

# Postcolonialism and Sociology

*E-Mail-Debate by Manuela Boatcă, Sina Farzjin and Julian Go*

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> *Sina Farzjin*: In recent debates we see a growing number of publica-  
> tions trying to mobilize postcolonial thought for sociology, often with  
> an emphasis on social theory. Take for example Gurminder Bhambra's  
> global social theory project,<sup>1</sup> Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha's  
> *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon*, and of course your book, Julian,  
> *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*, or *Decolonizing European Sociology*  
> that you, Manuela, published together with Encarnacion Gutierrez  
> Rodriguez and Sérgio Costa. Some even speak of a »post-colonial«,  
> »de-colonial« or »southern« turn. How would you describe the com-  
> mon denominator behind those interventions (if there is one)?

> *Julian Go*: This is a great question, because I think you're hitting upon  
> an important feature of this work: which is that it is, at this point in  
> time, indeterminate. I do think there is a sort of »turn« or perhaps a  
> sort of »movement«, but it is open-ended and disparate, with different  
> labels (»postcolonial«, »decolonial«, »southern«) and different approa-  
> ches. To my mind, though, they all can be considered part of a larger  
> »movement« in the sense that they do share a basic critique. That is, a  
> critique of certain traditional components of sociological theory and  
> research. That critique is wide-ranging, but at its core I think it's a cri-  
> tique of, crudely speaking »Eurocentrism«, but Eurocentrism not just  
> in the sense of »studying only Europe« but also in the very theoretical  
> approaches, concepts and methods of sociology. Simply put, sociology  
> has for too long represented what I call in my book »the imperial

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1 <http://globalsocialtheory.org/>

> standpoint« and the »imperial episteme«. That imperial standpoint and  
 > episteme is not just about representing a geographic location, i.e.  
 > »Europe«. It's more that it carries with it certain analytic tendencies  
 > (metrocentrism, essentialism, analytic bifurcation, the occlusion of  
 > empire and colonialism, the suppression of subaltern agency and so  
 > on – which I discuss further in my book) that merit reconsideration. I'd  
 > say that all of those different works you mention, and others, such as  
 > Connell's *Southern Theory* or the »indigenous sociology« movement of the  
 > 1990s, share this basic critique, i.e. that sociology has for too long been  
 > Eurocentric, in that it has for too long only represented the imperial  
 > standpoint, even if they would not necessarily put the matter in those  
 > terms, and even if they each probably only critique certain aspects of  
 > what I am crudely calling here »Eurocentrism«, and even if there are  
 > different names for the critique (e.g. »decolonial« vs. »postcolonial«).

> I think the difference lies in what scholars think is the best route  
 > out of that Eurocentrism; how to overcome sociology's imperial stand-  
 > point. Some follow Bhambra's innovative intervention in *Rethinking*  
 > *Modernity*, which is essentially to reconstruct »connected histories«.  
 > This idea of »connected histories« comes from transnational historians  
 > (Bhambra cites the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam's work for the  
 > concept). For Bhambra's approach, to put it in an admittedly simplis-  
 > tic way, it means bringing the history of colonialism into our theories  
 > and research, and in some ways extends the basic move made by  
 > Wallersteinian world-systems theory: to see things holistically (I argue  
 > in my book it means a form of relationalism, but it can mean different  
 > things to different people of course). But at a different end of the  
 > pole, scholars offer something else entirely: that is to find entirely new  
 > theories beyond the traditional sociological canon and located in or  
 > from the colonial or postcolonial world. This is what Alatas, Connell  
 > and others have been pursuing (and in Alatas' case, for over a decade).  
 > There are other approaches too. For instance, I suspect – and I may  
 > be wrong – that in the UK, the term »postcolonial sociology« basically  
 > means that you are offering critical analyses of race and ethnicity  
 > (hence, »connected histories« in the UK context seems to mean taking  
 > colonialism seriously, which in turn means taking race seriously).  
 > Nasar Meer has discussed this recently. In the US context, where the  
 > »sociology of race and ethnicity« is already well-established, this is not  
 > exactly what postcolonial sociology has come to mean.

