

Anticolonial thought, the sociological imagination, and social science: A reply to critics

Julian Go

Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Correspondence

Julian Go.

Email: Jgo34@uchicago.edu

Abstract

This essay responds to commentaries (this issue) on Go's "Thinking Against Empire: Anticolonial Thought as Social Theory" (this issue). The essay addressed shared concerns and underlying themes of the commentaries, most of which pivot around the problem of the *anticolonial* and the status of disciplinary sociology as a knowledge project. Is there a need for sociology to incorporate anticolonial thought? How does anticolonial thought as social theory differ from other epistemic projects? Is the distinction between sociology's imperial episteme and anticolonial thought fruitful or obfuscating? And what are the possibilities and limits of a social science informed by anticolonial thought? Ultimately, the essay maintains that anticolonial thought offers a powerful sociological imagination that can be fruitfully tethered to a project of realist social science. It also maintains that realist social science can be emancipatory; provided that it is reoriented by anticolonial thought.

KEYWORDS

anticolonialism, decolonial thought, postcolonial theory, social theory, sociological theory

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2023 The Authors. The British Journal of Sociology published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of London School of Economics and Political Science.

1 | INTRODUCTION

I am both honored and grateful to have such insightful scholars offer their critical perspectives on my essay. I am also overwhelmed. While some of the comments opine that my essay is not sociological enough, others suggest it is too sociological. Some suggest that my project of recovering anticolonial thought is provocative and important, others insinuate that it is duplicative of what is already being done. I am unsure whether this diversity reflects the plurality of positions in the British sociological field or whether it reflects the ambiguities of my essay itself. In any case, the diversity of responses is not only overwhelming; it is humbling if not, in a certain sense, beautiful.

I regret that, given space limitations, I cannot address every point raised in the commentaries. But I can try address shared concerns and underlying themes. Most of them pivot around the problem of the *anticolonial* and the status of disciplinary sociology as a knowledge project. Is there a need for sociology to incorporate anticolonial thought? How does anticolonial thought as social theory differ from other epistemic projects? Is the distinction between sociology's imperial episteme and anticolonial thought fruitful or obfuscating? Why bother incorporating anticolonial thought into our theoretical repertoire? And what are the possibilities and limits of a social science informed by anticolonial thought? As readers will see by the end of my response, even addressing these selected set of questions will take up far too much space—almost as much space as my original essay. But I beg patience and hope to do the commentaries some amount of justice. I also hope the critics take the fact that I've written such a lengthy response as an acknowledgement of how incredibly generous and generative their comments have been for my thinking.

2 | SITUATING THE PROJECT

It helps to begin with a brief contextualization of the essay, which brings me to the work referred to extensively by Favell (this issue): *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory* (PTST) (Go, 2016b).¹ One of the tasks of PTST was to show that social theory and its institutionalized expression in the US and Europe—disciplinary sociology—was born in, of and for empire. This claim built upon my research into the history of sociology (Go, 2009, 2013a) and upon the earlier pathbreaking work of scholars like Connell (1997) and Seidman (1996, p. 2013) who began sketching the entanglements of disciplinary sociology and empire very early on. My task was not only to trace such entanglements but to consider their implications for social theory and sociology. I found that disciplinary sociology was part and parcel of what I called the “imperial episteme” and that many of its theories, concepts, problematics and agendas embedded an “imperial standpoint.” I then turned to a different body of thought—“postcolonial” thought—that existed alongside disciplinary sociology but was not typically thought of as relevant for social theory or social science. Postcolonial thought emerged as an academic discourse in the 1980s in the humanities and embedded a different standpoint than disciplinary sociology: rather than imperialism, its lineage lay in anti-imperial and anti-colonial writings of the earlier part of the twentieth century. I argued that postcolonial thought in the academic humanities since the late 1970s generatively embedded anticolonial thinking attendant with anticolonial movements earlier in the century.

With the insights of this anticolonial *cum* postcolonial thought I was able to name the key components of disciplinary sociology's imperial standpoint (such as its essentialism, its analytic bifurcations, its ignorance of empire and colonialism, its metrocentrism and occlusion of subaltern agency). And with the insights of postcolonial thought I offered some ways in which theory and research in disciplinary sociology—an epistemic project that I believe in (more on this later)—might be reoriented to overcome the analytic limitations imposed by its imperial standpoint. I hoped to see a “third wave” of postcolonial thought anchored not in the humanities but in the social sciences. In short, I tried to glimpse a postcolonial sociology on the horizon (Go, 2016b).

But how to get there? I argued that at least two routes to a postcolonial sociology were available. For transcending essentialism, analytic bifurcations, and methodological relationalism, I suggested global-historical relationalism or, more precisely a “postcolonial relationalism” that seeks to track social relations through what Edward Said (1993, p. 36) referred to as “overlapping territories, entwined histories” (Go, 2016a, pp. 110–111; Magubane, 2005). This approach

is thus one way of overcoming what Valluvan and Kapoor (this issue) refer to as British sociology's "self-referentialism." I have taken up this route in earnest and other methodological work (Go, 2011, 2020; Go and Lawson, 2017, 2020). I also employ the approach in my current empirical research into the history of militarized policing in the US and Britain (2020a; In Press). In that research, I argue that militarized policing in the US and Britain is an effect of empire; that is, a "boomerang effect"—a term that Valluvan and Kapoor (this issue) conjure from Koram's (2022) recent use of the concept. The concept "boomerang effect" is not found in existing sociologies. It comes from an anticolonial thinker of the twentieth century: Aimé Césaire (1955). What I try to do in my recent work on policing is operationalize the concept and put to work in empirical research. I *sociologize* it.

My use of Césaire's "boomerang" concept manifests the second route towards a postcolonial sociology that brings us exactly to point of this forum: the *subaltern standpoint*. Conventional sociology has long embedded the imperial standpoint; its questions, concepts, theories and paradigms emerge from experiences and concerns of white male elites resting at the apex of the imperial metropolises. As an alternative, I suggest a social science that begins (though does not necessarily end) with the subaltern standpoint which embeds the experiences and concerns of the globally subjugated can be an alternative epistemic position from which to craft a postcolonial if not a postimperial social science. Rather than starting our questions, problematics, theories or categories from the perspective of the dominant class in imperial metropolises, we should instead start our questions, problematics, theories or categories from the perspective of the dominated and marginalized. To advance this project, I enlist a particular philosophy of science—scientific perspectivism, or rather *perspectival realism*—to provide the epistemic warrant for this subaltern standpoint approach. With it, I insist that the subaltern standpoint does not rest upon an essentialist but rather a relational identity; and I reject claims that a subaltern standpoint approach leads to parochial, subjectivist or relativist sociologies (Go, 2016b, pp. 153–184).

