

## *Conversations/Interviews*



# **Youth in the Global South, Southern Theory and Global Youth Studies: Howard Williamson in Conversation with the Editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies***

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## The Origins of the Handbook and Why It Is Needed

**Howard Williamson (HW):** It is a privilege for a white man from the Global North to be taking responsibility to interrogate all of you about why you produced this impressive volume of work. This is an opportunity for you to tell the readership of *Youth and Globalisation* what it's all about, and what core conceptual and other points lie within it. Right now, in Europe, we are facing the Ukraine crisis and perhaps are experiencing something more familiar to people in the Global South – precarity, displacement and conflict. It's a shock for those of us who've largely lived in peace in Europe since 1945. This is a time when we need to think about shared experiences across the globe, as well as the things that disunite us. So Sharlene, where did the idea for the Handbook come from, and why?

**Sharlene Swartz (SS):** It began with my involvement in the International Sociological Association (ISA) – my first real encounter with scholars from the Global South. It meant that, for the first time, there was a critical mass of people who could contribute towards a project we've been talking about for the past 10 years. When Ani Wierenga, the past president of RC34 (Sociology of Youth) in ISA put me in touch with the Oxford University Press (OUP) – who were really excited about the project – it was easy to begin. In addition, Adam Cooper and I had been having these discussions over many years – lamenting current handbooks on youth studies which speak of “youth in general” when they mean “youth from the Global North”. In 2018, Adam, another colleague, and I wrote a paper for the *Journal of Youth Studies* analysing existing handbooks on youth studies and making an argument for scholarly work from the Global South, by Southern scholars, that foregrounded the experiences of young people in the Global South. Furthermore, we felt this work should not be just about the empirical reality of young people's lives and that as Southern scholars, we should do some heavy hitting and theorise the data we had collected. A mining metaphor is helpful here. The Global South collects data, which the Global North then mines and turns into theory – much like the claim that the colonised mined precious materials from the ground, which were then sold to the colonizers for a pittance, who in turn made a fortune from beneficiating these. In the same way we wanted to beneficiate our own data into useable, relevant theory – first of use to the Global South, but also beneficial for those living in contexts like ours – complete with conflict, poverty and many coping mechanisms for dealing with hardships and crises. In the same way we wanted to beneficiate our own data into useable, relevant theory for people living in contexts like ours, who deal with conflict and poverty and have developed coping mechanisms for dealing with hardship and crises. That's the genesis of the

Handbook in a nutshell. Once we had received positive feedback from OUP, we began looking for two further editors to help – Latin America and Asia seemed good places to start. We invited Clarence to join us and another colleague from RC34, who later withdrew due to ill-health. Laura had been making a fantastic contribution with her own chapter, and by reviewing Spanish contributions, so we invited her to join us.

**Laura Kropff Causa (LKC):** I was surprised to receive the invitation to participate in this book. I sent a proposal and then they began asking me for help with the Spanish manuscripts – first to see if they were suitable for the Handbook, and afterwards to edit whatever was going to be included. And then they generously asked me to “come on board, as you are also a co-editor of this book”, and I am grateful for that. Everything was new for me because, although I attended youth studies conferences within Latin America, I never participated in global meetings, making this a great experience. Most of the communication problems with Spanish speaking scholars come from the fact that we write, publish, and discuss in Spanish. This is mainly because we want to influence policy makers and have every-day discussions with activists. We want them to read us because we aim to change things in our countries. This is reflected in this Handbook. We are thinking theoretically because we want to change conditions in the countries where we live. We are not talking about others, we are talking about ourselves. This creates a problem in translation because global audiences are not our main audience. We have to break the language barrier if we want to really speak about the Global South – and not only the English-speaking Global South. We need to engage in translation at least to all colonial languages (Spanish, Portuguese, French and others) because the Global South is greatly influenced by the colonial system. Translation is the way to reach people who are thinking about youth because they want to influence what’s going on in their own countries.

### What or Where is the Global South and Why Does it Matter?

**HW:** I am curious about the distinction between the Global North and the Global South because we know there are many pockets of typically Global Southern experiences for young people within the North, and there are some more wealthy parts of the Global South. It’s not a simple dividing line across the globe.

