contextualization as a crucially important instrument of validation, the authors follow the paradigm of Schütz’s sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). What is at stake is therefore not only a pragmatic approach centered on the analysis of particular social fields (such as activism) embedded in translocalized lifeworlds and actor constellations but the disentanglement of how global (supposedly Western) concepts of development are negotiated vis-à-vis potentially competing concepts such as the various interpretations of Islam and of local cultures.

This approach refrains from homogenizing and essentializing conceptions of what is “Western” versus what is “indigenous” and highlights the diversity of interpretations of politics, culture, and society. Processes of social change can be uncovered by elucidating the struggles for recognition, the negotiation over social and political space, and the contestations over meaning (see Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2005). Positions within the world are being shaped by entangled modernities and constantly adjusted through the interpretations of local activists who are pursuing social change by means of enlarging their spaces within local and national arenas. Quite evidently, power relations are central to this as they not only structure social interaction but can also be turned into a subject of negotiation. While acknowledging the existence of postcolonial hierarchies and inequalities, solid and empirically grounded counter-narratives can only be made visible when we listen to the people in the Global South or, in Sieveking’s words, recognize them as “knowledgeable social agents” instead of reducing them to being a “particularly vulnerable group” (169)—an act that reflects postcolonial thinking. Revealing the subjectivities of social actors and their embeddedness in social relations constitutes a necessary foundation for reconstructing social realities without which sociological inquiry into global processes would be in-

complete. The ways in which women's activists develop agency in interacting with institutions, discourses, and authorities, frequently traversing socio-spatial levels, leads to the constitution of translocal gendered spaces. This does not just imply that local interpretations of women's rights—or of development more generally—are subject to negotiation. It also illuminates how global development concepts are shaped by local experiences and thus become more differentiated. This contribution therefore provides a way out of the impasse described at the outset as it reveals how development continues to shape people's political and everyday worlds and how it is negotiated in translocal spaces by agents who, however "vulnerable" and "powerless" they might be, make use of their agency to challenge unequal power relations at various spatial and societal levels.

3 Beyond Categorical Thinking

Lachenmann and Dannecker's team questioned stereotypical categorizations of people living in the Global South as non-normative, objectified others.⁶ Sergio Costa is among the sociologists in Germany who have made an important contribution to reconceptualizing the subjectivity of the formerly colonized as hybrid actors, a notion by which he emphasizes the capability and agency of individuals in the Global South. In his book *Vom Nordatlantik zum 'Black Atlantic': Postkoloniale Konfigurationen und Paradoxien transnationaler Politik*⁷ (2007), he intends to reframe sociology by arguing that, due to globalization, Northern sociology has been forced to account for post-national constellations, thereby overcoming the institutionally consolidated sociological gaze on national societies. By referring to Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Jürgen Habermas as examples, Costa argues that the prevalence of a theoretical stance embedded in a Eurocentric and modernist worldview prevents sociologists from recognizing Southern social actors who are embracing their full agency.

To integrate social actors of the South, who actually represent a global majority, into sociological theory, Costa embarks on postcolonial epistemologies and criticizes the parochial character of ostensibly universal Western knowledge as being bound to specific national societies. He also questions teleological Western conceptions of modernity, which reduce societies in the Global South to underdeveloped copies of the West. Empirically, he substantiates his approach by showing how the longstanding national discourse on cultural heterogeneities in Brazil has been challenged. Constitutive of this national discourse is *mestiçagem* (miscegenation), which is predicated on the idea that colonial relations in Brazil had been less harsh than in other cases, thus painting a romanticized picture of a harmonious coexistence of European col-

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⁶ For an overview, see Gerharz (2020).

⁷ *From North-Atlantic to "Black Atlantic": Post-Colonial Configurations and Paradoxes of Transnational Politics*; Costa applies Gilroy's idea to shift scholarly attention away from the North Atlantic to contexts like the Black Atlantic.