What I now refer to as the *anticolonial standpoint* is one manifestation of the subaltern standpoint.² It offers perspectives on the social world and embeds experiences of domination and subjugation that conventional imperial sociology—from its viewpoint on high—overlooks, ignores or represses. It thereby offers an aperture for crafting novel sociological problematics, concepts, theories and research programs. These can be excavated, developed and mobilized for rethinking existing conventional sociological agendas and bringing sociology closer to a postcolonial form—that is, a form that reaches beyond the confines of the imperial standpoint. My *BJS* essay, "Anticolonial Thought as Social Theory," is one manifestation among others of this subaltern standpoint approach. It is an attempt advance the postcolonial agenda by providing some actual theoretical and conceptual resources and invite further explorations into the anticolonial archive that has been neglected as a basis for sociological theorizing for too long. It is also a response to the question that must be addressed if we are to advance the conversation, rather than only "calling for" decolonial sociology or critiquing imperial sociology: "what are the actual alternative concepts or theories or sociological perspectives that anticolonial/postcolonial thinkers offer us? Is there anything more to these thinkers than just critique?"³ My essay, "Anticolonial Thought as Social Theory," is one attempt to address these important questions and uncover at least some fragments of the *alternative sociological imagination* that anticolonial thought offers.⁴

3 | PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED

Some of the commentators in this issue remain unconvinced of the need for such a project. Favell (this issue) suggests that my essay is redundant. It "preaches to the converted" and says "nothing new or contentious." Similarly, Valluvan and Kapoor (this issue) suggest that British sociology is already postcolonial, as "antiracist" sociology (their term) has long been a staple of intellectual diet in Britain. They also point out that young sociologists have been spared subjection to the imperialist sociological canon, as instead British sociology has been fed on a healthy diet of "Foucault, Bourdieu and Butler." Evidently, British sociology already has a "vast repertoire of postcolonial thinking and references" that is by now "mainstream" (Valluvan and Kapoor, this volume).

My assumption has long been that postcolonial (and anticolonial) theory has been absent from British sociology.⁵ I was therefore delighted to learn from these commentators that British sociology is by now fully postcolonial, such that my essay in the *British Journal of Sociology* would be redundant and preaching to the crowd. If US sociology needed to some exposure to the ideas in my 2016 book (and before that, my earlier articles on the need for a postcolonial sociology), apparently British sociology no longer does.

Accordingly, after reading the comments about how mainstream anticolonial thought had become, I went back to the *BJS* to read up on all the developments and learn from the new postcolonial/anticolonial sociologies I had been missing out on. I was excited to read the detailed exegeses on the social thought of Fanon, Cesaire, Cabral, CLR James, Nkrumah, Mabel Dove, DuBois, Jose Martí or perhaps indigenous thinkers across the British empire whose thinking had been repressed. I was eager to learn about how to translate Spivak's concept of subalternity or "strategic essentialism" to sociological research; or critical analyses of Ibn Khaldun's positionality; or how anticolonial thought differed from geoeconomic essentialism. I was anxious to read the spirited defenses of charges from critics that postcolonial sociology was particularistic, subjectivist and advocated epistemic relativism. I looked forward to learning from new exegeses on the current state of empire from writers influenced by Stuart Hall or to dig into more postcolonial work by Paul Gilroy and others. I was also looking forward to finally reading work that shows how the theories of postcolonial thinkers can be best reconciled with Eurocentric Marxism, or learning from the new research on British race relations that employ concepts from postcolonial theorists. I was eager to read the exciting new historical sociologies exploring how the slavery in the British Caribbean has shaped current policing practices; how colonialism generated path dependent processes that explain current global inequality; how anticolonial movements of the 1960s shaped the formation of antiracist movements in Manchester, London or Bristol; how racial ideologies developed during Britain's colonial rule in African or Asian countries have been institutionalized in colonial states to shape polices and postcolonial legacies; or how such ideologies have boomeranged home. I searched too for the research articles that empirically track the tight connections between colonialism and the emergence of British sociology, or the colonial origins of social thought around the world. Surely the contents of the *BJS* would a good place for seeing all of the British postcolonial and anticolonial sociology that renders my essay redundant, as some commentators in this issue suggested.⁶

I was sadly disappointed. Even a cursory examination of the content of the *BJS* reveals that postcolonial or anticolonial thinkers, texts and empirical research informed by postcolonial theory are hardly commonplace. Of the top 10 most cited articles in the *BJS* in the past five years, none discuss empire, colonialism, postcolonialism or use anticolonial thinkers and texts.⁷ A search of the word "colonial" and its cognates in the abstracts of articles published in the *BJS* from 2001 to 2022 reveals only 17 articles, most of which were published after 2018. There were only 11 abstracts with the word "empire" in the abstract, and 0 with "Fanon" in the abstract. Relatedly, a full-text search of *BJS* articles from 2001 to 2022 reveals that Fanon is mentioned 18 times and Stuart Hall is mentioned 36 times. Meanwhile, there were 364 mentions of Bourdieu, 204 of Foucault, and 255 of Marx.

There is no empirical evidence, therefore, to suggest, as Favell (this issue) does, that postcolonial sociology is basically a "mopping up operation" or that as Valluvan and Kapoor (this issue) state, it is "mainstream." And what about course modules and curricula? Comprehensive data is lacking, but the most recent systematic review reveals that the study of race and postcolonialism remain marginal to British sociology (Joseph-Salisbury et al., 2020; see also Moosavi, 2022). I realize that, to some, a few DEI initiatives, a few additions to syllabi, and a few articles in mainstream journals might appear as if intellectual barbarians are flooding through the gates of sociology's empire. But that does not mean the discipline has been decolonized.⁸ What we need to see are sociologists tracing empirically the various ways in which colonialism has impacted modern society rather than just chanting to decolonize. What we need to see are sociologists putting down their conventional sociological texts and explicating all the new concepts and ideas we can get when we read anticolonial ones. We need to do more work.