**Adam Cooper (AC):** Yes, I think it’s a paradox we’ve grappled with throughout this project. In earlier discussions, we got a lot of pushback saying “you

can't divide the world into a simple binary between North and South." The difficulty is that there clearly are material differences in contexts across the world. So how do we find concepts that are able to portray those differences while remaining conscious that a simple North-South binary is problematic? In chapter two of the Handbook I describe this paradox historically, tracing systems that created inequalities globally – colonialism, global capitalism, and knowledge flows. These changed in the second half of the 20th century, leading to the concept of the Global South. After 1950, large portions of Africa and Asia joined South America and Latin America in being decolonised and new collaborations emerged with people saying "we now have greater political agency, our experiences need to be recognised." At the same time regions that were decolonised became new frontiers for global capitalism, with cheaper, less regulated labour. Equally, we encounter increasingly popular theories like decoloniality, postcolonial theory, and subaltern studies, which change the narrative of modernity by foregrounding its constitutive inequalities. So political, economic and epistemological changes occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, giving rise to the idea of the Global South. While there are pockets of the South in the North and vice versa, it is not a simple binary. The concept of the Global South challenges us to understand these inequalities and differences historically to make sense of these paradoxes.

**HW:** In putting together the Handbook with an impressive array of writers, did you have arguments about the conceptual distinction between the Global North and the Global South? Were there outliers who disputed your interpretations, or did you find consensus?

**SS:** In my view, almost everybody who contributed had an implicit understanding of who, what and where the Global South was. I think the problem was in the reviewers who often asked "Who, what, and where is the Global South?" So, we decided quite early on that the Handbook was going to comprise three sections. The five chapters in the first section are ground clearing: Who are youth? What is youth studies? Where is the Global South? What is Southern Theory? Why does it matter? What is epistepaxis?

**AC:** Just to add, we still get a lot of pushback from people in the Global North. I think there is a bit of defensiveness in that we could make people's research less relevant and important by creating these distinctions. Sharlene and I are still learning how to be provocative in a way that gets people thinking and questioning, rather than pushing them away.

**HW:** That's almost inevitable and "provocation" is the key word. I'll bring Clarence in here because he has always been provocative in his styles of presentation. It was no different with the Handbook and your contribution to its launch. Why did you do that?

**Clarence Batan (CB):** Well, the interesting thing is that we have an Internet connectivity problem here in the Philippines. Given this limitation, we devised creative ways to attend conferences virtually. To capture our arguments clearly, we chose to record our 5–10-minute presentation and asked the organizer to download a copy so that the presentation could proceed as scheduled even if the Internet fails on our end. This seems to have evolved into our default conference practice in response to the technological limitations in our country. I guess this really reflects our marginality and those situations which are beyond our control and we have to devise creative ways to make our voices heard.

**HW:** Okay, thanks Clarence. I think what you've done is to offer new methods of communicating your thinking. It occurs to me that Asian youth studies has been enabled and facilitated a lot by the Australians. Similarly, African youth studies has been helped and facilitated by the Global North population of South Africa – "lighter skinned people" as Adam put it. My first encounter with Sharlene was to 'have a go' at a white woman who was doing research on black youth in the townships. I've been trying to do my penance to her ever since because I got her motivation and indeed her morality completely wrong, and only later discovered her most magnificent study of the moral ecology of South African township youth. Latin America is rather different Laura, so I wanted to come to you. Given the strong tradition of youth studies in Latin America (even if in Spanish), and having made connections with colleagues on the African continent and the Asian continent, what are the similar challenges you've observed? And, beyond language, what differences separates these contexts?

**LKC:** Well, everything we get to read (from Asians and Africans) comes through the North Americans. The United States publishing industry is what gets things from other Southern countries to us because we are in those circuits of distribution and that's our main source. "Latin America is the backyard of the United States" is a popular way to refer to this geopolitical relation that we struggle with. So, almost everything comes to us through them, despite the efforts we ourselves make to stay in touch with other Southern countries. That's how I got to know the work of Achille Mbembe and Alcinda Honwana, for example. I read

it in books that were either published or distributed in the United States. And we are always late to those discussions because we need them to be translated into Spanish in order to exchange ideas with other people here. We are 10 years late to the debates people in Africa are having, and I think they are 10 years late to our debates. The knowledge other people are producing needs to be translated to English, first, and then – if we are lucky – it gets translated into our languages. This mechanism pre-selects what we read and it takes time. So, we have to think of a strategy that keeps us more connected in the present time.

