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Thinking against empire: Anticolonial thought as social theory

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Abstract

Sociology was born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a project in, of, and for empire. This essay excavates a tradition of social thought that grew alongside metropolitan sociology but has been marginalized by it: anticolonial thought. Emerging from anticolonial movements, writers and thinkers, anticolonial thought in 19th and 20th centuries emerged from a variety of thinkers (from indigenous activists in the Americas to educated elites in the American, Francophone and British colonies). I argue that this body of thought offers distinct visions of society, social relations, and social structure, along with generative analytic approaches to the social self, social solidarity and global relations—among other themes. Anticolonial thought offers the basis for an alternative canon and corpus of sociological thinking to which we might turn as we seek to revitalize and decolonize sociology.

KEYWORDS
anticolonial thought, empire, imperialism, postcolonial theory, social theory

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth century, around 1899, a man named Apolinario Mabini wrote this about society: "Society is association of men who are together for mutual help, so that each could enjoy the highest possible well-being; a situation that can never be arrived at by the sole efforts of individuals without the aid of others. [...] A man cannot

live alone; he alone cannot build his house, weave his clothes and produce the food and other items he needs'' (Mabini, 1931: II, 22, 68). This definition might appear banal enough, but two things are notable about it. First, Mabini tried to define and theorize "society" at a time when many others in Europe and the United States were doing the same thing. This was written around 1899, six years after the Department of Sociology was established at the University of Chicago and the first doctorate in sociology in the U.S. was awarded at Cornell. This was also around the time that the *American Journal of Sociology* and Emile Durkheim's journal *L'Annee Sociologique* had been created. It was 1 year after the London School of Economics was founded and 1 year after Franklin Gidding's (1898) founding sociological text *Elements of Sociology* was published. It was also 1 year after Gabriel Tarde's (1898) seminal work *Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology* was translated and published in English.

Second, Mabini was not associated with any of these American, British or European developments. Instead, Mabini was writing in the Philippines. The passage comes from a larger series of essays later published as *La Revolución Filipina* (Mabini, 1931). Mabini was a member of the revolutionary government established in the town of Malolos that had declared the Philippines to be an independent republic. The Malolos government had led a revolt against Spanish colonial rule and, in 1899, it was fighting the American troops seeking to establish U.S. sovereignty over the Philippine archipelago. Mabini is known as the "brains" of that revolution. He helped create the new government and write its new constitution. In short, Mabini was an anticolonial activist and thinker, striving to create a new nation under threat of extinction by the U.S.—one of the very countries where disciplinary sociology was emerging at the time.

What interests me here, therefore, is not whether Mabini's conceptualization of society is radically new or different from European conceptions. What interests me instead is that he *had* a concept of society; that Mabini was thinking about the social and writing about it amidst anticolonial revolution. Just as Chicago school sociologists were creating their sociological program while their fellow countrymen were invading the Philippines, and just as Durkheim and other European sociologists were creating new seminal journals, Mabini was thinking about and theorizing society. And he was not theorizing society because he wanted to have an article accepted in the *British Journal of Sociology* or the *American Journal of Sociology*. He was thinking and writing about society because he wanted to theorize why a society should revolt against colonial rulers; and he wanted to know something about society so that he could better create a postcolonial government for that society.

Mabini is useful because he stages the present essay. This essay is not about Mabini specifically but more broadly, anticolonial thought and social theory. To be more specific, this essay is about anticolonial thought *as* social thought. I suggest that Mabini was part of a larger tradition of social thought spanning the colonized world and beyond in the 19th and twentieth century centuries. I contend that this was a rich body of writing and thinking about society that should be recovered and appreciated today, even as dominant metropolitan sociology has largely excluded this body of thinking on the grounds that it is not 'really' sociology.

Understanding my intervention first requires some history and, in particular, the history of sociology. After reviewing this history, I will introduce the body of writing and thought I call "anticolonial," clarifying some of its parameters and key thinkers. I will then dive into particular ideas about society and related themes that this body of thought offers. I will conclude with some clarifying points while drawing distinctions between this project and other adjacent ones that have also sought to globalize social theory and sociology. I claim that the project to recover anticolonial thought can be seen as part of but also distinct from these other ongoing projects.

2 | FROM IMPERIAL SOCIOLOGY TO ANTICOLONIAL THOUGHT

When we learn about the history of sociology one of the stories that is told is this: sociology was founded in Britain, the US and Europe as a response to industrialization and its problems. But for understanding my intervention, we need to recognize a different history—a history that situates sociology less within the context of industrialization and more within the history of imperialism (Connell, 1997). Social scientists today operate within a framework of imperial

thought; not imperial because social science is inherently "racist" (though some may rightly claim so) but rather because of its history and legacies. As I discuss in other work, disciplinary sociology as we know it today, and indeed social science more broadly, was born in, of and for empire (Go, 2013c; Go, 2016b, pp. 1–14; 66–101; Go, 2020). The very notion of the "social"—as a space between nature and the spiritual realm—that emerged in European thought was generated in the 19th century and resonated among European male elites who were trying to make sense of manage social upheaval, resistance and revolt from workers, women, and colonized natives (e.g., Borch, 2012). In the United States, one of the first books with the word "sociology" in the title was published in 1854 by George Fitzhugh. It was called, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* and it deployed the social concept to vindicate the slave system in the American South (Fitzhugh, 1854; see also Morris, 2022, pp. 6–9).

