

The Global South is in Exile

Written by Mariana Kalil

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MARIANA KALIL, MAY 17 2020

The aim of this article is to approach the definition of Global South. Most contributions seek to define the term by trying to point it on a map. Here, the question changes from where to whom the Global South is. Instead of approaching it as an object, it is approached as a subject (or many). This proposition goes beyond territorially based or identity-based definitions of the Global South. It is the Global South as a condition, one of exile. A condition whose common traits are denouncing one's own marginalization in the discipline's social structure and creating thoughts deemed more capable of dealing with the reality that matters to most peoples around the world.

In 2019, at the International Studies Association's (ISA) Annual Convention in Toronto, Karl Holsti said at a round table the theoretical dead end of his lifetime had been dependency theory. Holsti designed one entire contribution to International Relations Theory (IRT) based on what he nowadays acknowledges as a failure. It never lifted off as a paradigm in IRT, and yet, whenever addressing theoretical contributions from the Global South, scholars such as Tickner look into Latin America and pick dependency theory up based exactly on Holsti's work directly cited – or indirectly via Gilpin's work. This citation game is precisely the mechanism Rekdal describes in the creation of an academic urban legend. An original misperception is continuously reified simply because of the social capital of some and/or the laziness of others. Developmentalism is not entirely ignored either, neither are world-system theories. Whatever relevant theoretical contribution from the Global South could allegedly then only stem from a political economic take.

It is no coincidence, whenever defining the Global South as a concept, political economic perspectives also tend to prevail. Mahler highlights three possible definitions, all of which pervaded by political economic viewpoints: (1) the Global South could be a way of defining economically disadvantaged nation-states; (2) it could carry a post-national take and encompass peoples and spaces suffering negative externalities of the capitalist globalization; and (3) it could be a political collectivity and an ideological formulation stemming from solidarity among a resistant imaginary transnational political subject who have in common shared experience of subjugation to capitalism.

Wolvers et al provide four definitions to the term Global South, three of them under political economic concerns: (1) a substitute for Third World/Developing World in the context of global capitalism; (2) a more empowering term, less hierarchical or evolutionary than Third World/Developing World; (3) a geopolitical non-static concept; (4) an elitist opportunity to explore South-South relations against a backdrop where the majority still lives under Third World/Developing World realities.

While Wolvers et al may bring a geopolitical conception into the equation, it still falls under concerns over where the Global South is. All other six definitions, exploring the relationship between politics and economics, refer to thoughts under the guise of dependency theory, developmentalism and world-system theories. In this article, nonetheless, the sociology of International Relations gains more relevance than the political geographic or economic territoriality of the term Global South.

Experience at the International Studies Association's (ISA) Global South Caucus Executive Committee and in other ISA Sections, besides having written a Dissertation on the sociology of International Relations (IR) in Brazil providing then 'rationalism is exile' as a resulting grounded theory based on the country's intellectuals' contributions to the field's theories, it is inevitable to adventure into the social structure of IR as a discipline, instead of going after how its

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object is defined. Rationalism in exile is the epistemology underlying Brazil's first-generation IR intellectuals' contribution to IRT. It derives from the rationalism intrinsic to a national-developmental paradigm, one that denounces its own marginalization from the mainstream debate besides praising its own singular validity, hence its condition of exile, as in Said's reflections.

The reason I named a Brazilian contribution to IRT rationalism in exile, rather than a *peripheral* rationalism is that, even though developmentalism is part of the paradigm underpinning Brazil's IR's first generation's thinking, they go beyond political economic considerations. The most cited and most read authors within the first generation of Brazilian IR – Amado Luiz Cervo, Helio Jaguaribe, José Flávio Sombra Saraiva, and Maria Regina Soares de Lima – actually explore, for instance, State and International System ontologies that go further than a simple political economic view whilst promoting their version with a singular intensity aiming to achieve pervasiveness among all possible analyses of an actually true, representative reality. Consequently, the Global South is not merely a geographic or a philosophical product of world-system theories. Actually, in the case of Brazil, these world-system theories and dependency theory rarely appear among the articles published in the two best rated academic publications in the country's IR – Contexto Internacional (CINT), and Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional (RBPI).