### The Concepts that Framed the Handbook

**HW:** One of the things you've done in the Handbook is explore a range of issues through key concepts. One of the points that really gripped me is this notion of 'precarity' that has cropped up in Europe relatively recently regarding the lack of labour market stability for young people. And the point is that in Africa we're talking about 90% or more of young people in circumstances that, in Europe, would be considered precarious. So, it's a completely different context for young people – just in relation to employment. Do you feel the conceptual framework that guided decisions about content resulted in anything you feel is now missing, having published the final product? And are there things you think are more paramount within that conceptual list?

**SS:** I suppose the big issue for us was trying to make sure people wrote theoretically based pieces rather than empirically based ones. For sure, we said, "Please would you illustrate your theoretical concept with empirical work", but that was quite hard because people's first instinct was to write an empirical account of youth in their context. So, by choosing those concepts, we were trying to force people to move from the empirical to the theoretical. Now, I think there certainly could have been more than the ten concepts described in the Handbook. We received over 300 abstracts for essays for the Handbook from which we finally selected 40, which we thought could illustrate these concepts. My vision was that some of these concepts would be distinctly from the South. However, almost everything that we came up with as a concept, somebody from the North had written about in a different way: precarity, navigational capacities, ontological insecurity, consciousness. People have written about it before, but we thought we could bring a specific interpretation, application, and theorisation about it. I do think we need to expand it and we also need more essays on these concepts from distinctly Southern points of view. You mentioned the issue of precarity. When we were talking about precarity, a lot

of the authors were saying, “We’ve got people in our contexts who’ve written about precarity before Guy Standing.”<sup>1</sup> But in the end, we didn’t get that article in the book. We’d really like to introduce topics from Southern thinkers who predated some of the Northern theorists because I think the Northern theorists have now shaped our understanding of the concept. We want to go back and look at people like José Rizal, for example, who actually writes about “waithood” in a way that helps us rethink it. Rizal predated Frantz Fanon by 70 years – and Frantz Fanon is a Southern theorist for sure – but we’ve even got a longer history of intellectuals theorising the conditions of the Global South and young people in the Global South. I’m very excited about putting this in front of audiences both in the Global North and South. Global South scholars, in my opinion, need to gain confidence and need to draw on these long traditions and write about them because this is missing. That’s the deficit. We haven’t got enough written about some of the things that we know influence our lives and the contexts of young people in the Global South.

**HW:** Thank you Sharlene. I was going to come onto José Rizal.<sup>2</sup> I mean, it’s not just about digging deeper into the historical writing. One could do that within the Global North. I was just thinking as you spoke about the power of Howard Becker’s 1963 “Labelling” theory. Henry Mayhew was writing about that in the 19th century in “London Labour and the London Poor” (1851) but he didn’t call it “Labelling” theory. He talked about giving a dog a bad name! So, it’s both about re-wording some of these things and then thinking about their meaning in different places. Anyway, can you tell us, Clarence, more about Sharlene’s segue into José Rizal? I’m obviously familiar with your work on the *istambays* and I have looked at your contribution to the Handbook, but please tell us more.

**CB:** It was my first-time using José Rizal for thinking about the *istambay* phenomenon in the Philippines in contrast to my first theoretical framing in my dissertation using ideas from Mills and Bourdieu. I utilized these Northern scholars as I was more familiar with them given that Sociology was a colonial implant in the Philippines, and I completed my graduate studies in Canada. While the *istambay* phenomenon speaks closely to the issues of precarious employment in a post-colonial Philippines, my entire sociological training subscribes to books and materials from Northern knowledge sources. I guess

1 Standing, G. (2011), *The Precariat: The new dangerous class*, London: Bloomsbury.

2 José Protasio Rizal Mercado y Alonso Realonda (1861–1896) lived towards the end of the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines. Clarence Batan anchors his analysis in Chapter 11 of the Handbook in Rizal’s colonial theory.

the breaking point was the persistent nudge of the Handbook, really – from Sharlene and Adam – to think theoretically. This led me to seriously consider the works of Jose Rizal, who not only provided insights about why Filipinos were charged with being “indolent” by the colonizers, but also articulated a convincing theory about the colonial Philippines as first recognized by Hussein and Syed Alatas in their writings.

