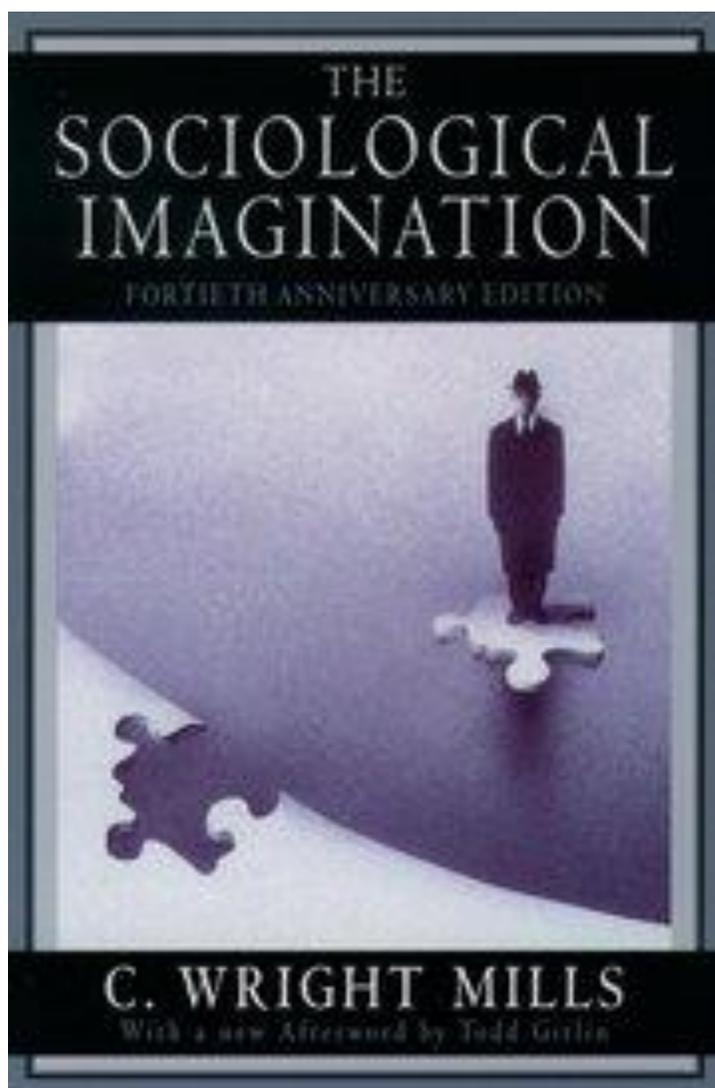


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Postcolonial Feminisms and Introducing Sociology in the Imperium

by Jyoti Puri



The first week of classes usually surfaces the problem of introductions—how to present myself to students and sociology to neophytes.¹ I have been teaching at a liberal arts and professional studies institution in northeastern United States for many years, but these issues seem more complex than ever in the introductory sociology class that I offer regularly. Mixed in with the excitement and adrenalin rush that usually quicken my walk toward the first class are confounding questions of what and how much to say about myself, how I came to know sociology, what I think sociology is and how it can be useful.

The problem of presenting the self in the classroom is fundamentally about locating it and, as Erving Goffman (1959) anticipated, managing its perception by students. In a setting marked by the imperatives of thinking, learning, and communicating, students' first impressions of the instructor are formed not just in terms of what is said but perhaps more so through expressions that one gives off—through name, race, linguistic accent. As someone born and raised in India, I am never more conscious of my non-Judeo-Christian name, brownness, accented English, and non-verbal self-expression than in the first few minutes of a new class, when it's not clear how best to navigate the differences of race, social class, gender expression, age, sexuality, nation, culture that swirl among us. Would it be more forthright to establish distance from a predominantly young, white, middle-class, U.S.-born, Judeo-Christian student body by noting that I migrated here as an adult and have not been through an undergraduate degree program here? Or, would it be more effective to establish common ground by noting that though my formative experiences were elsewhere, I have lived in this country for many years. Seeking to sidestep the anxious fretting self, elicited by the prospect of introduction, I usually choose to emphasize my affiliation to the institution, the department, and teaching and research interests.