It may be that when commentators say that postcolonial thought is now "mainstream" they are really referring to "antiracist" sociology (Valluvan and Kapoor, this issue). But "antiracist" sociology as it is presently configured and postcolonial, anticolonial or decolonial sociology are not the same thing. British and US sociology can be ostensibly

“antiracist” without paying attention to colonial and imperial histories that structure racism. In the US, antiracist sociology has existed for some time, much of it coming under the title of the “Sociology of Race & Ethnicity.” Even W.E.B. DuBois has been mainstreamed in the US, with the American Sociological Association naming an award after him and flagship sociology journals publishing numerous essays on his work. But few if any of this work has taken colonialism and empire seriously. They bring in DuBois but at best they refer to the early liberal DuBois of *The Philadelphia Negro* (1897) rather than the later thoroughly anticapitalist and anticolonial DuBois. Similarly, it may very well be that the British sociological canon is beyond Weber, Durkheim and Parsons and has fully incorporated “Foucault, Bourdieu, and Butler” instead (Valluvan and Kapoor, this issue). But these thinkers do not mark a postcolonial/anticolonial position either. With the exception perhaps of certain aspects of Bourdieu (whom I discuss in Go, 2016a), these thinkers fall into all the traps of imperial sociology that I discuss in *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*.⁹

The point here is not to impugn British sociology nor underplay the earlier efforts of vanguard sociologists like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy who, as Valluvan and Kapoor (this issue) note, opened up crucial new spaces in British sociology for critical scholarship. Nor do I mean to trumpet the *BJS* as the only source of legitimate sociology.¹⁰ The point is to suggest that mainstream British sociology might not be as converted to the anticolonial standpoint as some of the responses to my essay imply. By publishing my essay in the *BJS*, therefore, my goal is exactly the opposite of what Favell (this volume) suggests. I am not trying to preach to the converted but rather to the *unconverted*. One goal was to contribute to the larger ongoing project of postcolonial sociology by pointing to the anticolonial tradition as a resource for disciplinary sociology and offering some social-theoretical readings of anticolonial thinkers whose standpoints have not yet been absorbed by existing sociological programs. Let me state again: we need to do more work. Rather than just repeatedly calling for anticolonial sociology, we need to actually *do it*.

Of course, the *BJS* does not have to be the only forum for advancing this project. But I do fear that what commentators think of as preaching to the converted is in fact what too many proponents of postcolonial/anticolonial/decolonial sociology have been doing for too long, which is why we see so few postcolonial sociologies in journals like the *BJS*. And I do not wish to see anticolonial thought relegated to certain outlets or spaces only. We need to cultivate alternative spaces and outlets while also struggling to prove the worth of postcolonial sociology in traditional outlets. We need to win new converts and convince our more skeptical colleagues that postcolonial sociology is a valid and powerful approach for theorizing and studying social relations.

I cannot stress enough that this project requires much more work than is already being done. Nor can I stress enough that this project demands hard work. It requires outlining the epistemic premises and philosophy of social science underpinning postcolonial sociology to dispute charges that postcolonial sociology is subjectivist, particularistic or promotes epistemic relativism.¹¹ It requires demonstrating, through careful argumentation and continued theorizing, that postcolonial/anticolonial thought deserves to be a crucial if not dominant part of disciplinary sociology. It demands all of us conducting painstaking empirical research using postcolonial theory and anticolonial thought as the dominant frame so that we can better explain, illuminate and critically apprehend society. It requires us showing our skeptical colleagues how impoverished our sociological imagination is without the anticolonial perspective; proving to them that their our accounts and theories of the world, informed by postcolonial thought, are better at explaining society than theirs. It requires speaking directly to the imperial guards and gatekeepers of the discipline.

4 | THE ANTICOLONIAL CONTRA THE IMPERIAL

While some commentators suggest my turn to anticolonial thought is by now conventional, others question whether it is a tenable move in the first place. Krause (this issue) points out that my project requires a distinguishing between anticolonial thought and imperial sociology but claims that the distinction homogenizes differences among thinkers and ignores variations across national scientific fields. The related criticism is that the distinction appears to offer a sociology of sociology but “does not really do so” (Krause, this issue).

I stand by my distinction between anticolonial thought and imperial sociology. Such a distinction, and indeed any distinction—including those that Krause might offer as a better one—must be rooted in an ontological claim about

divisions or positions in the world that shape knowledge. So let me be clear: my distinction between anticolonial thought and imperial sociology is rooted in an ontology of global hierarchy and its associated formations of knowledge. My claim is that there is a global hierarchy wrought by empire, and that different positions in that hierarchy generate relatively different sets of experiences, concerns and hence views of social life. Imperial sociology embeds the concerns, experiences and view of those at the apex of global hierarchies—that is, imperial metropolitan elites—while anticolonial social thought embeds the concerns, experiences and view of those who have been relegated to the bottom of global hierarchies. To make this claim is not to claim that all anticolonial experiences are the same (I differentiate, for instance, between different colonial problematics of domination, such as between settler colonialism and other forms). It *does* mean, though, that the anticolonial marks a shared underlying set of concerns and rudimentary experiences that in turn shape knowledge production.

This is exactly a sociology of sociology—or more precisely a sociology of social knowledge and social thought—even if it is not one that Krause prefers. It is a macrosociology of knowledge, one influenced by post-positivist feminist standpoint theorists like Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Sandra Harding (among many others) but which rescales their insights to the global field. A key point of this standpoint theory is that knowledge, including sociological knowledge, emerges from social locations; that social position within relations of power shapes concerns, interests, experiences and hence knowledge. Thus Dorothy Smith (1987, 1997), in her formative work on feminist sociology, has long contended that conventional disciplinary sociology reflects the male standpoint which is tied to men's social location at the apex of social power. Men developed their sociology as they saw the world through the lens of corporate leaders, capitalists, managers, administrators, or top government officials. Embedding this social position, traditional sociology saw certain things about the social world, produced particular questions, and generated sociological concepts and theories while wittingly or unwittingly repressing others. My distinction between imperial and anticolonial sociology extends this standpoint theory of knowledge to global hierarchies. Hence, much as Dorothy Smith famously claimed that sociology in her time had been masculinist, embedded the male standpoint, so too do I claim—joining in the spirit of Connell's (1997, 2007) seminal work—that there is an “imperial sociology” that embeds the standpoint of imperial metropolitan elites. And as Smith and subsequent feminist standpoint theory posited that the feminist standpoint offered an alternative basis for social knowledge, so too do I suggest that the anticolonial standpoint offers an alternative basis for social thought.¹²

Surely there are other axes of differentiation besides the imperial and anticolonial. Krause points to national fields as important, and I agree. But again ontology is important. When doing a sociology of social thought, what is the analysts' understanding of the social in which we see knowledge as embedded? If our ontology is that the nation-state is the key basis of social differentiation in the world, then we will be more likely to claim that national boundaries define differences between social knowledge's. The ontology I work from recognizes that national boundaries might be one point of differentiation, but it stresses that also empires and their lasting legacies is another—and one that has been too long ignored. This is why I still think the differentiation between imperial sociology and anticolonial thought tells us something important.

To be clear, this ontology of global hierarchy and its attendant differentiation between imperial and anticolonial standpoints does not map onto geography. The difference between imperial and anticolonial sociology cuts across national boundaries. It also applies within metropolises and within colonies. Empire created complex hierarchies across the globe that cross-cut nations as well as colonies (which is something that anticolonial thinkers themselves help us see). This is also to say, then, that imperial sociology is not confined to the imperial metropolises (just as anticolonial thought is not confined to the postcolonial world). Through complex processes typically having to do with colonial expansion and postcolonial geopolitics, it has spread all around the world to envelop even postcolonial countries. While social thought originates in certain locations, hitched to certain social groups, it moves about. There are hegemonies.