onizers, indigenous people, and *Afrodescendentes*. This trivialization of cruel power relations served as a founding myth for a Brazil in which all persons were supposedly equal and no racism existed, thereby characterizing the nation as a “racial democracy.” This discourse served the elites’ aim to maintain power and fell under increasing scrutiny when the black movement started to point out the racism and discrimination that existed in Brazilian society. Actors with *mestiçagem* background rediscovered and re-enacted their cultural heterogeneity, including what Costa calls tendencies of re-Africanization, which clearly demonstrated the ample agency of these hybrid social subjects. Such processes, however, are often controversial. As anti-racist thinkers try to challenge official ideas originally based on scientific racism, Brazilian sociology is confronted with the paradox of redefining the concept of race and racial studies’ insistence on determining a clear-cut and irrefutable pattern of racialized identities that juxtapose “blacks” and “whites” as antagonistic groups. To grasp the underlying complexity and diversity of such processes, Costa argues for shifting the perspective of sociology by abandoning earlier ideas of cultural hybridity as abnormal. In breaking with this normative view, hybrid social actors may be acknowledged as ‘normal,’ thereby attributing them with agency and subjectivity. This would cast them as actors in their own right instead of perpetuating prejudiced minorization and othering, which would in turn allow for a proper sociological theorization of such social settings. Therefore, the development of a critical perspective should be based on a thorough examination of concrete social processes and their backgrounds while also taking into account their embeddedness in a transnational context of agency.

4 Inequalities beyond the National Lens

Instead of focusing mainly on local social settings or hybrid actors, Thomas Faist reframes the so-called social question in a global setting shaped by cross-border migration, thus breaking with methodological nationalism and Europe-centered perspectives (Pries, *MIGRATION*, this volume). In his book *The Transnationalized Social Question: Migration and the Politics of Social Inequalities in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), Faist investigates intersecting fields of social inequalities and cross-border migration. He argues that from the 19th century onwards the social question was mainly discussed as a matter of class, whereas other categories were at best seen as lateral influences on the class position and the subsequent divides. Nowadays, however, social and cultural heterogeneities are more clearly perceived as fundamentally intersecting with class. Against this backdrop, the social question re-emerges mainly at the interstices between the Global North and South. Transnationalization has led to diverse manifestations of the social question in different localities while at the same time migration has shaped social inequalities. For example, most countries around the world have not adopted the European models of the welfare state. In most countries, cultural and collective rights, often referred to as the third generation of rights, are instead far more important. Hence, debating these rights in relation to the

social question is fundamentally more important than analyses of welfare systems that presume that the European models will expand globally.

Faist points out that transnationality forms part of diverse sets of heterogeneities and boundaries and as such is of special relevance to social inequalities. Therefore, transnational social fields are particularly appropriate to analyze the social question, which manifests itself in numerous facets. Departing from the assumption that any analysis of the social question requires one to investigate how cultural and collective rights relate to social inequalities, he discusses the idea of voice and exit as an illustrative debate that translates the social question to a global level. Whereas in earlier, less transnationalized settings, voice would have been the main strategy to address social inequalities, nowadays exit constitutes a viable option to resolve the social question. Though migration might be seen as an individual decision, it is frequently embedded in larger groups and communities and impacts the social question on a larger scale because of its magnitude. Moreover, Faist posits that the relationship between migration and social inequality needs to be embedded in the rival conceptions of development put forward by developmentalist states or by a neoliberal setting that attributes development to civil society actors. In both cases, diasporas can be potentially important political actors—either because they are often integrated into domestic politics or because they represent a political rival or threat to processes of nation-building and the consolidation of political power. With the help of such examples, it can be shown how such settings have to be analyzed in a manner that overcomes often subtle restrictions imposed by methodological nationalism. Furthermore, a perspective that neglects cross-border linkages, such as those comprised by transnational social spaces, entails the potential threat of dividing on a global scale a perceived homogenous North from a similarly homogenous South, thus creating the need to overcome this dichotomy, as linkages through transnational social spaces are empirically much more relevant given that “[t]he social life worlds of individuals [...] extend beyond state borders” (170).

Incidences of social inequalities in social protection can be analyzed along three characteristic dimensions. The first one relates to a lack of binding social rights and standards in cross-border migration processes themselves; for instance, International Labour Organization (ILO) norms or conventions on human and social rights are neither binding nor globally enacted. Faist maintains that “[i]t does not make sense to speak of transnational (social) citizenship” (122) because enforceable rights are locally or nationally bound. A transnational perspective helps to analyze how struggles at diverse sites are connected across borders. Second, despite the existence of such struggles and of (soft) global norms, inequalities in social protection are produced and reproduced in migration settings, such as in the case of the European Union. Here, social protection is conditioned by the enactment of diverse kinds of social boundaries, especially those related to national and racial ascriptions that are reproduced in transnational settings and thus recreate inequality. The third field accordingly concerns measures and practices of social security developed internally by (small) transnational communities to cope with their situation and a common lack of access

to national systems of social protection, thus stressing their collective agency in the face of precarious formal social security. On a broader scale, and turning to states in the Global South, the aforementioned aspect of development and diasporas in transnational settings have manifold political consequences. By referring to debates around the migration–development nexus, Faist shows how sending states try to transfer “responsibilities for problem-solving to migrants, individual actors, and diaspora as collective actors” (265) while also attempting to control their transnational agency. Hence, the social question has a very flexible and multifaceted character that will continue to be of major importance. Climate change, for example, will lead to the rise of a socio-natural question that can be expected to intensify the transnational social question.