In the late 19 and early 20th centuries, as the social science disciplines were institutionalized, social thought became further tethered to empire. This was a time when empires themselves were expanding or consolidating. And as Connell (1997) points out, early sociology reflected the interests of this new imperial formation, manifesting the worldview of white male elites in the rising metropolitan centers of empire. This means that the questions that were asked by sociology in the early 20th century reflected the concerns and categories of these elites and imperial power broadly. Assimilation theory in the early 20th century reflected the concern of white elites fretting about the incoming nonwhite hordes (Jung, 2009). Inscribed in the early theorizations of "social order" were imperial anxieties about resistance from subaltern peoples, embedding the horrors of elites desperately attempting to maintain the racial status quo (read: "social order"). Anxieties about social disorder; sociology's attachment to Social Darwinism; its focus upon the so-called "Negro problem" in the US; Weber and Durkheim's Orientalist and essentialist lenses for discussing other cultures—in all of these respects and more, sociology reflected the questions of interest to imperial centers and embedded the worldview of those metropoles, thus expressing what I have called elsewhere the *imperial standpoint* (Go, 2016b, p. 75).

Today sociology is different. But many aspects of sociology still carry the imprint of its imperial history. This is seen in sociology's persistent essentialism, its analytic bifurcations, its metrocentrism and other operations. It is also seen in the objects of sociology's theorizing, which still includes issues like "assimilation" and "social order." It is reflected our epistemology and methods which often universalize from European experiences or distinct "model cases" taken from Europe (Krause, 2021). This is a longer story that I have discussed elsewhere (Go, 2016b, pp. 75–101). Suffice to say here that the structure of the imperial episteme persists in diverse parts of metropolitan sociological thinking and that this structure must be recognized as a legacy of sociology's imperial history.

But other histories of social thought can be sketched. One is the history of anticolonial thought; a history that begins not with empire but with resistance to it. To be sure, the spread of the British, European and American empires was contested, challenged and rebuked. Just as empires consolidated around the world, and as imperial sociology was being institutionalized, colonized peoples everywhere responded through various forms of resistance. This included nationalist movements seeking reform, eventual independence or full integration into the metropole as equal territories (Go & Watson, 2019). It also included transnational organizing, expressed in the various Pan-African conferences and the Bandung meeting of 1955, among other forums. These movements were vital for spelling the collapse of formal colonial empires in the latter part of the twentieth century. But just as importantly for our purposes, they generated a veritable explosion of new ideas from below. The proliferation of anticolonialism spawned novel thinking and writing by colonized peoples critiquing empires, questioning colonialism and critically interrogating colonial correlates like racialization, land grabbing and economic exploitation.

Much of this anticolonial discourse was about politics, government and the economy. Whatever their differences, anticolonial political movements all sought to overthrow the inequalities of empire and institute a postcolonial and sometimes a more cosmopolitan world (Getachew, 2019; Go, 2013b). Anticolonial critique was the ideological form of this global movement. But while anticolonialism was a political (and even economic) movement, it also entailed *social* thought: ideas, concepts and even theories of society, the social, and social relations. While sociology and social theory was institutionalized in the metropole to reflect the imperial episteme, anticolonial thought offered views of society from the ground up, in the dark underside of empire.

These anticolonial thinkers are far too numerous to name; they constitute a diverse and eclectic group offering a variety of different ideas. Despite the diversity, anticolonial thinkers shared some basic characteristics. First, most were born in or lived in the colonies and drew upon their experiences there. This would include Apolinario Mabini and Jose Rizal in the Philippines, Eugenio Maria de Hostos in Puerto Rico, or Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire in Martinique. It would also include, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, the Vietnamese anticolonial activist Nguyen An Ninh, and the Martinican surrealist Suzanne Césaire (to only give some examples). Second, many were educated in imperial capitals like Paris, London, or Barcelona where anticolonialists often met, mobilized, and theorized (Goebel, 2015; Matera, 2015). Ho Chi Minh and Fanon were among the many who studied in France, Jose Martí and Jose Rizal studied and traveled through Spain, Nkrumah and C.L.R. James joined many other anticolonial leaders in London. A different group of anticolonial thinkers lived and operated within the *internal colonies* of metropolitan centers. W.E.B. DuBois, operating mainly within the US, is an obvious example. But there are others. For example, Laura Cornelius Kellogg was an indigenous activist born on the Oneida Indian reservation in Wisconsin. She and other indigenous thinkers represent an anticolonial thinking that operated within the confines of settler colonialism, struggling within the internal colonized spaces of empire.

Anticolonial thought emerged from a variety of social positions along a continuum of professionalization. Some anticolonial thinkers were actual academics teaching in lower schools or universities. This list would include W.E.B. Dubois, but it would also include the Indian sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee, the Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (who was one of Pierre Bourdieu's collaborators), and the Lebanese theorist Mahdi Amel. Many others, and likely most others, were journalists, writers or artists. Some were activists and political leaders. Journalists and political activists included Mabel Dove in the Gold Coast. Political leaders included Nkrumah or Pedro Albizu Campos in Puerto Rico. The list is almost infinite. The point is that anticolonial social thought did not typically come in the form of academic writing. It was articulated in journalistic writings, political pamphlets, speeches, art, or through the chants of activists in the streets.