This is exactly why I reject geoeconomic essentialism, as I discuss in the essay. Just because a thinker or social theory comes from a colony or ex-colonial country does not mean it is automatically an alternative to imperial sociology—it can carry the same imprint of the latter. This is also why I would rebuke any claim that my distinction between imperial sociology and anticolonial thought implies a definition of sociology that “excludes real-existing

current Latin American sociology, real existing sociology in and of South Asia, the Arab World, long-standing contributions from area studies” as Krause (this issue) claims. Sociology does not only exist in the imperial metropolises. Nor does *imperial* sociology only exist there. Imperial sociologies exist in the ex-colonial world too. The extent to which it does so, the exact reasons for why, the precise institutional configurations that embeds it, and the forms of opposition and resistance to it probably varies greatly across contexts. But available evidence does suggest that even “real existing sociology in and of South Asia”, for instance, contains imperial sociology as well as anticolonial thought - as Patel’s work on sociology in India shows (Patel, 2021).¹³ Sociology in America’s ex-colony, the Philippines, is another example. In the essay I discuss Apolinario Mabini as an anticolonial thinker whose implicit sociology is worth considering. But in the Philippines, to my knowledge, he is not seen as nor read as a sociologist—if he is read at all. Indeed, sociologists in the Philippines still highlight that how much of their sociological classes in Philippine universities were dominated by US and European sociological theorists and trends, from Marxism to Blumerian symbolic interactionism and Parsonian structuralism and US social science in general (Banzon Bautista, 2000, p. 181). And according to Alatas (2003, 2006) a Eurocentric canon embedding an imperial episteme still dominates Southeast Asia. The hegemony of imperial episteme bleeds through the boundaries of nation-states and hence of national sociologies.

In stating this, I agree that I am applying, as Krause (this volume) warns, some kind of “test” of inclusion. But “tests,” or as I prefer to think of them, epistemic “warrants,” are *always* present. Any social thinker who is assigned to a syllabus, made part of a canon, who is referred to or cited requires a warrant, some kind of implicit “test” that they must pass to be included. And any text that passes such tests embed biases.¹⁴ The problem is that the warrant for too long has been tradition, some kind of vague notion of “genius”, the status of the thinkers’ institutional affiliation, or a claim that this thinker addresses certain pressing social problems better than another thinker. Some of these criteria implicitly bear the imprint of the imperial episteme (Go, 2020b). Attempts to include the “Global South” into the canon go by a different test: geographic location or worst yet, racial or ethnic identity (hence running the risk of geoeconomic essentialism). The question, then, should not be about whether or not my project requires a test. The question is whether or not the test gets us to something new and interesting.

The wager in my BJS article is that an “anticolonial” criteria does in fact get us something new and interesting: it gets us an alternative sociological imagination, one that embeds more social experiences and concerns than do conventional and canonical sociology (from Marx, Weber and Durkheim to Parsons or even critical sociologies extracted from Foucault, Latour or Butler). In my essay, I therefore outline some of the components of that alternative sociological imagination. I think these insights emerge because of the particular benefits of the anticolonial standpoint. It is not only that did anticolonial movements, texts and thinkers tended to speak to and from the experiences of dominated groups in their societies. It is also that, as critics of colonialism, they exposed the lies of colonial discourse, thus challenging scientific racism, the Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism of imperialists, the hypocrisy of European humanism, and the idea that US or European imperialism was benign and “civilizing.” Anticolonial thinkers often “saw” things that were different from mainstream social scientists at the time, as well as from imperialists and colonial actors. They were likewise compelled to think about the world very differently than many imperialists and colonial actors did, and their writings allow us insights into different imaginings.

Furthermore, as anticolonialists tried to make sense of racist claims, the brutality of European colonizers or the contradictions of the imperialists’ humanist and “civilizing” discourses, anticolonialists were prompted to make new connections. They began to see how racist brutality was connected to colonial economic exploitation, for instance; or how the local bourgeoisie were connected to European imperialists and the larger capitalist world-system; or how gender relations intersected with class in new ways than they did in metropolises, and so on. Anticolonialists thus offered critiques of and new insights into systems of economic exploitation, capitalism, dehumanization, racialization, gender, empires and global relations; thereby crafting new sociologies and often new theories of society entirely. Finally, as anticolonialists struggled against these new systems they found, they generated insights into forms of solidarity, conflict, and possible postcolonial post-imperial worlds (on the latter, see Go, 2013a; Hammer & White, 2018; and Getachew, 2019 among others). I therefore maintain that these are things worth reading into, and that the “test” of entry that I specify here (anticolonial thought), while having its own exclusions and biases, has some value.

5 | ANTICOLONIAL SOCIAL SCIENCE

Other commentators wonder about the difference between my approach and other bodies of theory, such as Marxism and decolonial theory. Favell brings up Marxism and claims that my approach, along with that of Bhabra and Holmwood (2021), “underplays” the fact that thinkers like DuBois and Fanon were unabashed Marxists in orientation and thought. I cannot speak for Bhabra and Holmwood, but I can say that, in my book *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory* to which Favell refers, does in fact discuss the Marxist influence upon anticolonial and postcolonial thought at great length. As I show, anticolonial thinkers like Fanon and his teacher Césaire embraced Marxism but rejected its provinciality, and what marks out postcolonial thought is exactly this willingness to adopt Marxist thought while pushing its limits. “Marx is alright,” Césaire once said, “but we need to complete Marx” (quoted in Go 2016, p. 37).

What about “decolonial” thought? Meghji (this issue) observes close similarities between my project and the decolonial approach originating with Anibal Quijano (2000, 2007) and carried forth by Walter D. Mignolo (2011b, 2011a) and his collaborators (e.g., Walsh and Mignolo, 2018). Meghji is right to note these similarities. But there also important differences. First, my specification of anticolonial thought as the basis for an alternative sociology is rooted in sociohistorical positionality rather than geoeconomic location. Meghji reads Mignolo’s decolonial project as relational, thus as a project that does not fall into the trap of geoeconomic essentialism. I fear this reading is not the same as mine. While proponents of the decolonial approach do speak of “border thinking” and emphasize “relationality”, and while they refer to anticolonial movements and some of the same anticolonial thinkers as I do, I find a notable and often frustrating inconsistency. In the very works that Meghji cites, decolonial proponents oscillate between relational criteria *and* geographic, geopolitical and cultural ones. They often conflate them.¹⁵ Mignolo (2011a: 45) claims that the “epistemic disobedience” entailed in the decolonial project “takes us to a *different place*, to a different “beginning” (not in Greece, but in the responses to the “conquest and colonization” of America and the massive trade of enslaved Africans), to spatial sites of struggles and building rather than to a new temporality within the same space (from Greece, to Rome, to Paris, to London, to Washington DC).” Quijano (2007: 177) asserts that decolonial knowledge is a challenge to and hence outside of “the *European* paradigm of rationality/modernity.”¹⁶ Mignolo (2011b: 2) meanwhile premises his approach upon the basic thesis that “modernity is a complex narrative whose point of origination was Europe” (as opposed to a global process from the start). Walsh and Mignolo (2018: 2) announce relatedly that they seek a “pluriversal decoloniality” and “decolonial pluriversality” as “they are being thought and constructed *outside* and in the borders and fissures of the North Atlantic western world”, including “temporalities” outside of “the *Western* idea of time “and “*Western*-imagined fictional temporality.”¹⁷ Mignolo even refers to linguistic (and by implication, ethnocultural and geographic) difference as marking the parameters of the decolonial. “[D]ecolonial thinking is,” he writes, “thinking that de-links and opens...to the possibilities ...by the modern rationality that is mounted and enclosed by categories of Greek, Latin, and the six modern imperial European languages” (Mignolo, 2011b, p. 44).¹⁸