More than these subjective aspects, though, it is the problem of introducing the discipline—what is sociology, how is it defined, what are its objects of study—that I find vexing. My first meaningful engagement with sociology was through the lens of cultural studies, especially the contributions of scholars such as Stuart Hall, foregrounding the importance of colonial legacies particularly in relation to race, representation, metropolitan and postcolonial nationalisms, and questions of belonging. And, it was when I encountered the glimmers of what would be later called postcolonial feminisms through the writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Inderpal Grewal, Ann Laura Stoler, M. Jacqui Alexander, and others that my relationship to sociology came to be further modulated through attention to the histories of modernity and their gendered, racialized, and sexualized dimensions. Surely, ambivalence can be generative, but it can also be difficult to communicate to students taking the introductory class in sociology, as they do typically at my institution, in order to either meet a general education requirement or because it looks generally interesting.

The vast majority of introductory sociology texts and readers in the United States resolve this problem of the discipline's presentation by gesturing to or providing excerpts from C. Wright Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination—as the ability to connect the life of an individual with the history of a society or the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man (sic) and society, of biography and history, of self and world (p. 4). Starting with the sociological imagination not only helps distill the discipline for the uninitiated, but it boldly presents sociology as a call to critical awareness and action. Seeking to rescue sociology from its tedium and depoliticization by the 1950s in the United States, Mills' attention to social structures and individual agency, the relevance of history, and analysis of social apathy and unease can be most useful. But, the sociological imagination can also track closely with a conservative, Euro-American-centric sociology, whereby the foundational concepts of self, individual, and the social present pedagogical barriers to fostering a more complex relational perception of the past and the present.

In what follows, I identify the ambivalences implicit in the sociological imagination, especially in the axiomatic weaving of self and society, from the perspective of teaching an introductory sociology course. Reading the sociological imagination from a postcolonial feminist perspective, I note how it can and does encourage an inherently bounded and ahistorical assessment of sociology. Grounding the discussion in a recent iteration of the introductory sociology course, I reflect on the strategies that I use—successfully and unsuccessfully—toward a different and more complex understanding of sociology and its concerns. Keeping focus on especially the first part of the course design rather than the students, my purpose here is to gesture toward the tensions that continue to grip sociology and, more to the point, reflect on the kind of pedagogical labor necessary to connect what I teach to what I write. The first section of this essay briefly reviews postcolonial theory and its tense relationship to sociology in anticipation of the following segment, which offers a close reading of the sociological imagination and concepts of self and society.

Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Sociology

Although multiple strands of postcolonial studies exist, its signature lies in unraveling histories and legacies of Euro-American colonialisms and imperialisms. For sure, colonial studies has a longer lineage, but setting postcolonial studies apart is a theoretical orientation concerned with the production of self and other—for example, colonizer and colonized, metropole and colony, white men and brown women—during and in the aftermath of colonial and imperial rule. Less concerned with periodizing or describing colonialism and post-colonialism, postcolonial theory is driven by a focus on the *relational*, if unequal, constitution of paradigmatic notions of selfhood as West and its others. Following Edward Said (1978), the emphasis has been on revealing the politics of knowledge production through which relations, practices, and legacies of colonial rule continue to endure (think here not only of

ongoing representations of the West or, for instance, Christianity, but also questionable notions of emerging markets, Islam, yoga, etc.)

The singular contribution of postcolonial feminist scholars has been to disaggregate notions of the self and social (nation, society, colony, etc.) by emphasizing the constitutive effects of gender, sexuality, and race.² For instance, postcolonial feminists have routinely called attention to the ways in which the “woman question” powered colonial practices and mediated relations between colonial and native male elites. In her turn, Ann Laura Stoler (2002) has understood the household as social to reveal the interplay of race, gender, sexuality, and nationalism in such intimate spaces. And, not least, postcolonial feminists have questioned Western feminist dualisms of self and other, and “here” and “there”—for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1991) indictment of Western feminism’s self-referential productions of “Third World Women.”

Despite its considerable impact on a variety of other disciplines, postcolonial theory’s impress on sociology has been less than encouraging. Mainstream U.S. sociology has remained untouched even as the discipline’s relationship to postcolonial theory is more complicated than might appear at first glance. Julian Go (2013a) notes that from 2003 to 2011 not a single session included the word postcolonial in its title at the annual American Sociological Meetings, except that the assessment is predicated on disregarding the pockets of engagement with postcolonial theory that may not be named as such.³ What is undeniable, though, is a lack of systematic engagement with postcolonial scholarship, leading Gurminder Bhambra (2007a) to lament the missing postcolonial revolution in sociology and provoking Stuart Hall (1996) to note the lack of global and non-European dimensions in the grand narrative of sociology.