Hence the larger claim about this motley collection of anticolonialists: despite the fact that they were not card-carrying social scientists, they nonetheless offered up important ideas and knowledges about the world that imperial sociology either ignored or completely overlooked. They offered often innovative ideas about society, the social, and social relations that we might learn from. Furthermore, this was a *sociology* containing potentially generalizable concepts and theories. That is, anticolonial social thought does not just offer particularistic ideas pertaining only to the dilemmas of colonized or racialized peoples. It offers insights onto society more broadly. To consider anticolonial thought as sociology and social theory, therefore, is to accept an invitation to experiment. From its onset, sociological reasoning and practice has been dominated by metrocentrism. We have developed concepts in, of and for the interests and concerns of elites in the imperial metropole and applied them to the rest of the world (Connell, 2007; Go, 2016b). Sociology has operated from the top down. But what if we went the other way around? Rather than developing our categories, concepts and problematics in, of and for imperial metropoles to then use for making sense of the rest of the world, what if we went in the other direction?

3 | CONCEPTUALIZING THE SOCIAL

Let me turn now turn to some of the substantive ideas and concepts that anticolonial thought offers. One way to do so is to discuss broad overarching themes, beginning with the theme of society and/or social relations. Scanning some of the diverse writings of anticolonial thinkers, I see at least three different approaches for conceptualizing society and/or social relations.

For the first, return to Apolinario Mabini with whom I began this essay. As noted, Mabini defines society to be an "association of men who are together for mutual help." What is going on here? If we read rest of his work, we find that

Mabini is ultimately theorizing society as a *series of reciprocal exchanges and mutual obligations* that are constitutive of social relations. To take one example, he writes:

> [A] man cannot live alone; he alone cannot build his house, weave his clothes and produce the food and other items he needs; they have to get together with others dedicated to different trades, so that with the exchange of the products of their respective industries, each one can meet their multiple needs (Mabini, 1931: II, 22–23)

This language of exchange, of course, summons the exchange theories of the Scottish Enlightenment, not least of Adam Smith, along with some versions of European social contract theory. Mabini would have been familiar with these theories from his studies in law in Manila (Majul, 1996). But it would be problematic to reduce his idea of society to an inferior variant of that body of thought. For while Mabini appropriates some of ideas regarding exchange from the Scottish Enlightenment and social contract theory, he creatively rearticulates them with the influence of Spanish Catholicism and the realities of local agrarian patron-clientelism to end up with a somewhat different theory. While Scottish Enlightenment thinkers were famously individualist and emphasized market exchange, Mabini theorizes mutual obligation as natural law, existing prior to and above individuals. More precisely, he claims that the reciprocal obligations of society's members express the natural law of reason or, in Mabini's Spanish, "*razón*" (which also translates into the word "right") (Mabini, 1931: II, 22). In Mabini's approach, therefore, society is not reducible to the market where self-interested individuals exchange material goods, nor does it emerge victorious from a Hobbesian state of anarchy, but rather begins, always-already, as a series of reciprocal exchanges and obligations seen as rights and maintained by reason. For Mabini, to fulfill social obligations was exactly to fulfill natural law, and these fulfillments constituted the social (see more in Go, 1999, pp. 342–345).

This creative rearticulation of European notions of exchange and the social contract was developed amidst anti-colonial struggle. Mabini argues that foreign colonizers like Spain, and then the US, transgressed natural law in that they were not reciprocal in their actions. They appropriate from Philippine society without giving anything back. They violated *razón*. Because of this, they could be legitimately overthrown and replaced with a new government, one which would restore the proper workings of society by better ensuring the smooth flow of reciprocal exchange and obligation (1931: II, 24). Mabini's social theory thus emerged as a warrant for anti-imperialist revolution.

This is not to devalue Mabini's theory on the grounds that it was political or partial. After all, Adam Smith's theory was political and partial too: it was meant to vindicate free market liberalism against the mercantilism of the British empire. Disciplinary sociology in the US at the time was also political and partial: it embedded the imperial standpoint that justified imperialism. To highlight Mabini's positionality and political commitments, therefore, is merely to recognize its context of emergence and better understand the meaning of his text.

But anticolonial thought is not reducible to a singular discourse. It is heterogeneous within a larger series of similarities. This heterogeneity is partly rooted in different social contexts, different forms of colonialism and hence different struggles. For example, Mabini theorized society in the context of Spanish colonial mercantilism, whereby the Philippines' agrarian society was tethered to an extractive if not entirely tributary form of colonial domination. Other colonized peoples faced different systems of power and other colonial logics, thereby facing different problematics of domination that each summoned particular concerns, themes and questions. Indigenous peoples subjected to settler colonialism, for instance, did not face mercantilist extraction but rather dispossession and displacement from the land (Coulthard, 2014; Wolfe, 2016). This shaped their alternative conceptual approaches to the social. Hence the second dominant mode of conceptualizing society that can be found in anticolonial thought: society not as a series of reciprocal exchanges and mutual obligations between humans but rather as *a series of intimate relations between humans, nature and the spiritual world*.

Consider the writings of Laura Cornelius Kellogg. As a founding member of the Society of American Indians in the early 20th century, she was motivated by struggles to restore land and autonomy for indigenous Americans, and amidst these struggles she articulated a view of social relations as inextricably tethered to nature and spirits

According to Kellog, Indian society before the intrusion of colonialism was very different from the Hobbesian state of nature. It was one where the "Red Man" was "brother of the gods," living with "the beautiful water courses" and "the great forests":

> The Red man had independence once, of a kind that could not be more idyllic. He followed the beautiful water courses and shot rapids in the romantic canoe, in the solemn solitudes of the great forests pursued the chase. Aesthetic even in the greater part of getting his livelihood, he was a brother of the gods and knew little irksome routine. And he was Lord of the richest continent on the globe.
>
> (Kellogg, 2015[1920]: 79)

Kellogg further explains how the tribes or "nations" in which the "Red Man" lived aggregated into larger unit, the Five Nations of the Confederacy. The different nations were not woven together by joint economic or political interests but by the summoning of the eagle: "[E]ach nation is free unto itself like a free man," but "when the eagle, which scans the heights and the valleys over the home of the Nations, gives the cry, then are they, one heart, one head, one man" (Kellogg, 2015(1920):73). In Kellog's conception, therefore, the unity of society is obtained through the command of the spirits' material manifestation in the natural realm. Kellogg did *not* separate, humans, the spirits and the land.