> There are probably other possible alternatives as well, which I think  
> Manuela Boatcă's edited collection speaks to. In any case, I do think  
> there is some kind of shared project going on, just that their labels,  
> exact points of critique, and solutions vary.

> *Manuela Boatcă*: Focusing on common denominators rather than on  
> the different labels currently in use is a very good place to start. It  
> helps to highlight the fact that central features of »postcolonial«, »de-  
> colonial« and »southern« approaches, such as the critique of Euro-  
> centrism, have been around for a very long time, although they didn't  
> use any of the present labels or explicit postcolonial vocabulary. They  
> did, however, intend (and succeed) to bring about a shift of perspec-  
> tive that would definitely count as postcolonial today.

> Latin American dependency theories are one such example. As  
> early as the 1960s and 70s, they countered the dominant approach of  
> the US modernization school with a fundamental critique of Eurocen-  
> tric conceptions of history as well as with a theory and policy of deve-  
> lopment from a »Third World« perspective that included a new socio-  
> logical vocabulary and an innovative political economy of capitalism  
> based on a relational model of center-periphery dependency. The fact  
> that this approach did not initiate a worldwide sociological »turn« at  
> the time (although it impacted Latin American, African, and to some  
> extent Indian sociologies and was crucial in the emergence of Imma-  
> nuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis) is in itself worthy of postco-  
> lonial analysis. Its fate had a lot to do with the fact that it was mainly  
> developed in the periphery and its findings published more often in  
> Spanish and Portuguese than in English, so it was less visible and less  
> accessible in the global North, as well as less valued there.

> When postcolonial studies, centered mainly on British colonialism,  
> started gaining visibility in academic centers of the global North, depen-  
> dency theories no longer fitted neither the timeline nor the vocabulary  
> that postcolonialism offered, since Latin America had been colonized  
> two centuries before the rise of the British Empire and had become in-  
> dependent long before the majority of British colonies. This is what  
> Fernando Coronil, writing an entry on Latin American decolonial  
> thought for the Postcolonial Studies Reader in 2004, termed »Elephants  
> in the Americas«: The different genealogy, vocabulary, and location of  
> Latin American decoloniality – which owes a lot to dependency theories

> and shares some of its prominent authors, notably Aníbal Quijano –  
 > made it an awkward fit with postcolonial terminology despite the many  
 > common denominators. That does not make the common ground any  
 > less important for a radical critique of social theory, which is why de-  
 > dependency theories feature prominently in Connell's *Southern Theory*.

> I therefore tend to be rather skeptical of self-proclaimed »twists  
 > and turns« and »paradigmatic shifts« in sociology. I would insist in-  
 > stead on the fact that a collective critical endeavor committed to the  
 > critique of Eurocentrism/Occidentalism, to decoloniality, or to post-  
 > colonial sociology needs to excavate, acknowledge, and work through  
 > the continuities between dependency theory, Third World and Chicana  
 > feminism, Indian subaltern studies, African philosophy, indigenous  
 > knowledges, decoloniality and postcolonial studies in order to develop  
 > a self-understanding of the commonalities on which it can build. This  
 > is of course also linked to different academic settings with their own  
 > histories, politics of naming and of exclusion. Immanuel Wallerstein  
 > has been mainly viewed as a historian in Germany, which made it  
 > easier to relegate world-systems analysis to a past period of the disci-  
 > pline of history, rather than see it as a radical critique of social science  
 > and the academic division of labor. Neither the report of the Gul-  
 > benkian commission, which Wallerstein presided, and which was titled  
 > *Open the Social Sciences* in 1996, nor Wallerstein's *Unthinking Social  
 > Science. The Limits of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paradigms* were widely discussed in  
 > Germany as specifically sociological critiques targeting Eurocentrism.  
 > Sanjay Subrahmanyam's work on connected histories entered German  
 > academia through the prominent role it played in Sebastian Conrad  
 > and Shalini Randeria's 2002 German-language collection *Beyond Euro-  
 > centrism. Postcolonial Perspectives in History and Cultural Studies* and Ran-  
 > deria's related concept of »entangled histories of uneven modernities«,  
 > both of which have since become standard reading for postcolonial  
 > curricula. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's 1994 volume *Unthinking  
 > Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, despite having been pub-  
 > lished in English or maybe because of it, but certainly because it is not  
 > primarily aimed at sociology, has received far less attention in Ger-  
 > many although it speaks to the same issues. And Samir Amīn's 1989  
 > book *Eurocentrism: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism* is some-  
 > times referenced for its title, yet has tended to circulate more widely in  
 > French-speaking contexts than outside of them despite having been