Even if the decolonial projects’ relationality can trump its apparent slide into geoeconomic essentialism, there remain important disciplinary differences conjoined with different knowledge projects.¹⁹ As I understand it, the decolonial school is a philosophical project seeking alternatives to standard modes of thought and epistemologies in the so-called “western” Enlightenment tradition. It seeks epistemes, cosmologies, knowledge systems, and philosophies that manifest “another rationality”, as Quijano (2007: 177) puts it; a rationality that has been “discredited” for being “traditional, barbarian, primitive, mystic” (Mignolo, 2011b, p. 44). The goal, therefore, is to locate forms of thought cultivated at the “border” of “western rationality” (i.e., alternatives to the strictures of “Western” philosophical thought) that can address philosophical questions about existence, being, hermeneutics and entirely different “cosmologies” and “epistemologies” that have the status of a “relatively exteriority” to “Western epistemology” and can bring about “other economy, other politics, other ethics” (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 87; Mignolo, 2007, pp. 453, 472). The project seeks alternative modalities of thinking, knowing and being.²⁰

This is grand and vital project. My project is humbler. I hope to recover anticolonial thought as *social* theory to mobilize for social scientific analysis and research. That project may contribute to a bigger project of constructing alternative imaginaries and modalities of living, but the immediate goal is *not* to locate an entirely new epistemology

or philosophy of being that is an alternative to social science and its ostensible “western rationality.” It is rather to locate new concepts, theories, or approaches for a realist social scientific project of illuminating social relations and processes, forms and practices of power, historical events and social institutions that have been undertheorized, under-researched, or even ignored. These do not amount to pure alternatives to western philosophical traditions or cosmologies, nor alternatives that “border” them. Rather they amount to an alternative *sociological imagination*, one that can be rooted still in the “western” epistemology and ontology of social science (i.e., sociological realism) but is nonetheless an alternative to dominant imperialist modes in disciplinary sociology. Hence, I contrast Fanon with Parsons or Mabini with Durkheim, while decolonial proponents contrast Waman Puma and Ottabah Cugoano with Descartes, Kant and Rousseau; hence, too, I probe Mabel Dove's work to better understand the dilemma of postcolonial states, while decolonial proponents explore indigenous thinkers to arrive at a different ethics or ontology of the world. And so on.

In short, rather than different cosmologies, ontologies or rationalities that offer an alternative to “the conceptual tools inherited from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment,” my project is a *social scientific* one and operates squarely within the terms of the Enlightenment (Walsh and Mignolo, 2018, p. 7). Most proponents of decolonial thought would be obliged to condemn this project of social science as part of the very “European paradigm of rationality/modernity” that they seek to unsettle (Walsh and Mignolo, 2018, p. 7). I do not (even though I agree that the Enlightenment's dark sides must be consistently critiqued).²¹ The differentiating feature of my project, therefore, comes down to this: I am unabashed believer in the potential power of *realist social science* whereas philosophical decolonialism abjures it. And I believe anticolonial thought can help us realize its power.²²

I can already hear critics bemoaning my allegiance to social science. But as I argue in *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*, it is difficult if not impossible to critique forms of domination, power and exploitation without at least a minimal social scientific realism. Even the most ardent skeptics' claims about social science rely upon it—just that they do not often admit it. To claim that imperialism is a form of exploitation rather than benevolence, for example, is a sociologically realist claim. To claim that there is institutional racism is also a claim that realist social science can countenance. To claim that sociology has done violence to the world is also itself a sociologically realist claim (Go 2016, pp. 71–75). So I prefer to be reflective and open, rather than obfuscating and unreflexive, and state my badge boldly and proudly: *I believe in realist social science*. I believe that there is an objective social world existing outside of our individual minds; that it is replete with patterns of unequal relations, domination and hierarchy that are accessible and knowable; and that social science—through rigorous empirical research, critical assessments of evidence, and the careful deployment of logics of causal inference and testing—can help us *describe, explain* and ultimately *critique* those patterns. Without such work, it becomes difficult to confidently counter arguments like “there is no racism in society”, “white people are discriminated against too”, “colonialism was good for the colonized” or “there is no institutional racism in policing.”

This, then, is a project that is different from deducing statements about the social world from the wisdom of philosophical writings and observations. It is also different from making assertions about the social world based only upon a single individuals' experiences (to wit: “I experience ‘reverse racism’, therefore it exists”). A realist social science instead seeks to systematically study social relations. It does not take it for granted that power and knowledge are connected; it researches them. It does not assume that colonialism left lasting legacies; it studies those legacies systematically. It does not only assert that history is relevant; it painstakingly reveals its impact. It does not assume that racism operates in only one or another manner; it empirically and systematically investigates its variety and veracities. It does not take individuals' experience as social knowledge in itself; it uses individuals' experience as the *basis* for further studying society to produce *social* knowledge about the *social* causes, consequences and complexities of injustice and power on a broad systemic scale. When W.E.B. DuBois in the late nineteenth century dismantled the dominant claims at the time that Black Americans were inferior due to their biology, blood and stock, he did not counter with loud opinions or a new philosophical tract. Though rooted in subjective experiences of domination—that is, a subaltern standpoint—he conducted painstaking research and mobilized statistics, logics of inference, and comparative reasoning to show that Black Americans in Philadelphia were pushed into inferior positions in society

by systemic racism, not by their genes. To show the constructedness of race and the prevalence of racist institutions, DuBois used the tools of social science (Morris, 2015).