Discovering our very own Rizal struck me. You see, our educational system is deeply American along with our political and justice system. After 330 years of Spanish rule, the Philippines was not freed but instead became entrenched in another form of colonialisation by the Americans. Thus, in the last century, I would argue that everything we know is really a product of ‘thinking like Americans’, even in the social sciences. We recognised José Rizal as a national hero in the early 1900s, but his writings were only legally introduced as part of our educational system in the 1960s. But was his writing introduced as a source of social science knowledge? No! The social sciences, specifically Sociology, taught to us was Global North in orientation.

I decided to look back and reflect on who José Rizal was and examine closely the sociological value of his works. That process let me discover and admit my misrecognition of the value of his work relative to my *istambay* research. After doing a content analysis of his work, I realized that Rizal already hinted at the indolence of Filipinos akin to the *istambay*, “waithood”, “transition crisis”, and “precarity” notions youth scholars are currently arguing about. Such a discovery was revolutionary for me, not because of its novelty but due to its theoretical powers to unravel the *istambay* phenomenon in the context of our very own colonial histories. Examining Rizal’s work has the sociological potential to unravel ideas about the colonial Philippines and its relevance to our contemporary lives. His concept of ‘youth’ and exploring the crises inherent in growing up in colonial times have immense potential. The Handbook thus allowed me to introduce Rizal to youth studies, which I hope will allow the theoretical application of his ideas in issues relative to youth, education, and employment.

### The Term ‘Epistepaxis’

**HW:** The time has come for ‘Epistepaxis’. I think Laura has already articulated what she feels it is, and what she and her colleagues have been doing in Latin America for some time. Who wants to tell the readership of YOGO what it is?



AC: The term comes out of thinking together and this has very much been a project of thinking with people across different spaces. In looking at some of the terms that are core to the Handbook: notions like “hustling”, “being on standby”, and “navigational capacities”, you notice two things with these terms. One, they are practices that describe how people try to survive while contesting a set of circumstances. But they also imply a way of knowing in the world. The term Epistep Praxis goes to the next level and says “How do we as researchers engage with young people such that our knowledge production is also a practice that is making a difference in the world.” It is a research practice that uses knowledge to change the world. There is a wonderful article by Michael Burawoy (the sociologist), describing Eddie Webster (the South African sociologist), called “the Webster Windmill”.<sup>3</sup> Burawoy says, “Eddie’s with the workers union in the morning doing an interview on TV and then he’s engaging with this NGO there, and then he’s teaching a class on Marx in the afternoon at the university.” And Burawoy adds that professional sociology in the US has become very rigid. In terms of what you do as a sociologist, you’re the tenured professor who teaches and publishes in peer-reviewed journals. This is obviously a caricature because there are many academics in Europe and America who are activists. However, even that term, “activist” is often approached in binary fashion. People ask “Are you an academic or an activist?” I think it’s hard in our contexts to not be what people in the Global North call “an activist”. For example, I’ve spent the last 10 years (I’ve just moved) living opposite an abandoned hospital occupied by 1500 people who don’t have alternative housing.

What does it mean to be politically engaged in that kind of context? Can you go to the university and teach about social justice but do nothing living amongst widespread poverty and homelessness? Your research practices need to become aligned with visions for social change. We are forced to take a stand because of the inequalities and some of the injustices. So, your professional work must be political in some ways, but we don’t often even see it in those terms. Whereas I think in other parts of the world it’s easier to remain a professional in a different way. As such, the term “Epistep Praxis,” is about our practices and our political engagements being embedded in the kind of scholarship and academic work that we do, without seeing that as somehow corrupt or problematic, as some colleagues have intimated. Working in a state funded research institution, we’re aware of the imperative for evidence-based practice and remaining objective. Nonetheless, it’s hard in our context not to be committed to our work of contributing towards social change.

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3 Burawoy, M. (2010), Southern windmill: The life and work of Edward Webster. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 72(1), pp. 1–25.