Kellogg's conception of the social, like Mabini's, was firmly rooted in an anticolonial position. Conceiving the social as she did opened up a trenchant critique of settler colonialism and its violent destruction of nature and appropriation of land. But it likewise has conceptual value offering a distinct starting point for theorizing social relations. Kellogg was writing at a time when dominant conceptions of society were coming from the Chicago School which theorized society as a series of associations among *men* based upon resemblances (Small, 1900; Small, 1904). Humans' relations with the land or with the gods were bracketed out. Alternatively, Kellogg and other indigenous thinkers amidst their anticolonial struggles against dispossession offered a notion of society as an intricate web of interdependence between spirits, humans and nature of which land is a crucial part; a sort of thick interdependence of elements that environmental sociologists today might urge us to recognize (see also Connell, 2007, p. 200). Long before Bruno Latour tried to get us to retheorize the social as an assemblage consisting of humans and nature and material objects, Kellogg and indigenous anticolonialists were articulating a similar notion (Latour, 2005).

Kellogg was not alone in her vision of society. A variation of the same vision comes from the Indian anticolonial sociologist Radhakamal Mukerjee. In his writings of the 1920s, Mukerjee landed upon what can be thought of as an "ecological" theory of the social, but unlike the social ecology of the early Chicago school and some anthropological ecologies of the time, Mukerjee's approach was offered a more critical lens. In one of his founding declarations, he writes: "man and the region [that is, nature] are not separate but mutually inter-dependent entities, plastic, fluent, growing." He opposes his conception directly to the so-called "human ecological" approach which, he says, "has been concerned almost entirely with biotic factors, with the effects of man upon man, disregarding often enough the trees and animals, land and water....an undue prominence has been given in history and economics to these purely human influences." He goes on to argue that what is needed is a sociology that stresses not only "the intimate ecologic inter-relations of man but...also...his close alliance with the entire range of ecologic forces, his co-operation in the conservation of the land, in the use of water, in the management of forests and rivers, or in the domestication and use of his live-stock and the control of insects bacteria and parasites" (Mukerjee, 1930, p. 286).

This way of thinking about social relations led to later innovations by Mukerjee, but what is also notable is how it fueled his passionate critique of colonialism in India and around the world. Prefiguring Latin American dependency theories by half a century or so, Mukerjee criticizes colonialism for thrusting weaker societies into a larger exploitative division of labor whereby colonized societies are forced into a system of export monoculture. The system entails forms of bonded labor that were "more inhuman than the old system of domestic slavery." The system also has devastating ecological effects. "Labor is," he says, "demoralized by the herding of masses of men, recruited from the countryside, into the plantation centers....Not merely are the surrounding agriculture and stock-raising ignored, but there is also a progressive exhaustion of the soil owing to continuous cultivation of a single crop" (Mukerjee, 1926, p. 203).

He describes this as a "slow injection of poison into their system [colonized societies] by conscienceless members of civilized peoples" (Mukerjee, 1926, p. 240). This was a novel conception of the social that went hand-in-hand with anticolonial critique.

The third set of ideas about the social generated by anticolonial thought is a view of modern society as a *racially bifurcated system of domination*. In this conceptual approach, racial division and domination form the key structure and logic of the social. Frantz Fanon portrayed Algerian society under French rule as fundamentally broken along racial lines, forming a compartmentalized society of the racially privileged and the racially abject. Writing at a time when neo-Durkheimian Parsonian theories of society emphasized social cohesion and integration, Fanon says that society is divided into distinct worlds: those of the colonizer and those of the colonized, the settler and "the native." He writes that these are two distinct spaces "a Manichean world" divided up into compartments:

> The colonized world is a compartmentalized world. The dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations. The 'native' sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion. There is no conciliation possible. The colonist's sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It is a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers. The colonist's sector is a white folks' sector, a sector of foreigners (Fanon, 1968 (1961): 3–4).

Throughout his work, Fanon elaborates upon this idea of society as a compartmentalized world, explicating in urgent passionate prose the practices, correlates, and logics attendant with this racialized bifurcation of society. He explores how society's racial compartmentalization reflects the economic contradictions generated by colonial rule, how it structures social space, and how it has powerful cultural and psychological effects for colonizer and colonized alike. This was a view of colonialism and its effects that Fanon partly innovated, and if it did not influence Pierre Bourdieu's early work, it was certainly a preface to it (Go, 2013a).

Amilcar Cabral, the Bissau-Guinean and Cape Verdean revolutionary, articulated similar ideas writing about what he called "the social situation" in Portuguese colonies in Africa. He described the "social situation" as one of "complete racial segregation, except for contact through work, where it furthers the interests of colonialism. With very few exceptions—such as can also be found in South Africa—there is no social contact between Africans and European families" (Cabral, 1979, p. 22) Cabral adds how institutions like cafes or bars, which according to metropolitan sociologists were sites of social integration and leisure, are the privilege of Europeans. "Any African bold enough to enter one of these places must be prepared to face humiliation" (Cabral, 1979, p. 23). One can imagine Cabral reading Parson's or Durkheim's view of social institutions as spaces that function for social cohesion and retorting: "yes, but functional for *whom*?" One can also imagine Cabral reading Cabral's contemporary, Michel Foucault, and asking: "disciplinary power, yes, but for everyone equally?"