- > published in English. Here, the hierarchy operating among what  
> Mignolo called imperial languages still serves to distribute attention,  
> postcolonial visibility, and academic currency.
- > *JG*: Thanks Manuela! I completely agree with your point that there are  
> many shared perspectives among seemingly diverse schools of thought,  
> which too often go overlooked. It is precisely for this reason that I am  
> often dismayed by the infighting that is sometimes seen in some of  
> these discussions, by which I mean the tendency for some folks to try to  
> argue that one or another school or thinker is inferior or less worthy  
> than others. Now, I do think it is important to recognize differences  
> among the projects, as well as commonalities. I also think it is crucial to  
> reflect upon the various limitations as well as the benefits of each of the  
> different thinkers, schools, or approaches – whatever you want to call  
> them. But reflecting about the limits of certain approaches over others  
> is not the same thing as dismissing them as subpar or worthy of igno-  
> ring, which is, unfortunately, what I see happening by some proponents  
> of some of these schools of thought. Hopefully this is something that  
> can be overcome by a new sensibility that aims for a perspectival plura-  
> lism among these different schools rather than pure opposition (I argue  
> for »perspectival realism« in my book, for instance, which aims to move  
> towards such a type of plural realism).
- > *MB*: Yes, you are totally right about the infighting that only leads to  
> fragmentation of otherwise shared bases for a genuine critique and  
> change. To be clear, I was also not pleading for glossing over differen-  
> ces among approaches and projects. By mentioning earlier projects for  
> which the critique of Eurocentrism was fundamental, I instead meant  
> to draw attention to the fact that acknowledging genealogies of  
> thought should be particularly important to postcolonial and decolo-  
> nial critique. While new approaches (not only in the social sciences)  
> have often tended to overstate their own originality and to advocate a  
> new »turn« as a result, doing so usually happens by disavowing the con-  
> tribution of previous approaches. In the case of postcolonial thought,  
> this would amount to disavowing Southern approaches, indigenous  
> and Black European thought, among others, which easily happens  
> once the postcolonial becomes a fashionable label (even this critique  
> has already been voiced a while ago by people like Ella Shohat and

> Arif Dirlik). I think it is therefore all the more important for postcolo-  
> nially-minded scholars to recognize the many ways in which critiques  
> of Eurocentrism, imperialism, and colonialism have informed »Sou-  
> thern« thinking and critical approaches for quite some time and draw  
> from the common bases instead of (sometimes) reinventing the wheel.

> *SF*: Thank you both for this first mapping of a rather broad terrain.  
> The ›infighting‹ you mention seems (at least in parts) like yet another  
> manifestation of what Andrew Abbott describes as ›fractal heuristics‹:  
> argumentative patterns occurring on different scales in sociological  
> subfields (correct me if I am wrong). But maybe we could step back  
> for a moment from the internal differences you describe and talk  
> about the disciplinary reception. If I understand you, Manuela, cor-  
> rectly the reception of most approaches in German sociology beyond  
> specialized subfields is rather reluctant. Do you see any recent chan-  
> ges? And how would both of you describe the impact of those critical  
> perspectives on Eurocentrism within sociology in different regional or  
> national academic settings?