**HW:** Before the others jump in, I think you've come up with a fancier word, but mine was always "public sociology" – a commitment to engage with political and policy debates, especially – in my case – on questions to do with youth social inclusion. I remember having a long debate with Paul Willis in the 1980s about our moral responsibility, particularly around studying social exclusion, to engage with how we supported more inclusive practices that were neither exploitative nor judgmental of young people. While Paul had a very different view from me, I remember saying "We both have our different lines in the sand about influencing policy". Neither of us had a line in the sand that was at the top of the ivory tower.

**AC:** Howard, I think that's just the point. My point might be mischaracterised as condescending to Northern scholars, implying that they are not politically engaged. However, my core submission is that in the South we have less of a choice about engaging with issues of social justice.

**LKC:** It's very difficult to even think about the metaphor of the ivory tower when you're teaching in a university that is occupied by people fighting for something. There is no boundary between us – scholars – and the rest of the world. We belong to that. So, there is no way to be impartial. Impartiality is a political option: you decide politically to force yourself out of something that you belong to. Mostly, when people choose to be impartial, they are choosing the side of the powerful, because impartiality is a claim that only people in power can sustain. When you are fighting for rights that need to be acknowledged, then you are partial. When you are standing over privileges that you know are unquestioned, then you are impartial.

**SS:** 'Public sociology' almost feels like there is no struggle involved. I think in the Global South, the term that I loved was "Liberation Sociology" – Joe Feagin's book of the 70's. Equally in Latin America, I grew up reading about "Liberation Theology" and certainly "Black Consciousness" in South Africa. All of these were political movements that then had an academic element to them. What Epistepaxis articulates is a dissatisfaction with Epistemicide, where our knowledge doesn't count. We want to take our knowledges and turn them into something that will be helpful and useful to the world and to young people in particular.

**HW:** Everything the three of you have said is really powerful, so thank you all.

### The Message of the *Southern Charter for Global Youth Studies* to Northern and Southern Scholars

**HW:** Sharlene, you finish off the Handbook with 14 chartist statements designed to take control and responsibility for one's thinking. I'm sure you can summarise it better than me.

**SS:** Yes, it came from the South Commission, which was led by Julius Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania during the 1980's. For me, and for us, it was really this thinking around 'so what are we charging scholars from the South with and what are we charging scholars from the North with?' And that was really the aim around this Charter because I think there is something for both of us to do separately and then together. So, the first set of ideas in the Charter was around solidarity between scholars in the Global South; let's get to know each other's contexts; let's get to talk to each other and build each other's confidence; and let's be dependent on ourselves in trying to bring about knowledge, Epistepaxis, and making sure that it's globally known. One of the things that we seem to do is bemoan the fact that Southern writing is never taken up globally. Instead of just complaining about it, let's take responsibility for developing our own strengths. And I suppose this was also informed by Steve Biko's idea of Black Consciousness. Before we try to deal with racism from without, let's talk together about what is it that we want rather than just accepting what anti-racism offers to us. That's a similar metaphor. The next piece in the Charter is about moving from subordination to interdependence. So, we don't want to remain alone as Global South scholars forever, because what we want to put into scholarship on youth studies is something that will benefit both the Global North and South. For us to come to the table, we really need to strengthen ourselves. And so, the Charter says a few things about this. For example, we need to have a little bit of affirmative action when it comes to advanced institute studies; making sure there's money for Southern scholars to have sabbaticals; making sure that we find ways to publish our work – not just in parochial journals, but in global journals, because we want to work towards interdependence with the Global North. And certainly, in the review process and in the process of the Handbook, that interdependence did happen. We were supported by Global North scholars who didn't try to take over – and that was very important. And that is part of what the Charter is saying. We also want to take responsibility because most of the young people who are suffering and struggling are in the Global South. And we want to take responsibility for the change, and when a meeting, a conference, or a journal is dominated by the North, we are not going to remove ourselves. We are going to challenge

