

Review of Raewyn Connell, *Confronting Equality: Gender, Knowledge and Global Change*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011, pp. 190.

On the international stage Raewyn Connell is Australia's best-known social scientist. This collection of loosely linked essays tells us why. Connell combines fine-grained empirical research on class, gender and organisational life with acute political observations and persuasive theory-building. The persuasiveness is in part because of the ease and lucidity of writing style, well-attuned to the aspiration of reconnecting social research to social change. Bringing imagination into dialogue with current reality is how Connell puts it, meaning that careful observation can open up rather than closing off alternative possibilities.

In recent years Connell has exercised global influence in developing the new field of comparative study of masculinities. This work has contributed to United Nations strategies to promote gender equality, having immediate application in areas such as gender-based violence or the more equal sharing of caring responsibilities. But she also recognises the contradictory effects of neoliberal individualism: on the one hand, encouraging the emergence of new masculinities, on the other, increasing performance pressures that cut across men's greater involvement in caring work.

The book as a whole is intended to illustrate social science at work. It includes chapters (previously published as journal articles) on gender equity in public sector organisations, school education and intellectual labour, all drawing on Australian fieldwork. It also has chapters with a more international focus, dealing with the history of sociology and the significance of colonial relations (the colonial gaze on the colonised) within that history. There are also chapters on men's role in gender equality initiatives and the effects of neoliberalism on family life.

Connell grapples with the pervasive effects of neoliberalism: the universal commodification of services; the transformation of organisational cultures by regimes of individualised performance management; and the penetration of marketing messages into every form of communication from the Internet to the classroom. She sees the strongest challenge to neoliberalism as having emerged from Latin America. This segues into one of the main messages, that the metropole must take more notice of southern theory and social movements.

In Australia, as in other parts of the global south, intellectual life has been fixated on the metropole, addressing research findings to the global north. Globalisation has come to mean dominance of the market perspectives of the global north rather than true globalisation, which would mean incorporating perspectives from the periphery or global south. In line with this argument, Connell calls for more globalisation of intellectual life rather than less: seeking an awareness, for example, of the dependence of higher education on ‘the Malaysian workers who generate the profits to pay university fees for their employers’ children’ (p. 163).

In general, apart from the inspiration sought from non-metropolitan movements of resistance these essays are a depressing if nuanced picture of today’s world and the choices and lack of choice it presents. New political forms such as blogging and web-based organising are noted briefly, but not explored in terms of the possibilities they present. Neither class-based politics nor the social movements of the 1960s have achieved the kinds of transformations they sought. Connell is one of those trying to bring sociology back to a role in democratic reform. We can only join in trusting that ‘otro mundo es posible’.

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