Here Rutazibwa's (this issue) provocative call to ensure that social thought serves "life-over-death" rather than "power-for-control-and-mastery" resonates profoundly. For I believe in the capacity of social science to serve the world in exactly this way. I believe in the ability of social science to do what W.E.B. Du Bois and other critical social scientists have done: expose lies and speak truth to imperial power rather than serve it. I believe that, through sociological research, we can illuminate and critique inequality, exploitation and hierarchy and open up our imaginations towards a landscape of change.²³ I also believe that this project in realist social science can in turn help empower communities in their struggles against imperialism in all its forms. After all, social scientists have privilege: we have the resources and time to conduct theoretically informed research that can shed light on the causes and complexities of exploitation and injustice. We can thus humbly offer this knowledge to others who can use it in their own struggles, without dictating to them *how* they use it or *for what*. This is the opposite of the imperial standpoint. It is also, to my mind, a way of acknowledging and mobilizing rather than covering up ones' privilege; a way of using academic privilege in productive ways.

Rutazibwa's powerful reminder that we must look "beyond diversity" and question the limits of disciplinary sociology also apply here. I see Rutazibwa's calls to recognize the limits of disciplinary social science as resonant with other bodies of thought that I also find compelling. One is Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) critique of the limits of disciplinary social science and her call to recognize "Black Feminist Epistemology" as an alternative mode of knowing; an alternative epistemology to conventional social science undergirded by alternative mobilizations of evidence, forms of validation and argumentation. Another is Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) exposé of social science's limits for absorbing alternative life worlds and his call to write a form of social science that inhabits the limits and renders them bare. Both approaches offer ways of confronting social science's "desires of mastery" (to draw from Rutazibwa's compelling phrase).

My project is closer to Chakrabarty's, even as it learns from and acknowledges the importance of Collins' approach. My project recognizes the limits of disciplinary social science but does not seek to overthrow it. It presses on social science's potentialities and possibilities. For while social science has the *capacity* for producing social knowledge that can speak truth to power, expose lies and in turn empower communities, it is inadequate as it now stands for meeting this task. Much of it is still tethered to the imperial standpoint. The theories it constructs, the concepts and categories it uses to analyze the world, the social "problems" it identifies, the questions about the social world it addresses, and thus the research it conducts reflect the interests, concerns and experiences of imperial power. Therefore, we need to go beyond existing theories, concepts and problematics that embed the imperial standpoint and seek alternatives. We need to think differently, but also we need to think within rather than without social science.

This is exactly where anticolonial thought can help. I seek to elevate anticolonial thought not to just change the canon or add new thinkers to the syllabus, nor to merely "diversify" the canon. I seek to elevate anticolonial thought to contribute to the project of generating better critical knowledge about the social world. With the insights of anticolonial thinkers, we can begin to see different things about the world, ask different questions than those that imperial metropole elites asked, and do new research to answer those questions. We can mobilize new concepts and theories for social research to create knowledge that captures social relations, forms experiences and processes that conventional sociology overlooks. We can better understand relations, practices and forms of power, global inequality, and exploitation that the imperial episteme ignores. Rather than generate social knowledge that reflects the interests and concerns of imperial power or reinforces it, we can generate social knowledge the critiques it and reaches beyond it. In this way, we can offer a critical social science that can contribute to emancipatory projects. In sum, to paraphrase Chakrabarty (2000), I believe that social science is at once indispensable and inadequate, and I think that anticolonial thought can help us overcome its current but not interminable inadequacies.

This, finally, gets at the issue of "what is it all for?" Favell (this issue) offers one version of this question when he asks about the politics of my project and worries that postcolonial sociology "risks cutting [anticolonial thought] off from vital currents of political mobilisation and political practice," especially when it "rejects" Marxism. For one

thing, as I have noted above, postcolonial sociology does *not* reject Marxism; it seeks to elaborate upon it and make up for its real deficiencies. For another, my project in learning from anticolonial thought is exactly about learning from and connecting with “vital currents of political mobilisation and political practice.” If Marxism embedded the standpoint of the white male wage earner in England, anticolonial thinkers in the Global South embed the standpoint of all of those other laborers, antiimperialist struggles, and movements that Marx’s theory of capital arguably occludes (Go 2016, pp. 34–37; Robinson, 2000).²⁴ Perhaps, then, we might seriously entertain the heretic notion that it is conventional Marxist sociology—with its Eurocentrism and its reductionist approach to pressing contemporary matters like racial domination and police violence—that risks being cut off from “vital currents of political mobilisation and political practice”; unless the only “vital currents” one is speaking about are the struggles of white male workers in England and not the struggles of the racialized subproletariat around the world—the “wretched of the Earth”, Fanon’s (1968[1952]) words, whose standpoint anticolonial thought takes seriously but that dominant imperial sociology (including some of its Marxian variants) relegates to the analytic margins, desperately absorbing difference into the self-same.²⁵

This relates to Favell’s (this issue) plea for a sociology that can help ground “new cross-class, intersectional and transnational mobilisations.” I too plead for such a sociology. But I maintain that one way forward is to take anticolonial thought seriously as a tradition of sociology rather than ignoring it. Many anticolonial thinkers too sought the same sort of “new cross-class, intersectional and transnational mobilisations” that Favell seems to countenance.²⁶ They thought hard about, strove for, and worked with cross-colonial and transnational alliances, rooting them in shared problematics and experiences of domination that were connected to but not exactly the same as subjects in imperial metropolises. Anticolonial thought, by bringing those problematics and experiences to the forefront of the sociological imagination, thus facilitates global movements not by reducing them to a singular universal Subject of Hegelian History modeled upon the white industrial working-class but rather by capturing a “universal rich with all that is particular”—to draw from Aimé Césaire (quoted in Go, 2016b, p. 184). We can thus try to ground new alliances exactly by recognizing that which anticolonial thought illuminates, and that which it urges us to incorporate into our sociological thinking: the connectedness of being amidst the particularities of experience, and the irreducible humanity of our joint struggles against systems that act upon us but which we ultimately control.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank the BJS editors (the late Nigel Dodd and Daniel Laurison) and the commentators to this forum; along with Ricarda Hammer, Meghan Tinsley, and Jake Watson for additional feedback.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

I acknowledge that I have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Al-Hardan (2018) and Connell (2018) offer useful discussions of how my book might be situated with the work of others in the same vein.
- ² Others might include the standpoint of the subproletariat whose position may or may not align directly with the anticolonial; Black Marxism or “Third World Feminism” or varieties of “Southern” knowledge.
- ³ Reed (2013) likewise asks constructively of Connell (2007) about what kinds of “middle range” concepts and theory is afforded in her “Southern Theory” approach. See also Connell (2013).
- ⁴ In other work I take Raúl Prebisch as another example of a social thinkers who starts from this alternative standpoint (Go, 2016a). For a parallel project on anticolonial thought in political science, see Getachew and Mantena (2021); one difference between my project and this adjacent project is that I seek anticolonial sociologies, while most of the work on

anticolonial thought in political science is largely but not exclusively aimed at excavating alternative political theory and philosophies.