Anticolonial thinkers built upon this basic picture of racialized societies to add other related elements to their view of social structure. Cabral (1979) and Nkrumah (1961) wrote about how ethnic divisions intersected with colonial divisions. Fanon in Algeria and Nguyen An Ninh in Vietnam wrote about the comprador bourgeoisie (An Ninh, 2012). Fanon argued that the local bourgeoise and their ties to global capital spelled doom for postcolonial state building (Fanon, 1968 (1961): 148–205). Other anticolonialists added trenchant critiques of the colonized bourgeoisie and their alliances with political elites, thereby offering a salutary indigenous critique of postcolonial capitalist regimes and their social structure. Mabel Dove Danquah's work is notable here. An early advocate of anticolonial feminism, Dove began her career as a journalist in Ghana during British rule. While she initially supported Kwame Nkrumah and his anticolonial independence movement, she soured on his post-independence authoritarianism, critiquing him and his "gang" as comprador bourgeoise masquerading as nationalists, much to the detriment of the nation:

> Kwame Nkrumah, his gang, and his followers, taught people that the best type of citizen in the community was the man who lives in luxurious surroundings, owned long expensive cars, whose palaces or flats were so furnished that the visitor feared to walk on the soft carpet or sit on the comfortable chair. [...] Their greed, cruelty, cowardice and callous indifference to pain and suffering show them to be what they really are—ignoble despicable contemptible, men and women totally unfit for public serve. Their sole motive in pushing themselves into political power was gain and profit (Dove, 2004: 118).

These views of society as racially fractured, with a social structure that includes the comprador bourgeoisie, speak volumes to the dilemmas of postcolonial societies as they emerged from the ashes of colonial rule. The seeming corruption and dictatorial tendencies that plagued postcolonial governments are well-known by now, and the theories of social structure in these anticolonial thinkers offer salutary insights that escape the dominant social science languages of the time which were applied to make sense of postcolonial nations. They thus align with Latin American *dependista* theories, which must also been seen as a form of anticolonial thought, in challenging modernization theory's portrayal of postcolonial nations.

Yet, exactly for this reason, the insights of anticolonial thinkers might seem to apply to colonial and postcolonial societies only. They might appear too particularistic to be relevant sociologically. This appearance is one of the many reasons for why metropolitan sociology has ignored anticolonial thought; that is, on the grounds that it is not general. Don't these ideas only apply to colonial and postcolonial societies? But this is the wrong way to think about it. First, as intimated already, these seemingly localized insights are important innovations in themselves. Metropolitan sociology ignored the specificity of colonial and postcolonial societies. In metropolitan sociology, societies were either premodern or modern, primitive or developed, capitalist or precapitalist and there is no sense of colonial societies as a distinct form of society or having logics in their own right. Dominant metropolitan sociology thus offered no theory of colonial or postcolonial societies, even though the vast majority of societies had been colonized societies. At best, it saw colonized societies as little else than spaces for the dark heaping masses awaiting white salvation; or as passing moments in presumed evolutionary schemes of modernization. This has left us with an unfortunate tendency to study colonial and postcolonial societies only through the lenses of metropolitan-based theories and concepts, whether those be about modernization theory, or Weberian theories of patrimonialism and bureaucracy, or Marxist theories modeled upon industrial England. Anticolonial thinkers like Fanon and Cabral offer an important corrective.

Second, even the seemingly specific analyses of racialized societies by anticolonial thinkers are nonetheless relevant for thinking about metropolitan societies. Consider WEB Dubois. Like Fanon, he theorized society as racially fractured. He claimed that society was fundamentally split by the color line and its associated "veil" of division. This, as scholars note, was generative for Dubois for thinking about all kinds of complexities to modern societies (England & Warner, 2013). But Dubois meant it for all societies. He was referring to the US but he also claimed that "the color line belts the world" (DuBois, 2005). The notion of modern society as racially bifurcated is not in this sense a particularistic concept, especially given that our modern world –including colonized to metropolitan societies alike—has been fundamentally shaped by colonialism and hence by racial division.

To be sure, given increasing racial differentiation in many metropoles around the world, the anticolonial conceptions of the social as racially fractured would be relevant to these metropolitan societies as well as to colonized societies. Cabral (1979) and Fanon (1968 (1961)), for example, extend their discussions of racial division in colonial societies to construct an urban sociology of sorts, detailing the ways in which the white sectors are maintained and the black sectors are contained. They also write about the racialized spatiality of the city and the effects of it upon urban social relations. This amounts to innovative ethnographies capturing social forms and relations of division applicable not just to colonial societies but to metropoles too. It amounts to urban ethnographies that are sensitive to racial inequalities and spatialization that contemporary metropolitan sociologies had ignored, and which might be useful for thinking about urban space and urban social relations everywhere (Go, 2020, pp. 95–96).

4 | THE SOCIAL SELF, SOLIDARITY, AND THE GLOBAL

Beyond these broad conceptualizations of the social, anticolonial thought also offers up a panoply of other concepts, theories and rich descriptive sociologies, some of which approach the level of middle-range "Southern" theories of the sort called for by Isaac Reed (2013) in response to Connell's (2007) seminal work. I cannot discuss all of them here. I will instead focus upon three themes or problematics.