The agency of migrants and especially the potential of their collectives is a central aspect of the transnational social question. In settings where their access to social security is restricted, often in a combination of formal and informal ways, migrants rely upon their social capital, bonds of reciprocity, solidarity, and so forth to create social security of their own. The Global South and the corresponding social actors can thus be analyzed by considering the diversity of specific contexts, social positions, and perspectives (or knowledge) that account for their agency. It is hence interesting to note that, although Faist adopts a different theoretical approach, he nevertheless comes to similar conclusions as the other works under discussion here.

5 African Inequalities

Like Faist, Dieter Neubert criticizes that notions of class have dominated debates on global inequalities. In his book *Inequality, Socio-Cultural Differentiation and Social Structures in Africa. Beyond Class* (2019), he develops a new framework for the analysis of social structure in Sub-Saharan Africa. In so doing, he examines recent approaches to global social inequalities and argues that these need to see global, national, and local inequalities as interrelated. With a few exceptions (Weiß, 2017; Boatcă, 2016), these ventures lack not just conceptual clarity but also rigor. One decisive shortcoming is the unidimensional character of the class concept: Following the Marxian tradition, “class” depends on people’s relation to the means of production. This, however, neither captures the complexities of how most people in Africa make a living nor does it do justice to the heterogeneity and volatility of their social positions. Moreover, “class” obscures the significance of social networks, which are of utmost significance in many African societies, as well as the question of how inequalities manifest themselves in predefined units of analysis, such as the household.

Given that the middle class is commonly seen as the new bearer of hope in developmentalist approaches, increasing the size of the middle class has turned into the ultimate goal of development. Neubert critically examines this debate and argues that instead of “middle class status” being merely a statistical category, it should draw our attention to those who are seizing opportunities to achieve upward social mobility.

This new paradigm breaks with classical developmentalist approaches, which viewed inequalities through the lens of poverty and “the poor” as a vulnerable homogeneous mass prone to a high level of risk and without much agency. Here, Neubert’s argument intersects with those proposed by the scholars named above because the absence of any attempts to grant agency to “the poor” can be read as a continuation of colonialism.

Another important thread in research on inequality concerns the socio-cultural elements of social differentiation. Ethnicity, religion, neo-traditional authorities, and patron–client relationships in Africa are characterized by multiplicity and multilayeredness. These relationships are related to social structure not just by ordering individuals by social status; they also provide protection for people who belong to lower strata and secure the positions of those occupying more powerful positions. With this focus on vertical interlinkages of societal dimensions, Neubert’s book highlights the complexities of patterns of inequality and differentiation. Feminist scholarship has revealed that social positioning adds to this complexity. Moreover, women’s economic activities are rendered invisible as they are often concentrated in subsistence production, unpaid housework, and also in the informal sector, including trade (Lachenmann, 1997). Contrary to conventional approaches, Neubert thus points to the limitations of predefined units of analysis, such as the household. He argues that households are areas of bargaining where it is not only the maximization of benefits that counts but also the welfare and social security of the family, norms, values, and the agency of individual actors.

Quite unlike Faist, who approaches social inequality through transnational connectivities, Neubert understands global social inequalities to be structured by global (exploitative) relations under post-colonial or, more recently, neoliberal conditions. In arguing for a thorough reconceptualization of inequalities while taking patterns of social change in different societal contexts into account, he reveals how individual and collective aspirations toward upward mobility are not only changing social structure but also determine how individual and collective action is embedded in social figurations and how such action responds to conditions set by the respective states as part of their social security and welfare. This shows how much the quest for individual and structural progress shapes the social reality of so-called developing societies. Yet upward mobility does not follow clearly defined trajectories. Rather, it is a dynamic process. Research on Africa has underscored that economic strategies cannot be understood independently of formal and informal social security. The Bielefeld School (see Evers et al., 1983) has shown how people who face situations of high insecurity react by diversifying and combining their modes of production. Neubert has extended this concept by integrating formal security and informal security arrangements. Given the limitations most states in the Global South face in their ability to establish welfare systems, informal arrangements are particularly relevant but often ignored. High degrees of uncertainty and vulnerability force people to integrate social relations into the “welfare mix,” which can also delimit social upward mobility because expectations of reciprocity are directed toward those who have

achieved a higher status. These obligations can turn into risks because they have the potential to constrain one's ability to secure a higher-status position.