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Extending such appraisals of the discipline, Bhambra (2007b) argues that relying axiomatically on notions of rupture and difference, sociology frames the West as intrinsically different from so-called traditional and pre-modern societies and fosters Eurocentric assumptions of sociology. This is to say, sociology begins by taking modernity as its disciplinary object and views the West as the autochthonous protagonist of this history, thereby embedding Eurocentrism into its foundations (Bhambra 2007b, Bortolucci and Jansen 2013, Hall 1996). The upshot of such assessments is a more complex and paradoxical

rendering of sociology, whereby Euro-American-centric representations persist even as a variety of critical interventions—through transnational feminist sociology, public sociology, queer of color critique—are pressing against the discipline in ways that cannot be glossed over.

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Considered from a pedagogical standpoint, especially in relation to the introductory sociology course, the challenges of representing the discipline are manifold. How does one introduce sociology from a postcolonial feminist (and queer) perspective to students at my institution who are either completely new to the field or, when asked about their exposure to it, in a few cases have taken one course during their high school years? Can such a course be taught in a way that doesn’t simply reaffirm select narratives, especially the drama of modernity, the French and Industrial Revolutions, and such, but attempts to remake sociology by integrating the banalities of racial histories and colonial rule. Yet, would including such disciplinary tensions dilute a strong foundation in sociology for students who despite their promise are at an earlier phase of their intellectual development, often in their first or second semesters? Would, in fact, adding postcolonial scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ann Laura Stoler and others to the syllabus make the course unrecognizable to other sociologists? To what extent does starting with the sociological imagination clear the path or not toward this more complex, relational, and pluralistic view of sociology for students? Carrying forward these difficulties, I begin by engaging Mills’ writings on the sociological imagination, especially the eponymous book’s introductory chapter, “The Promise,” which is typically excerpted in readers, while reflecting on experiences of teaching the introductory sociology course.

Revisiting the Sociological Imagination, Destabilizing the Self and Society

Students taking the introductory sociology course with me begin with excerpts on the sociological imagination. Tracking Mills’ (1959) depiction of a period of acute social transition and instability, mildly described as “earthquakes of change” (p. 4), they follow his outline of chronic personal troubles and upheavals at the societal and worldwide level. As reflected in the class discussions, students relate easily to his examples of personal troubles, such as unemployment, marriage, and financial instability, if less so to societal issues in the manner of industrialization, the bureaucratization of authority and violence, monumental changes in world history due to decolonization and social revolutions. They respond to his emphasis on the importance of developing connections between individual lives and societal histories, or what he describes as the sociological imagination. Seeing the value

of this approach, these mostly woman-identified, middle-class and upwardly mobile working-class students speak surely in their first written assignment about societal impact on the difficulties of personal relationships, eating disorders, making it to college, bullying, body image, and such. Indeed, as one student said in the most recent iteration of the course, "I like the sociological imagination, I get it."

Effective in fostering a more critical awareness of the impact of social structures and forces on our lives, the sociological imagination for Mills is also an attempt at rescuing sociology from a morass of abstruse theory, vapid empiricism, and pre-occupation with method for method's sake. Perhaps therefore, students taking introduction to sociology respond to his efforts to breathe life into the discipline, make it more socially relevant, and jar them out of a sense of complacency or social paralysis due to what he sees as a loss of moral orientation. Yet, Mills' endorsement of sociology as a means of critically navigating societies and a world amidst monumental changes and crises is discomfiting, for it reproduces what Bhambra (2007b) has identified as sociology's role in defining the social through notions of rupture, modernity, and crisis. Thus, lost in this view of sociology is the discursive production of (perpetual) crises, transitions, and upheavals and, more to the point, the framing of the social along the lines of individual selves and societies! Undoubtedly important about Mills' intervention is that he gives, in the words of Todd Gitlin (date unavailable), human tragedy a social root through the sociological imagination, except that it matters how its constitutive elements—self and society—are being represented.