One has to do with the *social self and social identity*. While George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley in the early 20th century theorized the self as a coherent entity, and while Marx and Durkheim had offered up notions of the self as alienated or anomic, anticolonial theorists articulated different approaches that followed from their distinct conceptualizations of society. Dubois' early writings are exemplary. Dubois theorized something none of the metropolitan theorists or European philosophers offered: that is, the marginalized and racialized self in society. With his popular notion of "double consciousness" Dubois compels us to think of the racialized self as a reflection of the social body: a fractured self, split into two.

> It is a peculiar situation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self (DuBois, 1897: 194)

This bears some similarities to, say, Marxist theories of alienation it is irreducible to them. For Dubois, the fractured self was a product not of estranged labor but of social discrimination and the bifurcated nature of society, and it was a self that was not separated from an intrinsic essence rooted in an ideal of transhistorical labor. For Dubois, double consciousness instead means that the self is fundamentally split in two halves whose structure troubles any sense of a singular self, alienated or otherwise (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015). Dubois conveyed this sensation of double-consciousness by reference to his own experience:

> I lived in an environment which I came to call the White world. I was not an American; I was not a man; I was by long education and continual compulsion and daily reminder, a colored man to a White world; and that White world often existed primarily, so far as I was concerned, to see with sleepless vigilance that I was kept within bounds. All this made me limited in physical movement and provincial in thought and dream. I could not stir, I could not act, I could not live, without taking into careful account the reaction of my White environing world (1903: 135–136).

Fanon similarly wrote of the colonized's "third person consciousness." By being racialized, Fanon says, the colonized subject is also particularized. The "black man aims for the universal…[but] on-screen his black essence, his black 'nature' is kept intact…in the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness" (Fanon, 1967(1952): 83).

These theories of the self capture the distinct experiences of being a colonized, marginalized and racialized subject; experiences about which metropolitan sociologies had very little to say. These theories also capture how the particular social structures of racialized societies generate not only distinct forms of subjectivity but also related existential dilemmas of social selfhood. Suzanne Césaire, the Martinican anticolonial surrealist and supporter of the Negritude movement, expresses something of this in her 1942 essay "The Malaise of Civilization." In this piece Césaire writes about the dilemma of Martinican identity and laments how colonialism has forced Martinicans into a subjectivity of dependence and imitation (Césaire, 2012). She thus rearticulates Freudian psychoanalytic categories to make sense of colonial subjectivity as a tragic condition striving to emulate European civilization and become

white. "The most serious thing," she writes, "is that the desire for imitation—just a short time earlier only a vaguely conscious one since it was a defense mechanism against an oppressive society—has now migrated to the area of fearsome secret forces in the unconscious" (Césaire, 2012, p. 32). This dilemma, she notes, emerges from Haitian society's history of segregation that prevented Black Haitians from assimilating into white society (and even banned Black Haitians from dressing the same as whites). The subsequent social structure thus generated a peculiar dilemma for Black Haitians. "One will understand that from that point forward the fundamental goal of the colored man became assimilation. And with overwhelming force, a disastrous confusion takes place in his mind: *liberation means assimilation*" (Césaire, 2012, p. 31).

Another theme is social *solidarity*. For metropolitan sociology social solidarity was a crucial theme. For Durkheim and his contemporaries in France, like Léon Bourgeois, solidarity was the solution to social disintegration. Hence Durkheim (1984) sees organic solidarity as the product of and contributing to a smoothly functioning social system with a high division of labor. For Marx, solidarity was essentially class solidarity, based upon ones' place within a division of labor (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 79–81). Marx and Durkheim's concepts are therefore similar, despite appearances otherwise, for they are both rooted in the modern division of labor. Anticolonial theories of solidarity are different. The work of Haitian thinker and politician Anténor Firmin (1850–1911) is a good place to start. Firmin is probably best known for his 1885 book "On the Equality of Human Races" in which he critiqued scientific racism (Firmin, 2000). But as Holley (2021) shows, Firmin also critiqued European discourses of solidarity. Firmin's essay, "European solidarity," begins by theorizing solidarity as a form of patriotism:

> As civilization progresses, men develop a feeling of solidarity which becomes increasingly stronger. People who are separate from one another by considerable distances feel a deep sense of connectedness which, only a short while ago, hardly existed among people of the same nation but of different regions. This feeling exists only when a people has achieved moral unity. It is only then that people flying the same flag are inspired by the same ideas, experience the same emotions, pleasures and sufferings as others in society. This heightened sense of connectedness, which may be called patriotism, unites all in one ineffable bond and facilitates the workings of the social organism (Firmin, 2000: 379).

If Firmin here sounds like Durkheim or Spencer (whom Firmin critiques elsewhere), the rest of essay takes a turn. Firmin observes that "the feeling of human solidarity increases the more a nation becomes civilized in its mores and way of thinking" and that this feeling "expands gradually" from the "inner circle of the family" to "the largest collection of individuals sharing a common set of ideas" (Firmin, 2000, p. 381). Firmin then claims that the buck stops with race. Justified by racist ideology, "Europeans nations naturally tend to unite in order to dominate the rest of the world and the other human races...Does not the question of race lie at the core of these outbursts of solidarity?" (Firmin, 2000, pp. 384–387). Firmin thus analytically reconfigures solidarity from a desirable state of social connectedness that can solve modernity's problems to a tool of oppression rooted in racial conquest.