this domination. The responsibility for change rests with those from the Global South. And finally, we really believe in the global relevance of what we have to say. Ultimately, we seek this undivided world where there would be no South and no North, but we are not there yet, and we need to take our place as equals. And so the charge to Global North scholars is please carry on doing your work, but don't call it 'global youth studies', call it 'Northern youth studies'. And we'll call our work 'Southern youth studies' until one day we can find the ways in which our work intersects/overlaps and then call it 'global youth studies'. The Handbook is called the *Handbook of Global South Youth Studies* for now, but in the future, we hope there will be a project called the Handbook of Global Youth Studies. This is why the Charter ends with the statement: "Southern scholars need to speak out and insist on the space to speak out. They need to speak back while remaining ethically and theoretically grounded in their own cultures and knowledges. And they need to speak up rooted in emancipatory methodologies and ontologies and they must never be spoken for. And if they are spoken for, they must be the ones to object and to offer alternatives."

### Hopes for the Handbook

**HW:** By any standard, this Handbook is a phenomenally impressive labour of love and commitment at every kind of level. It will be something that I will be talking about in many different places. But *you've* put it together; *you've* edited it; *you* spent a lot of long nights sorting things out – especially Laura having to work through all the Spanish contributions.

What do *you* hope it will achieve?

**CB:** My hope is for some of these articles to be translated into other languages. As language is key in promoting knowledge, the concepts introduced in this Handbook would be appreciated if read in local languages. The second one is my issue about access. I hope that – while we have a special discount for Southern scholars offered by Oxford University Press – more local universities and colleges in the Global South will have access to these articles so that the Handbook can be used in teaching various courses. I believe that access to our Handbook is key to knowing and understanding the issues and challenges of doing Global South youth studies. My third hope is seeing how our Handbook may be used as a credible material in the writing of theses and dissertations of emerging youth scholars across the world.

**HW:** Laura, beyond the thumbs up of translation, what are your hopes for the Handbook?

**LKC:** I think that is my first hope also. Without our work in translation, really, people in Latin America are not going to be able to access it. That's a fact! Without that, it's really very difficult to share this discussion deeply among Latin American scholars. Furthermore, in order to share it with policy makers and activists we also have to do a translation within Spanish. Therefore, this translation work has multiple levels.

**AC:** Laura and Clarence raise important issues we need to think about as a group – issues of translation, there is such a rich possibility for collaborative work, for us to engage with places in Asia and certainly Latin America. I'm really fascinated by the shared similarities of our respective contexts and interested in the possibilities for enlarging this discussion so that we can engage with people there about these concepts. Translation is the first step towards a more in-depth dialogue and discussion. My next hope is in relation to people working at the centre of the youth studies field in the Global North, who use concepts like precarity. If we can influence people to see that a concept like precarity is all relative to context and get people to rethink the concepts they're using based on our relative places in the world, we can then work together towards developing ideas, concepts, practices, and ways of being in the world that shed light on the human experience. As Sharlene said, it's about connecting with people with both similar and different experiences to ours.

**HW:** I think these issues of translation and interpretation, access, inspiration, communication, connectivity, collaboration – it's almost another charter, really. It's a different kind of charter, one that is both theoretically deeper and politically impactful. I think that the Handbook, beyond its internal intentions, has a broader potential to influence the nature of academic life beyond youth studies and across the world.

### Some of the Struggles for Scholars in and of the Global South

**SS:** Howard, I just want to make one final point. The Handbook was difficult to produce. It didn't take us too long, and I know that other handbooks have taken us much longer than three years, but it was the circumstances of scholars

in the Global South that I think was excruciating for all of us. It was the calamity upon calamity they experienced and yet they produced the chapters that they did. It was the amount of collaboration it took to get to the Handbook that we have between people. I mean, it's not embarrassing for me to say, but there was a lot of handholding. But it's what we've all experienced at some point in our career. And I think that issue about finding the space, time, will, and partners to make this happen is absolutely critical. It was important for us that we produced a piece of high-quality work, so that it doesn't become something that is looked down upon by Global North scholars. I don't know if I have another handbook in me though, it's that much work. But I think there must be another handbook. Whether the next handbook is the Handbook of Global Youth Studies, I'm not sure. What I really want is a handbook filled with José Rizal kinds of contributions from around the Global South and around the world.

**HW:** I was going to say we would need a bit more Rizal and a bit less Bourdieu perhaps. A deeply felt *gracias* for putting all this together and putting in that huge amount of work.