Dualistic Selves and Societies

Throughout the chapter, Mills speaks interchangeably of the individual, the personal, and the self, which can be read in more than one way—toward a more radical publicly-oriented sociology or one that falsely universalizes a culturally and historically derived discipline. In parts of the book, he gestures toward the self as relational and, ideally, self-aware, which resonates with how feminists and queer scholars of color have used self-narratives and personal histories to rethink the production of knowledge and redefine the meaning of activism. For example, Andrea Smith (2005) centers Native women, interspersing their personal accounts throughout her book, to understand afresh issues of violence, sexuality, and the genocide of American Indians. In his turn, Mills extends the sociological imagination, for instance, to place an Indian Brahmin from the 1850s in relation to a pioneer farmer from Illinois and, in the appendix to the book, he exhorts sociologists in the making toward self-reflexive sociological practice, although these discussions do not figure into the introductory part of the text which gestures toward a universalized vision of the self.

A product of his time and setting, Mills implies a particular view of the self, which in his case, Gitlin notes, was full of "frontier insouciance."⁴ As a result of an itinerant history of schooling in Austin, Texas, Madison, Wisconsin, and then living in Maryland and New York, Mills had this to say about himself, "Intellectually and culturally

I am as 'self-made' as it is possible to be."⁵ In equal parts brave and lacking in the sociological imagination as Mills' self-characterization might be, the point is that the self is being invoked in ways that is tied to the rise of individualism in U.S. history. Thus, even though the personal may be an obvious starting point in an introductory sociology course, it activates cultural beliefs about autonomous individualism, as has been routinely apparent in class discussions and written assignments and the faultlines of this strategy become evident not just in sociology courses, but in other fields as well.

In an interdisciplinary first-year writing class at my institution, for instance, an assignment on narrating the self served as a means of locating it in preparation for engaging difference—especially along the lines of race, class, and gender. That is, the thinking goes, once we can get students to identify their selves, consider their personal troubles, then not only can we, following Mills, initiate their sociological imagination, but also help them bridge the frequently confounding differences between self and other. But, this view reinforces what Dawn Rae Davis (2010) has called the "mirroring effect," whereby course materials will center the experiences of culturally dominant students. Although drawn from women's studies courses, the insight is relevant to the discussion here, for the sociological imagination, too, presents the personal as the starting point of knowledge and it does not, in the words of Leela Fernandes (2013), encourage students to discover how to suspend their selves when learning about the world. Thus, as evident over and over again, students can be eloquent in class discussions on the sociological imagination about the influences of the family, media on their selves, but can remain unaware of the implications of their lack of interest in social events, such as the Arab Spring.⁶

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Taken further, this notion of the self reactivates binaries of self and the constitutive other. Reading the work of prominent symbolic interactionists from a Buddhist theoretical lens, Matthew Immergut and Peter Kaufman (2014) compellingly note that sociology is shaped by a self-other dualism due to which the self is inherently and implicitly conceptualized as threatened and anxious; this,

despite Mead's notion of the self as socially constructed and interdependent. Immergut and Kaufman's take could benefit from engaging questions of power in their assessments of the self-other dualism, which would help explain why the anxious self often shows up in the classroom, especially around questions of racism and racial differences. Consider here the tensions, both overt and especially the awkward silences, discomforts, and unease that bubble up when attempting to come to grips with race, racial privileges, immigration into the United States from Central America, and such. Animating the apprehensive self through the sociological imagination in class or through an assignment is likely to imperil it further once questions of privilege and inequality are centered, thereby hardening the barriers to confronting self and racialized others.

Further, the sociological imagination, the ability to "achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves" (Mills, 1959, p. 5) can be interpreted to connect the individual self to society and, implicitly, the national state. "The Promise" largely links the individual to society and societally bound social structures, even as it weaves in the language of milieu here and there, which is to say, notions of historical and social context emphasized in the sociological imagination need not be limited to national states. Indeed, as a later chapter, "Uses of History," in the book attests, Mills (1959) took a skeptical look toward nation-states, seeing it as a humanly created history-making unit. Yet, a previous chapter, "The Human Variety," also unambiguously states that even though social scientists do not always limit themselves to national social structures, this focus provides a suitable level of generality.

Insofar as society is understood as an aggregate of associated persons (institutions and structures), the national state is not the only or even the obvious meaning of society. Still, sociology has a long history of discursively producing the national state through the concept of society, normalizing it as the irreducible container of individuals, and undergirding it with a hierarchical assessment of the world, which syncs with the discussion in Mills' introductory chapter. The point is not to efface the ambivalences and paradoxes in Mills' program for sociology, but to note its dilemmas as a prototype for knowing the discipline. In a rendition of sociology that privileges the self and connects it to society within an international system of states, one that is also devoid of any historical address of the colonial contexts in which nationalisms in the metropolises and the colonies took shape, it becomes harder than ever to dislodge widespread assumptions about the "givenness" of the United States, its inherent distinctions from other nations, or its hierarchical place in the world.