Furthermore, even though rationalism in exile itself derives from a paradigm who is partially political economic – the developmentalist bit of national developmentalism –, it does, besides development and autonomy, grapple with philosophical questions over sovereignty, security, war and peace, and other central ontologies to IRT. Hence, it is not simply the poor looking into the division of labor and devoid of academic wealth, but exiled IR intellectuals with a peculiar nationalist viewpoint, inspired in Helio Jaguaribe's writings, looking at the same and/or different objects from marginalized positions of power and perspectives within the scientific community.

As in the case of Brazil, when the Global South goes about constructing their thought, they portray their dissatisfaction with an intellectual division of labor in the world, with the mainstream disqualification of their epistemologies and methodologies. Also, they are particularly intense in rebuking their own marginalization, quite frequently even discarding any participation in mainstream social networks – be them academic journals or conferences. Moreover, disqualifying mainstream lines of thought, the Global South praises their own as the only and the most fitting pathways to understand not only their own reality, but most likely that of others who share similar experiences. Never has nor will anyone come up with better explanations for the actual reality than every single national or regional strand of thought from the Global South.

This combination of excoriation and exceptionalism is what Said understands as the condition of exile. By denouncing their marginalization, those in exile would 'lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity – to deny an identity to people'. By proclaiming their thoughts as the best ones to approach reality, those in exile would legitimize a condition 'designed to reassemble an exile's broken history into a new whole', defending their choice not to conform to the mainstream.

Not by chance, Acharya warns against a common trend of exceptionalism in thoughts produced in national schools outside of the social and theoretical IR clique. Exceptionalism is a common trait in most theoretical thoughts stemming from the Global South. And, since their authors are exiles, when we acknowledge Said's interpretation of the thoughts produced by those in exile, we understand it is only natural. Acharya's warning, however, is not misplaced. It intends to avoid further parochialism in the discipline.

Said is also concerned with the nationalism intrinsic to the exiled thought: 'How, then, does one surmount the loneliness of exile without falling into the encompassing and thumping language of national pride, collective sentiments, group passions?' Since Acharya seeks to galvanize support for a Global IR, he suggests for an actual Global IR to take shape, authors around the world ought to focus on building, not burning bridges. Alongside with a recurrent denounce of their own social marginalization, it is, however, the exile and hence the exceptionality component of these Global Southern contributions to IRT that would form such a bridge.

As for the content of these exiled thoughts, while Acharya is concerned with exceptionalism, Bilgin (2016) draws

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attention to the similarities they may share with the mainstream. Bilgin invites the hypothesis that, in relation to the mainstream, Global Southern thoughts might be almost the same, but not quite. Bilgin refers to Bhabha's mechanism of mimicry among especially the colonies' elites, meanwhile borrowing Said's 'contrapuntal reading' as a useful metaphor for a Global IR capable of bridging the gap between knowledge produced by the mainstream and by *others*: 'Said's approach to contrapuntal reading offers students of IR a method of studying world politics through focusing on 'connectedness,' on intertwined experiences, past and present'. The study of IRT would then turn into an effort of 'contrapuntal awareness, (...) belonging to multiple worlds not only in terms of cultural identity but also academic field'. 'Such 'eccentricity', argues Bilgin, allows the exile not only 'the negative advantage of refuge,' wrote Said, but also 'the positive benefit of challenging the system, describing it in language unavailable to those it has already subdued' (Said 1993: 334)'.

For Said, exile hinges an involuntary state of mind. However, since he constantly borrows from Freud, the involuntary is but a condition. Thus, the Global South is not anywhere specific, neither any specific race, ethnicity, gender or epistemology, but everyone who is a marginalized thinker denouncing their condition while yielding more feasible thoughts. A thinker whose values and ideas, and even language domain, do not conform with those more frequently published in the most read and most cited academic journals. It is not that gender, race, institutional affiliation and other identities do not matter. The point is: they do matter since they all speak the same language, one that cannot escape denouncing their own marginalization and developing the best possible explanation for a reality that actually matters. Therefore, be them a positivist, a rationalist or a reflexivist, the Global South is whomever is in exile.

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