By considering these different factors along with the complexities of social position and patterns of social security, Neubert's ultimate aim is to develop a new framework for the analysis of social structures. He points out that Stefan Hradil's (1987) concept of social situations corresponds with most of his proposals. Neubert seeks to expand on Hradil by categorizing and systematizing the variety of social situations according to clusters through identifying fields of needs (e.g., socio-economic needs, welfare and security needs, social needs) and dimensions of inequality (e.g., money, housing conditions, entitlements, political participation). This taxonomical process is then combined with the "subjective element" drawn from lifestyle and milieu studies. In highlighting how social positions and milieus relate to each other, Neubert makes a convincing case that moving beyond class is a necessity if we want to understand how people aspire and act toward (potential) upward mobility and how they strategize to maintain certain positions. In this way, he offers new vistas for development policies and analyses and certainly enriches our perspectives on the Global South with a nuanced and well-structured conceptual framework.

6 Decolonizing Sociology

However convincing Neubert's effort to transfer Hradil's theoretical concept from Germany to African contexts might be, this venture can become controversial if we take seriously the demands made by scholars who represent decolonial thinking. In German-language sociology, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez is one such scholar who takes the central theoretical arguments of a decolonial mode of thought that was mainly developed in the Americas and applies those arguments to European sociology. In her article "Decolonizing Postcolonial Rhetoric" (2010), she argues in favor of recognizing the epistemological contributions of "decolonial voices, subjugated knowledge" (49) present in "Black, Chicana and Third World feminist and queer theorists" since the 1980s in the USA. By critically examining the absence of their theory production from sociological curricula in general and even in fields like gender studies, she identifies this as an instance of a progressing underrepresentation of critical theory in sociology. Decolonial feminist-queer epistemology, she claims, is appropriate for understanding the complex and multidimensional character of post-colonial social settings, be it in the Global North or South, because it provides an analytical basis for applying a decolonial perspective to sociology.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez stresses that knowledge is always embodied and socially embedded. She emphasizes that the illusion of scientific objectivity embodied by a supposedly socially detached, universal, and objective academic resulted in a conception in which "Social Sciences are institutionally thought within the paradigm of European modernity" (50), thereby ignoring that paradigm's merger with coloniality, as demonstrated by decolonial scholars. Like Costa, she claims that scientific

knowledge has to be seen as being embedded in concrete historical, material, and social settings and therefore as locally bound, partial, and in a sense often parochial. Modernity, then, is immanently contradictory, and (sociological) knowledge production always takes place in “a field organized by different social antagonisms” (52). However, this latter diversity is frequently neglected, as are contributions by female scholars and/or scholars of color.

One of the by-products of an ontological stance that ignores the entanglement of modernity and coloniality is the aforementioned parochialism of classical sociological works, which carve out detailed complexities in European societies but disregard others as “primitive” and traditionalistic, thus reproducing the classical idea of a divide between “modern Western” and “traditional non-Western” societies. This has severe consequences for the conceptualization of the non-European “others” who populate the Global South or exist as minorities in the North and who, in striking concordance with colonial perspectives that reduce them to the status of things, are often seen as passive non-rational social objects instead of being acknowledged as fully capable social actors just as Western social subjects are. Hence a “predominant androcentric white European focus” (55) that was forged during the colonial era is still globally present. This is as true for the academic world in general as it is for European sociology in particular, which, for a long time, has based its paradigms on ideas of modernity and universality.

Whereas gender has been integrated into German-language sociological debates, decolonial perspectives are rarely considered and often even seen as non-scientific. This fails to acknowledge what they have to contribute to social theory. Decolonial approaches are rarely accepted in “core” disciplines such as sociology, which shield themselves through strict rules of exclusive disciplinarity. Even if such approaches are integrated, this exclusivity ensures that relevant critical questions are silenced by depoliticizing decolonial approaches and stripping them of any transformative potential in a global sense. This is perpetuated by unequal access to so-called high-impact journals and exacerbated further by a hegemony of the English language in the academic world along with a geographical core of academic institutions that privileges research from the same areas. This geographical and social situatedness of knowledge production is sustained by inequalities, global and local, that reflect the coloniality of power and of knowledge, as Aníbal Quijano (2000) has argued. Moreover, addressing the entanglements of social processes and formations instead of presupposing the exclusivity of the social within the framework of the nation helps us to understand the manifold facets of coloniality (cf. Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020). Taking heed of these facts in building sociological theory allows for a more pluriversal knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2011).