Adapting the Sociological Imagination

That the sociological imagination continues to serve as a cornerstone of a conservative, Eurocentric and modernist vision of the discipline is well evident in the annals of sociology.⁷ But, seeking to stretch Mills toward a different interpretation of sociology, in the most recent version of the course I sought to deploy it differently than before.

Instead of muddling through my ambivalence around the sociological imagination, I strove to address head-on its strengths and limitations in setting the stage for a more critical and complicated understanding of sociology. Useful about this concept is that it helps me give students a definitive response to the opening question—what is distinctive about sociology—especially as they begin to encounter the discipline (perhaps for the first and last time). Pairing the excerpts with Donna Gaines' (2013) well-known piece, "Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead-End Kids," and my institution's version of the "It Gets Better" campaign, notwithstanding the valid criticisms directed against it, seemed to be effective in grappling with the sociological imagination.⁸ Illustrating the sociological imagination in these ways reinforced Mills' point about the self as socially influenced, but also honed the awareness that some selves are more vulnerable to the social and the perception that some of us, especially those who conform to dominant expectations of gender and sexuality, are privileged as a result of the social.

Highlighting the usefulness of the sociological imagination, as well as explicitly noting how the concept needs to be extended, I underscored four points during the inaugural discussions. First, selves are not autonomous and that we are relationally differentiated—lesbian identities only make sense relative to what is understood as being gay, heterosexual, bisexual, for instance. Second, every personal story matters (and of course it does), except that some lives are more vulnerable to social effects due to, for example, racial, class, religious affiliations, gender expression and/or sexual orientation. Third, mediating the relationship between self and societies are institutional sites and cultural spaces, such as family, peer groups, and community (where homophobia, transphobia, racism, and such can be most intensely experienced or even mitigated).

Of these, the second and third points seemed to resonate more clearly, provoking lively class discussions and active contributions especially from students who have known marginalization. For example, a queer-identified White student spoke about how growing up in New York City amidst a progressive school environment made life easier for her, while a Muslim-identified student narrated how being part of her religious community helps her navigate anti-Islamic sentiments in the United States. The insights, the personal offerings came fast and thick on these points, while the fourth point—that the social is contingently defined, whereby it can be the national state or a regional context or global circuits and spaces—did not appear to register, for it did not flow clearly from the readings and examples that I had used. Not surprisingly, then, ideas of the self as connected and the social as contingently understood were not reflected in the short assignment asking students to apply the sociological imagination. Rather, this assignment, for which students could use a variety of creative modes such as a poem, an op-ed, short story, among others, was more successful as this mix of women, queer, and transgender-identified, White, Latina, Asian, middle- and working-class students wrote compellingly about how the relations between self and society are modulated by power and privilege.

Continuing the strand about the distinctiveness of sociology, the next segment exposed students to the concept of social constructionism, showing that notions of self, society, institutions, spaces, beliefs, perceptions, the world, indeed our reality, are socially constructed. Assigning readings explaining this concept and also pinning it to a focus on race and gender was designed to complicate received wisdom about nature and biology. More so, seeing race and gender as socially constructed early on in the syllabus not only meant that they did not come in as “add-ons” later in the semester, but this also encouraged students to see the self in terms of groups and collectives—African Americans, women, etc.—and apprehend the social as historically constituted. For instance, it allowed me to note the shifting understandings of race across time and the ways in which these mutable discourses affect people collectively. Through these readings and discussions on race and gender, I could also more seamlessly return to the point that selves are relationally, but hierarchically, produced. One student’s rueful admission, that this was all shaking up her worldview, was more heartening than I was able to express in class at the time.

The recent version of the introductory sociology course was my partially successful effort at presenting students with a living and breathing discipline, centrally concerned with issues of power—race, colonialism, social class, gender, sexuality, and nation.