In Firmin's wake, a spate of anticolonial thinkers reconfigured the solidarity concept to refer to something else: connectedness forged through struggle. A few years after Firmin's book, the Filipino intellectuals known as the *ilustrados* established a nationalist organization and newspaper while living in Madrid. Aptly, they titled the newspaper, *Solidarity* (*La Solidaridad*). Soon after, Apolinario Mabini referred to solidarity in his urgent call for unity against Spanish imperialism: "[A]s long as there are national frontiers erected and maintained by the selfishness of races and dynasties....you must unite in a perfect solidarity of purposes and interests to have strength, not only to fight the common enemy but also to realize all the ends of human life" (Mabini, 1931: I, p. 107).

Frantz Fanon also deployed this concept of anticolonial solidarity while adding a critique of Marxist approaches to the concept. In one of his lesser-known articles "The Algerian conflict and African anticolonialism" (1957), Fanon declared:

> The necessary response to colonialism's tactical cleverness is a strategic solidarity amongst the territories occupied by French forces. Today we can measure the illusoriness of the famous doctrine according to which organic solidarity exists between the proletariat of colonialist countries and that of colonized peoples. In actual fact, the theory of anticolonialism is being formulated today and all the theses previously put forward have proven entirely false. In their struggle, colonized peoples must essentially count on their colonized brothers (Fanon, 2019: 565).

Fanon here critiques Marxist assumptions that class forms the basis of solidarity. As Fanon and his contemporaries like Aime Césaire (2010) argued, such assumptions overlooked racial division (Césaire, 2010 (1956)). Fanon also adds a global dimension to the solidarity concept, stressing unity among *all* colonized peoples: "colonized peoples must essentially count on their colonized brothers" (Fanon, 2019, p. 565). If Firmin earlier critiqued the solidarity concept for its function in unifying White Europeans, and if Mabini later deployed the concept to speak of national loyalty amidst revolution, Fanon uses the concept to refer to a global movement of transnational alliance among the colonized. This too was an innovative reformulation of the solidarity concept, unmooring it from its Durkheimian and Marxian variants. In the anticolonial repertoire, solidarity is not seen as a natural product of the division of labor but rather a force for and product of struggle *against an Other*. Opposition and struggle rather than the division of labor generate a unified identity and feelings of connectedness.

Amilcar Cabral generated a similar approach to solidarity. Amidst his political projects, Cabral theorized solidarity (or "unity", as he sometimes called it) as a feeling among colonized peoples created through struggle against colonial domination. Unity emerges through struggle in opposition to the Other: "any force acting on an object," Cabral (1979, p. 33) argues, "can only exist if there is an opposite force"; and "in our specific case, the struggle is the following: the Portuguese colonialists have taken our land, as foreigners and as occupiers, and have exerted a force on our society, on our people. ... If the colonial force was acting in one direction, there was always our force which acted in the opposite direction."

The third theme is *global hierarchy and intersocietal interdependence*. On the one hand, sociology is founded upon an endogenous narrative of western European development embedded in classic social theories and their methodological nationalism. What these theories ignored, and hence what our founding narratives ignore, is that global relations in the form of empire and colonialism have been constitutive of modern societies and global modernity (Go, 2016b, pp. 83–91). Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) already articulated this idea when he theorized society as a singular hierarchical world-system. Similarly, postcolonial sociologies insist upon seeing societies as enmeshed in connected histories (Bhambra, 2007). But anticolonial thinkers overcame endogenous development theories and methodological nationalism long ago (Magubane, 2016). Their concerns over empire and colonialism allowed them to not only see empire and colonialism as constitutive forces, but also the global connections and global relations of domination that metropolitan sociology ignored. Anticolonial thinkers have long offered *global* narratives of modernity. From CLR James' (1989(1963)) account of the French and Haitian revolutions to Suzanne Cesaire's (2012) surrealist writings on the impact of global slavery to Mahdi Amel's (2021) theory of colonialism and underdevelopment—these and many other accounts offer exactly the global historical sociologies that some sociologists have been calling for in recent years. If Latour's (1993) mantra is "We have never been modern" a key mantra of anticolonial sociology might be "We have never been methodologically nationalist." It is not accidental that, in his memoirs, Wallerstein (2002, p. 359) says that his theory of the world-system was partly inspired by Fanon.

5 | CONCLUDING CLARIFICATIONS

To conclude, some points of clarification might be helpful. First, as might be clear already, my project is meant to join recent attempts to rethink the sociological canon and the Eurocentric bases of sociology (e.g., Alatas & Sinha, 2017; Connell, 2007; Morris, 2022). I am hoping that anticolonial thought might be taken more seriously as offering an

alternative critical sociology. Still, unlike some recent attempts to rethink the canon, my goal in advancing anticolonial thought is not to replace canonical thinkers (whether Marx, Weber or Durkheim) with some other presumably genius thinker. Rather, if we are to redo the canon at all, we should overcome the existing "Mt. Rushmore" model which valorizes individuals and instead attend to broader sets of ideas or traditions, organized around distinct themes (Bobo, 2015). This is why my essay discusses multiple thinkers rather than delving too deeply into a single thinker. It seeks to identify a tradition of social thinking that has yet to be identified as such.

Second, in exploring this tradition of anticolonial thought, the goal is not to locate a set of sociological ideas or discourses that are somehow outside of the dominant European-centered framework going back to the European Enlightenment. Anticolonial thought does not mark a space of pristine prelapsarian purity. It exists in a space of critical *engagement* with the Anglo-European empires, their standpoint, and discourses. Fanon, for instance, does not reject Marx or Freud or Sartre, he critiques them, borrows from them, domesticates or creatively appropriates them. The same goes for nearly all the other anticolonial thinkers we might come across. We might say that such critical engagement, rather than ignorance or blind rejection, is one crucial and generative characteristic of anticolonial thought.