> *JG*: I think you're exactly right, Sina, regarding ›fractal heuristics‹. Regar-  
> ding your question about different national contexts and their reception  
> to critiques of eurocentrism, I can only speak of the US and perhaps  
> from what I can perceive of the UK. Regarding the UK, my perception  
> is that »postcolonial« sociology has become one way in which what  
> North American sociologists might think of as »the sociology of race«  
> enters UK sociological discourse. In other words, my guess – and it's  
> only a guess – is that, in the UK, critical sociologies of race have been  
> comparably absent; and so the postcolonial approach becomes the um-  
> brella for it. Postcolonial sociology and critical sociologies of racial in-  
> equality thereby become equated. This makes some sense: postcolonial  
> theory is about empire and colonialism, and the connections between  
> the British empire and England's racial minorities are clear (as the recent  
> controversy over the Windrush generation shows starkly). In such a  
> context, to critique empire as postcolonial theory is also to critique racial  
> inequality. Now, I could be completely wrong about this. Maybe post-  
> colonial theory and the sociology of race in the UK have not been equa-  
> ted. But the recent article by Nasar Meer on »Race« and »post-colonialism«  
> discusses this and suggests that this may be partially true at least.

> The US is different. What is often called the »sociology of race and  
> ethnicity« has long been institutionalized. There are various ASA sec-  
> tions relating to it, and there's a journal of the ASA called *Sociology of*  
> *Race and Ethnicity*. It has typically been about African-Americans, Asian  
> Americans, Latinas(os)/Chicanas(os), Native-American groups, and  
> their experiences in the US, as well as racial and ethnic stratification  
> within the US. But that work is varied, and does not always if ever  
> critique Eurocentrism. It is typically methodologically-nationalist and  
> internalist. It does not typically address empire. So as a sociological  
> discourse, the postcolonial approach and its critique of Eurocentrism  
> and imperialism is separate from that subfield. This is reflected in how  
> W.E.B. Du Bois has been received in the US. He is known, of course;  
> and he is read. But sociologists tend to read him for what he has to  
> say about the African-American experience in the United States. They  
> are too often blind to his larger critiques of colonialism and empire.

> Of the postcolonial theory and the sociology of race, the former is  
> lesser known in the US when known at all. I attribute this to the  
> general »exceptionalist« discourse in the US about empire: the belief  
> that the US has never really been an empire. Given that belief, which  
> even many traditional sociologists have long bought into, it is difficult  
> to get sociologists – even sociologists of race – to think in postcolo-  
> nial terms – i.e. to embed their analyses of race within a critique of  
> empire and colonialism. The challenges I have faced in US sociology  
> have therefore been especially layered. I have had to spend much of  
> my early work and continuing work towards getting other sociologists  
> to acknowledge the very existence of American empire. Only then can  
> I introduce the postcolonial critique. At the same time, I've recently  
> had to engage conventional sociologists who work on »race and ethni-  
> city« and try to convey to them the importance of going beyond meth-  
> odological nationalism and to recognize the importance of empire for  
> the current condition of racial minorities in the US, forthcoming in  
> *Postcolonial Possibilities for the Sociology of Race*.

> The good news is that, in recent years, not only has American  
> empire become acknowledged more and more, so too has postcolo-  
> nial sociology. There is now an emerging group of younger scholars  
> especially who are open to the postcolonial critique. But it is still an  
> uphill battle.

> MB: The analogy with »fractal heuristics« works well until the question  
> is raised what discipline or field the different argumentative patterns  
> are subfields of – sociology? Or postcolonialism? In Germany, for a  
> long time, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives were not consid-  
> ered to be part of sociology at all. Worse still, they were seen as what  
> Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez 1999 has called »third-degree im-  
> ports«. Ideas borrowed, first, from the humanities, in German *Litera-  
> tur- und Kulturwissenschaften*, second, from a different cultural space, i.e.  
> the Anglophone world, and third, from a different historical context,  
> i.e. one that was »truly« postcolonial, like the British context – since  
> Germany’s role in the history of colonialism and the present of  
> coloniality was considered insignificant in comparison. We have come  
> a very long way since then, and one can definitely say that postcolonial  
> perspectives have made significant inroads in the social sciences in the  
> past fifteen years. There is now a solid corpus of literature in German  
> on classics of post- and decolonial perspectives as well as on their  
> impact and further development of their perspectives in sociology,  
> political science, geography etc. But it is still possible, indeed it is the  
> rule, to get a sociology or political science degree without ever having  
> been exposed to postcolonial thought. It would however not be pos-  
> sible to get a degree in sociology without having studied functiona-  
> lism, or modernization theory. This is why I said I was skeptical about  
> celebrating any »postcolonial turn« just yet, either as regards the equa-  
> tion of critical sociologies of race with postcolonial sociology, as Julian  
> suggests for the UK, or with respect to any important sociology of  
> race as in the US case. Not only are there no established equivalents in  
> Germany to the sociology of race and ethnicity institutionalized in the  
> US, and no departments of Ethnic Studies, Race and Ethnicity Stu-  
> dies, or Turkish-German studies, for that matter – to mirror them.  
> But, more important still, »race« as a term is still not used in most  
> German social science texts in the German original. The original term  
> *Rasse* is reserved for reference to its use during World War II and thus  
> to what is considered a tragic exception in the history of an otherwise  
> racism-free national society that has since learnt from its mistakes.  
> The term is therefore disconnected from its systematic, century-long  
> use in the transatlantic slave trade and in the German colonies in  
> Africa as well as from its impact on today’s hierarchization of human  
> groups. In this respect, the treatment of the term in Germany is