- ⁵ This was an impression I gathered as early as 2001 when I was asked by a British sociologist to write the entry for “postcolonial theory” in a Handbook of Sociology on the grounds that there was no one else to do it). This was eventually published as Go (2006). I had known Connell’s work (1997) but it was not identified with British sociology. Later, in the US, it was only Zine Magubane’s work that represented a decisive move towards postcolonial sociology (Magubane, 2004, 2005). When I found Bhabra’s (2007) work, it was clear that this was the exception that proved the rule.
- ⁶ For work from an emerging wave of sociologists in the US who have taken up the postcolonial/anticolonial call and incorporated into their research, see Edwards (2020), Hammer (2017); Hammer and White (2018); and White (2023).
- ⁷ The only exception that comes close to centering empire, imperialism and colonialism or anticolonial texts is Bhabra’s (2017) article. Even here, critics might point out that this article, though fantastic in its own right, does not theorize from anticolonial thinkers or systematically analyze the constitutive character of colonialism and empire upon racial and class formation (even as it refers to imperialism or colonialism a few times). Bhabra’s (2022) other lesser cited article in the *BJS* does discuss imperialism and colonialism more directly—a fact that supports my claim about the comparable marginality of anticolonial texts and postcolonial thought in British sociology.
- ⁸ Note too that DEI initiatives do not represent a turn towards postcolonial social science. Adding more faculty of color to universities is not the same thing as transforming the *content* of sociological theory and research.
- ⁹ And it is unfortunate that few if any works operating in the tradition of Stuart Hall systematically explored the logics and dynamics of colonialism, empire, and their impact upon British society.
- ¹⁰ The *BJS* is useful here because it is the journal this essay is published in, and so tests Favell’s claim that my essay preaches to the converted. It is also useful because it is surely considered to be a mainstream sociology journal.
- ¹¹ This is exactly why, to respond to Favell’s critique that my book *PTST* spends too much time on “philosophy”, I enlist perspectival realism in the philosophy of social science: to provide a counter argument to skeptics who think that postcolonial thought is either too particularistic or too relativistic. See, for example, Go (2016b).
- ¹² This sociology of sociology thus *requires* considerations of epistemology that Krause (this issue) and Favell (this issue) take to be irrelevant. Standpoint theory is an epistemology that invites us to be reflexive about social position shapes how we come to know what we know and what we proclaim to know. And to be clear, the epistemology is not reducible to critical realism; it is also standpoint epistemology (cf. Krause, this issue). I lean on Harding (1993) for this and related issues.
- ¹³ Indian sociology for the most part has long struggled with the hegemony of S.N. Srivinas who was hardly representative of an anticolonial standpoint. As Patel’s work on Srivinas hints (Patel, 2005), he was more of an indigenous and nationalist sociologist whose thinking relied upon the classic exemplar of the imperial episteme: British anthropology. Is this the same thing as “anticolonial” sociology? Patel even goes so far as to say that Srivinas and much of Indian sociology is itself an effect of colonial modernity that reproduces rather than challenges “the language of colonialism” (Patel, 2021, p. 37).
- ¹⁴ Interestingly, while Krause points out that my attempt to find an “anticolonial” tradition of social thought problematically requires a “test,” one of the motivations behind trying to find such a tradition is in response to demands that I specify such a “test” exactly. In response to previous work where I’ve argued that we might rethink the canon by bringing in more postcolonial or anticolonial standpoints, critics have asked: but you don’t you need to have some criteria by which new standpoints are brought in? Hence they were explicitly asking for such more precise parameters; that is, to construct a “test.” I am here referring to Michael Burawoy’s response to a conference presentation of mine at the American Sociological Association. One also sees similar querying of earlier work by Connell and her definition of what counts as “Southern Theory” (e.g., see Arjomand, 2008).
- ¹⁵ Valluvan and Kapoor (this issue) also notice the geoeconomic essentialism of some strands of the decolonial project. This supports my reading of the decolonial project.
- ¹⁶ See also discussed in Mignolo (2011a, p. 47).
- ¹⁷ Mignolo is most relational in his book *Local Histories/Global Designs* where he questions essentialism that is tied to territorialism (Mignolo, 2000). But again, throughout his and others’ discussions, this relationalism often veers into cultural essentialism.
- ¹⁸ These confounding references to culture, language or geography become legible when we recognize that the decolonial project is rooted in and seeks alternative philosophies rather than social theories. For all their claims about seeking to transcend disciplines, much of the language and aims of the some of proponents of the decolonial project are squarely in philosophical discourses (and/or comparative literature studies) where categories like “Western” and “non-Western” traditions of philosophy and thought are more common and have not yet suffered as much critique as they have in anthropology or sociology. A category like “Western philosophy” is still in circulation.

- ¹⁹ This difference noted, I do think that these two terms are essentially referring to a similar attempt to critique and transcend the imperial standpoint, just that do so in somewhat different ways, and they each signify different intellectual traditions and genealogies (one going back to the Latin American scholars and the other to South Asian thinkers in the humanities).
- ²⁰ Quijano is often referred to as a “sociologist”, but it is surely the case that the “decolonial” movement’s foremost voice in the US-British academy has been Mignolo, who is not a social scientist in the academic sense and is instead a “philosopher and semiotician” (Bhabra, 2014, p. 115).
- ²¹ This attempt to work within and generate an *immanent* critique is the same sort of project that anticolonial thinkers themselves adopt, from W.E.B. DuBois to Fanon and beyond (Go 2016, pp. 29–33).
- ²² This is not to insinuate a *positivist* social science; to the contrary, I see positivist and realist sociologies as distinct.
- ²³ Against those who claim that poverty in Britain is the fault of individuals’ biology or ability, we can point to systems of exploitation that explain poverty. Against those who claim that poorer countries are poor because of their internal inadequacies, we can show that the history of colonialism and capitalism best explain those countries’ current state. Against those who think that more police leads to less crime, we can show that it does not and that it instead causes harms gone unseen by most of society. Against those who say that capitalism is the best option for humanity, we can point to its inherent contradictions and violent impact.
- ²⁴ Of course Marx did discuss issues of race and ethnicity (e.g., Anderson, 2010), but the issue is not this; it is (i) whether the categories of his theory of capital center those dimensions of stratification in capitalism or not (for more on this see Go, 2016b, pp. 85–87) and (ii) whether it is complete in itself or if it should be supplemented with anticolonial thinking too.
- ²⁵ I do think Marxist thought, as a system of thought, can and should be part of a new critical anticolonial approach, and I maintain it is a powerful way of thinking for social science and for politics. My argument would be, however, is that it must be built upon and extended with the insights of anticolonialists—this is the same point made by anticolonial thinkers like Césaire and Fanon themselves.
- ²⁶ The assumption or claim, typically made against postcolonial thought, that it prevents such transnational alliances because operates from a problematic bifurcation between “North” and “South” or “Europe” and the “Rest” is by now old-hat and is just plain wrong. As I’ve argued repeatedly (see Go 2016), such analytic bifurcations is the mark of imperial sociology, including Marxist sociology (by taking as its model for struggle the struggle of wage laborers in England), not anticolonial thought. The latter strove exactly to overcome those bifurcations. For one among many examples, see Fanon’s postcolonial cosmopolitanism (Go, 2013a).