To stress an alternative, Gutiérrez Rodríguez resorts to border thinking. Border thinking unites Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of borderland—namely, *Nepantla*—and a decolonial perspective. She argues that experiences of being situated in-between and living amid the constant transgression of borders, thereby resulting in acute border consciousness, offers a way to eschew the coloniality of power by acknowledging

ambivalences and diversity instead of clear-cut categorizations and paradigms. It is a “transgressive and transversal movement in which contradictions are dissolved into myriad infinite series of differences” (61). This way of thinking ought to be transferred to academia to foster the ability “to grasp the complexity and fluidity of social phenomena in a modern/colonial world system” (62). Decolonial thinking should be connected to proper praxis and the quest for transformations of society instead of resulting in simple rhetoric or, worse, the exploitation of postcolonial critique as a vehicle to enhance academic career opportunities in a globalized academic market. As Gutiérrez Rodríguez states, “a critical analysis of society begins where understanding finds its limits, where the focus on discontinuities and multiple antagonisms complicates our view and drives us to interrogate the epistemic pillars of our scientific presuppositions” (49). Sociology should therefore transform itself in an appropriate manner.

7 Towards More Equitable Knowledge Production

German-speaking sociologists have contributed to the international debate on the Global South by generating knowledge about social structure, class, inequality, differentiation, and underlying knowledge systems (Schimank, SOCIETY, this volume). Much of this knowledge, however, has been generated in a highly unequal system. The scholarship discussed here applies concepts and pursues lines of thought that can be analytically useful in diverse settings worldwide, thus putting aside political aspirations to resist existing hierarchies. The focus of these scholars is much more on mitigating Eurocentric views and decentering sociology, as Gutiérrez Rodríguez has called for. The literature we have discussed in this article reveals that knowledge production can neither take place without contextualization nor be disentangled from the scholars’ subjectivities, as these subjectivities have been and continue to be shaped by knowledge systems that rest upon particular epistemological traditions.

Nonetheless, the approaches discussed here all bear legitimacy in their own right. Instead of playing these off against each other, we believe that scholars who represent different schools of thought need to enter into conversation with one another. Decolonial approaches, combined with a thorough analysis of embedded translocal and transnational spaces, consider actors’ social positions and their knowledge systems to enhance sociology’s reflexive capacity to deconstruct power relations and global hierarchies, irrespective of where scholars are spatially located. Thomas Faist, for example, has devoted a great deal of thought to the position of the scholar in the public sphere. He calls for scientists to critically analyze processes around the transnationalized social question and to vigorously introduce their findings into public debates. However, this should not come in the form of policy advice; rather, it should be scientific knowledge that is provided beyond the usual research–policy nexus in order to broadly inform such debates in a comprehensive manner. Lachenmann and Dann-ecker take this further by highlighting the need to create networks and coalitions

across spatial boundaries and bring together scholars from different parts of the world. Herein lies the potential to work towards a decolonization of knowledge within the globalized world.⁸

Our aim has been to show how research perspectives from development sociology have advanced towards a sociology of the Global South. We believe that a decolonial critique of knowledge hierarchies involves embedding social processes and formations in a broader global perspective. Transnational processes fostered by cross-border migration and translocal connections that exist at various sites throughout the world mesh well with the perspective on entanglements and the critical reflection of local embeddedness that is being put forward by development sociologists. Both postures typify the analytical capacity of sociology and the profound scrutiny it can provide in addressing such issues. They can be employed in tandem to forge a more comprehensive mode of thought and analytical approach in German-language sociology—one that, moreover, can leverage an epistemology that has already become well established in development sociology. This dovetails nicely with the idea of honoring empirical data that do not fit the mold as a way of questioning theoretical assumptions to further advance sociology. The central epistemological foundations of development sociology are highly compatible with theoretical approaches that incorporate the Global South and/or its social actors who are enmeshed in transnational contexts all over the globe. This also holds true for recognizing the agency of all actors and further integrating other elements, such as the aforementioned focus on knowledge systems and social interfaces, which allows one to better comprehend interactions and systems of meaning. The intended result of all this is to allow for a deeper understanding of alternate forms of agency and logics of interaction and thus, for instance, alternate ways of doing politics, resistance, socialization, economic activities, or social security. It is high time for German-language sociology to take these proposals seriously and to encourage critical reflection on the impact of power relations on sociological knowledge production.

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⁸ For a more detailed discussion, see Gerharz (2020).

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