> somewhat similar to the situation that Étienne Balibar had diagnosed  
> for France in 1991 when he said that »migration« functioned there as a  
> euphemism for »race«, but »race« was never used. In many ways, we  
> are still dealing with third-degree imports when it comes to both post-  
> coloniality and the critical sociology of race in many parts of Europe.

> In saying so, I am not equating Europe with Germany and France.  
> There is a significant amount of work being undertaken in Hungary,  
> Poland and Romania and their respective (and growing) diasporas on  
> the political economy of empire, critical whiteness theory, and decolo-  
> niality. Yet this is a younger generation, mostly precariously employed  
> and with no institutional say in their countries or a limited say in the  
> diaspora and is not representative of how social sciences are being  
> taught in these countries, either. Moreover, the postcolonial label is  
> being appropriated for nationalistic, right-wing arguments, most nota-  
> bly in Poland, but in Hungary and Romania, too. I would venture to  
> say that, to this day, the sociology of race is more strongly represented  
> in those parts of the world in which the migration of enslaved Afri-  
> cans played a significant role and which use »race« as a census catego-  
> ry for this very reason. I tried to show this in *Von den Siegern geschrieben*  
> in 2011. That renders »race« sayable and a category of sociological  
> analysis at the same time. That is the case for the US and many parts  
> of South America and the Caribbean. The UK introduced »race« in its  
> census in 1991 in response to increasing immigration from the Com-  
> monwealth. To what extent the sociology of race becomes a sociology  
> of empire, if it ever does so, is very different from case to case, and I  
> agree with Julian's assessment of why the former did not necessarily  
> translate into the latter in the US case. Brazil has a well-established  
> and complex sociology of race, yet postcolonial and even decolonial  
> perspectives have had a very hard time gaining any institutional foot-  
> hold in Brazilian social sciences and to my knowledge have not be-  
> come commonplace today.

> *SF*: Different national histories of colonialism and the fact that post-  
> colonial ideas and themes entered academic discourse via the humani-  
> ties are probably important reasons for the delayed reception in Ger-  
> many and the US. What would you say changes when concepts deve-  
> loped in disciplines such as literary and cultural studies »travel« into  
> sociology? Could you identify important readjustments accompanying

> these shifts or do you see (or even hope for) the emergence of a new  
> transdisciplinary field?

> Also, my impression is that many themes and issues closely related  
> to postcolonial perspectives – such as going beyond methodological  
> nationalism or reflecting critically about the normative implications of  
> modernization theories – initiate growing research activities in recent  
> years – just see for example this year's DGS Congress theme paper  
> »The Complex Dynamics of Global and Local Developments« which  
> we published in last year's no. 4 of this journal. Yet still sociologists  
> tend to shy away from the label postcolonialism, not only because of  
> its ties to the humanities but its close relation to social activism and  
> the anticolonial movement. Many of the first wave thinkers and their  
> successors were or became deeply involved in political activism  
> beyond academic settings – Julian mentioned W.E.B. Du Bois who is  
> probably a very prominent example. How does this conflict between  
> the norm of a »value free sociology« and political activism affect the  
> field today (if it does) and what is your take on it?