Third, excavating anticolonial thought for alternative sociologies does not mean that we need to adopt a position of epistemic relativism. We do not need to claim that a theory, concept or sociological claim is necessarily truthful just because it comes from an anticolonial thinker, any more than we must assume conventional sociology developed in imperial metropoles necessarily offers untruths. The point should be to provincialize all bodies of knowledge. To draw upon the philosophy of social science sometimes referred to as "perspectival realism," we can recognize all knowledge as partial yet potentially truthful, rooted in particular standpoints but nonetheless possibly objective (Go, 2016a; Go, 2016b, pp. 162–173). The epistemic commitment of my project is to consider a standpoint (heterogeneous though it may be) that has not yet been considered. The goal is not to replace one standpoint for another but to proliferate them.

Finally, this project of recovering anticolonial thought is partly inspired by but also distinct from other adjacent sociological knowledge projects seeking to overcome the "Northern-centrism" or Eurocentrism of social thought and social theory. These projects, sometimes referred to as projects in "non-Western" sociology, "alternative" discourses, "Southern theory," "decolonial" or "global social theory" are important (Alatas, 2006; Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Sousa Santos, 2014). They have helped to revolutionize social thinking. The problem is their misappropriation and domestication by *geoepistemic essentialism*.[1] By this I mean the ontological assumption that the world can be divided into distinct essentialized geographical spaces—such as North and South or 'West' and 'non-West'— and that those spaces map directly onto cultures and knowledge formations. Some attempts to enact the Southern Theory project, for instance, use this questionable assumption as the basis for inclusion. The implicit claim is that if a thinker is "in" or "from" the Global South or a "non-Western" country their knowledge is necessarily oppositional to dominant "Western" sociology and therefore should count as alternative knowledge. Simultaneously, according to this geoepistemic essentialism, any thinker in or from the "Global North" is to be rejected.[2]

This is highly problematic, both in its ontology of the world and its assumption that geographic location maps onto knowledge directly. Note that by this criterion, someone like W.E.B. Dubois would not count for this alternative sociological canon, or Laura Kellogg discussed above, because they spent most of their lives in the United States. Note too that by this criteria, Ibn Khaldun has been heralded as a critical voice offering an alternative to Eurocentric sociology on the grounds that he represents the "Middle Eastern" view, even though Khaldun's standpoint was not a critical one. After all, Khaldun was a court scholar; his theories of *assabiyah* and of cyclical state-formation represent the standpoint of dynastic power intent upon preserving and prolonging dynastic rule (Khaldun, 2015). His is the standpoint of power and empire, even if it is the standpoint of a "non-Western" power.[3]

My claim is *not* that this criteria for inclusion is to be rejected out of hand. Khaldun's text is powerful and important. My claim instead is that Khaldun is not necessarily oppositional to the standpoint of European imperial power. If it is critical and alternative, it is arguably minimally so, merely reinforcing dubious assumptions of cultural or regional essentialism. My claim, too, is that in many existing knowledge projects that seek to contest the hegemony

of Anglo-European sociology, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion is underspecified when specified at all, and this can lead to problems. If we are to search for alternative sociologies, we need to be clearer about the ontology of the world and epistemology that underpins them.

Here is where my interest in anticolonial thought lies. My point is not to divide up the world into distinct geographic regions and assume that knowledge from one site is superior to the other. As opposed to this geoepistemic essentialism, my interest in anticolonial thought is grounded in an ontology of global hierarchy forged by histories of colonialism and empire.[4] My project does not assume that Frantz Fanon, Mabel Dove or Mabini or other writers discussed above offer potentially rich social insights that can serve as part of a critical alternative sociology because they wrote in what today is called the "Global South" or "non-western" world. The wager is that they offer potentially insightful alternative sociologies because they embed the standpoint of actors who are marginalized in global hierarchies and struggling to redeem their humanity and worth. The space of the anticolonial does not mark an essential position of geography (or race, for that matter) but a *relational* position of experience, of subordination, erasure and struggle. While imperial sociology embeds the experiences, interests and concerns of metropolitan elites in the Anglo-European center, anticolonial sociologies embed the standpoint of subjugated peoples whose voices and minds have been marginalized as lesser, inferior; as not offering valuable social knowledge at all. My conclusion, therefore, is that recovering anticolonial thought *is* to recover an alternative to imperial sociology and its imperial standpoint. If we want an alternative to imperial sociology, surely one place to start is antiimperial, anticolonial thought which has for too long been repressed but which might just be the key to unlocking a more expanded sociological imagination that is analytically alive to the elusive relations of power and structures of domination plaguing us today.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ENDNOTES

[1] I develop this term "geoepistemic essentialism" partly from the concept of "geo-epistemology" (Barkawi, et al., 2021).

[2] I do not claim that these approaches are intrinsically essentialist, just that they are too easily deployed as such when they do not clarify the standpoint and positionality of their proposed alternative canons.

[3] Patel (2021) registers a similar critique of "colonial" sociology in India which manifests as "indigenous" sociology.

[4] The difference is this: the ontology of geoepistemic approaches is that the world consists of different regions and cultures and these correspond with knowledge formations. My ontology is (a) the world consists of a global socioeconomic and geopolitical hierarchy that has been created through centuries of empire and colonialism and (b) social science as we know it has been developed within and for the highest positions in that hierarchy. That hierarchy does not map exactly onto regions, "cultures" or nations but traverses them.

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