REFERENCES

- Al-Hardan, A. (2018). The sociological canon reconfigured: Empire, colonial critique, and contemporary sociology. *International Sociology*, 33(5), 545–557. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580918791967>
- Anderson, K. B. (2010). *Marx at the margins*. University of Chicago Press.
- Arjomand, S. A. (2008). Southern theory: An illusion. Review of Raewyn Connell, southern theory. The global dynamics of knowledge in social science. *European Journal of Sociology*, 49(03), 546–549. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003975609000356>
- Bautista, B., & Cynthia Rose, M. (2000). The social sciences in the Philippines: Reflections on trends and developments. *Philippine Studies*, 48(2), 175–208.
- Bhabra, G. (2007). *Rethinking modernity: Postcolonialism and the sociological imagination*. Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Bhabra, G. (2014). Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues. *Postcolonial Studies*, 17(2), 115–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966414>
- Bhabra, G. (2017). Brexit, trump, and ‘methodological whiteness’: On the misrecognition of race and class. *British Journal of Sociology*, 68(S1), S214–S32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12317>
- Bhabra, G. (2022). Relations of extraction, relations of redistribution: Empire, nation, and the construction of the British welfare state. *British Journal of Sociology*, 73(1), 4–15.
- Bhabra, G. K., & Holmwood, J. (2021). *Colonialism and modern social theory*. Polity.
- Césaire, A. (1955). *Discours sur le colonialisme*.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton University Press.
- Collins, H., & Patricia (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Connell, R. (2007). *Southern theory*. Polity Press.
- Connell, R. (2013). Under southern skies. *Political Power and Social Theory*, 25, 173–182.
- Connell, R. (2018). Decolonizing sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 47(4), 399–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306118779811>
- Connell, R. W. (1997). Why is classical theory classical? *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(6), 1511–1557. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231125>

- DuBois, W. E. B. (1897). *The Philadelphia Negro*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Edwards, Z. (2020). Postcolonial sociology as a remedy for global diffusion theory. *The Sociological Review*, 68(6), 1179–1195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120916132>
- Getachew, A. (2019). *Worldmaking after empire*. Princeton University Press.
- Getachew, A., & Mantena, K. (2021). Anticolonialism and the decolonization of political theory. *Critical Times*, 4(3), 359–388. <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-9355193>
- Go, J. (2006). Postcolonial theory. In B. S. Turner (Ed.), *The cambridge dictionary of sociology* (pp. 452–454). Cambridge University Press.
- Go, J. (2009). The 'new' sociology of empire and colonialism. *Sociology Compass*, 3(5), 775–788. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2009.00232.x>
- Go, J. (2011). *Patterns of empire: The British and American empires, 1688-present*. Cambridge University Press.
- Go, J. (2013a). Fanon's postcolonial cosmopolitanism. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 16(2), 208–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431012462448>
- Go, J. (2016a). Global sociology, turning South: Perspectival realism and the southern standpoint. *Sociologica: Italian Journal of Sociology*, 10(2), 1–42.
- Go, J. (2016b). *Postcolonial thought and social theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Go, J. (2020b). Race, empire and epistemic exclusion: Or the structures of sociological thought. *Sociological Theory*, 38(2), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275120926213>
- Go, J., & Lawson, G. (2017). *Global Historical sociology*. Cambridge Cambridge University Press.
- Go, J., & Lawson, G. (2020). Response to reviewers - global historical sociology. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(6), 914–920. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1838205>
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in westernized universities. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 11(1), 73–90.
- Hammer, R. (2017). Epistemic ruptures: History, practice, and the anticolonial imagination. *Political Power and Social Theory*, 32, 153–180.
- Hammer, R., & White, A. I. R. (2018). Toward a sociology of colonial subjectivity: Political agency in Haiti and Liberia. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 5(2), 215–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218799369>
- Harding, S. (1993). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is strong objectivity? In Alcoff, L., Petter, E. (Eds.), *Feminist epistemologies* (pp. 49–82). Routledge.
- Joseph-Salisbury, R., Ashe, S., & Alexander, C. (2020). *Race and ethnicity in British sociology*. British Sociological Association.
- Koram, K. (2022). *Uncommon wealth: Britain and the aftermath of empire*. John Murray.
- Magubane, Z. (2004). *Bringing the empire home: Race, class, and gender in Britain and colonial South Africa*. University of Chicago Press.
- Magubane, Z. (2005). Overlapping territories and intertwined histories: Historical sociology's global imagination. In J. Adams, E. S. Clemens, & A. S. Orloff (Eds.), *Remaking modernity: Politics, history, sociology* (pp. 92–108). Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2000). *Local histories/global Designs*. Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2), 449–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>
- Mignolo, W. (2011a). *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2011b). Epistemic disobedience and the decolonial option: A manifesto. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(2), 44–66. <https://doi.org/10.5070/t412011807>
- Moosavi, L. (2022). Turning the decolonial gaze towards ourselves: Decolonising the curriculum and 'decolonial reflexivity' in sociology and social theory. *Sociology*, 57(1), 137–156. Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221096037>
- Morris, A. (2015). *The scholar denied: W.E.B. DuBois and the birth of modern sociology*. University of California Press.
- Patel, S. (2005). On Srinivas's sociology. *Sociological Bulletin*, 54(1), 101–111.
- Patel, S. (2021). Nationalist ideas and the colonial episteme: The antinomies structuring sociological traditions of India. *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, 34(1), 28–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12311>
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, eurocentrism and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views From South*, 1, 533–580.
- Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2/3), 168–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>
- Reed, I. A. (2013). Theoretical labors necessary for a global sociology: Critique of Raewyn Connell's southern theory. *Political Power and Social Theory*, 25, 157–171.
- Robinson, C. (2000). *Black Marxism: The making of the Black radical tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. Knopf : Distributed by Random House.
- Seidman, S., & Said, E. (1996). Empire and knowledge: More troubles, new opportunities for sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 25(3), 313–316. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2077439>
- Smith, D. E. (1987). *Researching the everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Northeastern University Press.

- Smith, D. E. (1997). From the margins: Women's standpoint as a method of inquiry in the social sciences. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 1(1), 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097185249700100106>
- Walsh, C. E., & Mignolo, W. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.
- White, A. I. R. (2023). *Epidemic orientalism: Race, capital, and the governance of infectious disease*. Stanford University Press.

How to cite this article: Go, J. (2023). Anticolonial thought, the sociological imagination, and social science: A reply to critics. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13025>