> *JG*: These are thought-provoking questions that probably require  
> much more space than we have here. But let me try. As for the first  
> issue about cross-disciplinary »traveling« from the humanities into so-  
> ciology: I think the main adjustment that needs to happen is (1) the  
> concepts and theories should be transformed into empirically-verifi-  
> cable social-theoretical propositions (by which I mean propositions not  
> about literary texts but about the broader social world) and (2) these  
> propositions or »hypotheses« must be empirically validated.

> For instance, in US literary postcolonial studies, one can find many  
> implicit claims about the social world, claims emerging from founding  
> postcolonial theorists or related theories. These include the claim that  
> knowledge is power, that racist or Orientalist images shape social  
> action or policy, that colonialism shaped all aspects of modernity, and  
> so on. Social scientists would want to turn these implicit claims into  
> empirically verifiable propositions, and also dig deeper empirically. Is  
> knowledge really power? What kinds of knowledge feed into power  
> relations, and under what conditions? How exactly has colonialism  
> shaped modernity, if at all, and in what respects? What are the diffe-  
> rent relationships between racial discourse on the one hand and state  
> policy or violence on the other? And so on.

> A related difference is that some literary postcolonial studies take an individual's social experience as empirical validation for a social generality. If Fanon experienced racism in France, there must be racism across France and the experience he had must be how racism operated in all of France. As a social scientist, I would be more inclined to ask further questions, such as »how general was Fanon's experience? Is this really how racism operated, or were there other ways too?« I am not saying we must deny the individuals' experience or its importance. To the contrary, I believe that the best postcolonial studies begin from the lived experiences of colonized subjects. But I think that postcolonial studies in the humanities is inclined to take the individual's experience as the only thing of relevance, or as evidence for wider social processes, while social scientists are more interested see how those individual experiences connect to broader social patterns and mechanisms. This is exactly what C. Wright Mills called »the sociological imagination«; and it's exactly what is needed when pushing postcolonial theory from the humanities into social science.

> And my larger claim is that we need social scientific postcolonial studies, alongside postcolonial studies in the humanities. We cannot persuade skeptics – whether they be other scholars or the public – about the importance of colonialism, colonialism's legacies, and empire in our lives without providing some empirical validation. We can of course appeal to their human values through art and literature. But social science has a distinct contribution to make; specifically, to offer up empirical evidence of general social processes. This is why I argue in my book that a transdisciplinary project is not only possible but also desirable and essential.

> Now to the question of the values. I do not see a fundamental conflict between »science/value free sociology« on the one hand and »political activism« based upon values on the other. Instead, I see a necessary relation: the former informs the latter (and hopefully the latter informs the former). I am not saying they are exactly the same thing. To say that would be to fall into an epistemic relativism which I think we must resist at all costs (and which forces us into not being able to say which »news« is »fake« or not; and which would provide us now means of ever saying that colonialism is important for shaping social relations, etc.). So I'd instead be Weberian about it (one of the few times I'd be Weberian): I think that the essence of so-called

> »scientific« sociology (i.e. so-called »value free sociology«) lies in its pro-  
 > cedures for making, assessing and validating claims about the social  
 > world, and that these procedures are »value free« to the extent that,  
 > while they might emerge from certain values, they in themselves do  
 > not dictate values. To give one example: the method of regression  
 > analysis emerges from statistical reasoning which in turn has some  
 > origins in racist thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But if I use regression  
 > analysis, does that mean that my analysis dictates racist values? If I use  
 > regression analysis to show that the number one cause of a country's  
 > position in the socioeconomic world system is whether they had been  
 > colonized or not, does that mean that my analysis – just by virtue of  
 > the fact that the statistical procedure has racist origins – is racist?

> This is of course a complicated issue, but to my mind it can also be  
 > put quite simply: we cannot fight oppression in society if we do not  
 > understand the logics, dynamics and forms of oppression in society.  
 > And a postcolonial sociology can help us do that.

> *MB*: I thoroughly agree with you, Sina, that one reason for the delayed  
 > reception of postcolonial approaches in both Germany and the US  
 > stems from the perception that they were a domain of the humanities.  
 > As someone who has started out as a humanities scholar herself – I  
 > studied German and English philology in Bucharest before turning to  
 > sociology – I tend to see the synergies rather than the differences be-  
 > tween the humanities and sociology. What attracted me most to socio-  
 > logic was a class in sociolinguistics that I had taken as part of a philolo-  
 > gy curriculum. What drew me to qualitative research was Fairclough's  
 > critical discourse analysis, of which I had learnt as part of my English  
 > philology training, and which is widely used in sociology to this day.  
 > So, as social scientists, we need to be aware of the fact that discipli-  
 > nary boundaries are historical as well as political constructions, and  
 > that the emergence of the social sciences, as well as the intellectual  
 > division of labor between sociology, anthropology, political science,  
 > economics, and history, was concomitant as well as complicit with  
 > empire, something that Wallerstein's report *Open the Social Sciences* had  
 > already pointed out long ago. Therefore, while I agree with Julian that  
 > social scientists are more interested in broader patterns than in  
 > individual experiences, I do not think that social science's distinct  
 > contribution – in opposition to literary studies – is to provide empiri-

> cal evidence to general social processes. I believe sociology and literary  
> studies have a lot in common in terms of theory production, and that  
> literary studies, but also film studies and cultural studies more generally  
> – offer us some of the richest sources through which the teaching of  
> sociological theory can become more concrete as well as empirically  
> grounded (although not statistically representative).

> And yes, you are right, the perceived conflict between the norm of  
> a value-free sociology and a politically engaged postcolonial approach  
> still drives a wedge between sociology and postcolonial studies. On  
> the one hand, this is due to a misrepresentation of Max Weber's stan-  
> ce, or, rather, an overgeneralization of his view of only one phase of  
> the research process. He actually never advocated a value-free sociolo-  
> gy, and was well aware of the fact that researchers' class, upbringing,  
> and social location shape their interests and, thus, the research ques-  
> tions they regard as relevant. He did advocate value-freedom, but only  
> when assessing the results of empirically researching the questions  
> thus formed. He, however, again conceded that the recommendations  
> derived from the research results are shaped by individual values. So,  
> on the other hand, this misrepresentation of sociology as value-free  
> has led to a postulate of objectivity in social science research that  
> seems to be at odds with political activism. Yet, as we have all learnt  
> from feminist research, the personal is political and standpoint is cru-  
> cial. Postcolonialism is very similar to feminist standpoint theory in  
> this respect, in that it points out that there is no neutral, objective  
> standpoint, that perspectives are geopolitically located, shaped by  
> class, gender, and race-imbued values and historically contingent.  
> Weber would have agreed, and had indeed described his own position  
> as one derived »from the standpoint of Germanism« when arguing  
> against Polish immigration into Germany at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>  
> century, as I discussed in 2013. The Weberian sociology bequeathed  
> to us through Parsons and modernization theory has simplified his  
> position to advocate for value-freedom, but postcolonial sociology  
> can bring the political back into the social without the risk of losing  
> the explanatory power of sociology in the process.

- > *SF*: Many thanks to both of you for those insights into a very active research field. My last question is rather short: Are there any further readings beside the publications mentioned above you would recommend to our readers?
- > *MB*: As far as further reading is concerned, I think a crucial resource are non-English language publications. Postcolonialism is about so much more than the British Empire, or what gets published in English. For readers of Spanish, I recommend Catherine Walsh and Santiago Castro-Gómez *Indisciplinar las ciencias sociales: Geopolíticas del conocimiento y colonialidad del poder* published in 2002, and *Feminismos y poscolonialidad: descolonizando el feminismo desde y en América Latina*, edited by Karina Bidaseca and Vanesa Vazquez Laba in 2011. For an understanding of postcolonialism as applying to Eastern Europe as well as going beyond the humanities/social sciences divide have a look at Madina Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo *Learning to unlearn: Decolonial reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (2012) or *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe. Contexts, Practices and Politics* published in 2016 by Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpani.
- > *JG*: Regarding books to read beyond what we've been discussing, I think that postcolonial sociology can learn a lot from Black Marxism and Native-American/Indigenous studies. It is already connected to these areas, but the links should be deepened. I'd therefore recommend, for starters, Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* from 1983 and *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith published in 2012.

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