If re-positioning the sociological imagination and coupling it with social constructionism aided in presenting a solid though nuanced introduction to sociology, then the next section allowed me to grapple with the dilemmas of historicizing sociology. Departing from the previous iterations of the introductory course, I added a new section, “Histories and Legacies of the Discipline.” Providing students with an overview of the history of sociology and the play of the French and Industrial Revolutions, the readings worked their way to the holy trinity—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. The glazed looks on students’ faces during this overview, which also included a history of sociology in the United States, gave me pause about the extent to which I ought to delve into these pasts. “The readings were difficult to get through,” they collectively admitted in heavy tones. Their responses also redoubled my efforts to help them see the continued relevance of the early interventions—through connecting Marx to the Occupy movements and connecting Weber to debutante balls that still happen in the United States. Not only did this resuscitate the students, but it also allowed me to engage their attention on the missing histories of race and colonialism in sociology’s nascence.

Laying bare the promise and pitfalls of sociology in its early years, the students and I arrived at the importance of W.E.B. Dubois’ (1903/1996) interventions around race and then turned to selections from Huanani-Kay Trask’s (1999)

writings on the colonization of Hawai’i in the next segment, “Revising the Discipline: Race, Colonialism, Nation.” Bringing “home” the ongoing colonial history of mainland United States and then transitioning to questions of nation, nationalism, and belonging in the contemporary context through a cluster of lively readings were my attempts at illustrating how what counts as the social is both contingent and connected. That is, contemporary discourses of nationalism and belonging play out against the foil of the United States as a settler colonial society, the anxieties of immigration, especially from Mexico, among other things. The extent to which these readings and discussions were effective is unclear since I never tested the students on them, though I take as encouraging the one comment on the evaluations that more coverage of colonialism and race would be welcome. This approach enabled me to make them attentive to the politics of knowledge production that create canons selectively, neglect histories unfolding during the discipline’s heyday, and normalize the national as the social. Most of all, it set the stage for presenting sociology as a complex, relevant, imperfect, and dynamic discipline.

The recent version of the introductory sociology course was my partially successful effort at presenting students with a living and breathing discipline, centrally concerned with issues of power—race, colonialism, social class, gender, sexuality, and nation. It was aimed at conveying understandings of the self—at the individual, collective, even national level—as different but relational, relational but unequal. And, more, it was designed to reinforce the simple point that we—the self, the community, the nation—are all inextricably linked to one another through our pasts and our contentious presents. The purpose was to help students see the social as potentially ranging from communities and neighborhoods (through one of the books assigned) to institutions (such as the media) to nations and transnational circuits of migration. Thus, by the time we got to carework and migration toward the end of class, it was possible to build on the unequal linkages between nations of the global north and south and the (mostly) immigrant women who provide the labor and the (mostly) women whose lives are facilitated as a result.

Did this attempt at presenting sociology through a postcolonial feminist (and queer) framework make a difference in terms of how students understood and will take forward sociology’s promise? I could not tell from the class discussions or the assignments, for they did not seem significantly different compared to previous iterations of the course. It appears, though, that the student evaluations are more enthusiastic than ever (our students tend to be generous to us as instructors), with more specific comments about learning about sociology, becoming interested in the discipline, and understanding sociological concepts. Yet, will students recall these concepts or will they more easily remember the specifics of the examples used to illustrate them? Will this approach energize students to intervene in the world around them? Will any of them ever wish to take another sociology course again? I am not sure, but it felt a lot better teaching a version of the course that is closer to the sociology I know and believe in.

Coda

The sociological imagination can invoke and encourage different interpretations of sociology. On the one hand, it may herald a notion of the self that is most likely to register with the lives of the privileged, for those who stand most to gain by the discourses of individuality, autonomy, sovereignty. Instead of the counter-potential of the self that is implicit in Mills and well evident in the appraisals of feminist and queer scholars of color, it becomes neutralizing. It is not that other ways of thinking about the self or relating to the self do not emerge in the classroom. Rather, the problem is that the sociological imagination can exhort inferences of the self and society as discrete and autonomous.

Much like the self, society can be implicitly represented through the sociological imagination as self-contained, rather than fundamentally porous and profoundly interconnected. Parallel to the work of having to complicate the self once it is already elicited in a simplistic way, pursuing this line of thinking with issues such as immigration in class presents the problem of having to trouble the notion of borders after having already affirmed them. The crux of the difficulties raised through interpreting the sociological imagination thus is that while it can usefully open up discussions about the impact of society on our lives and the possibility of individual agency, it stops short of laying the foundations for us, as instructors and students, to come to grips with dominant discourses of individualism, racism, nationalism, immigration, and such that are pervasive in the United States.

At the same time, it is possible to teach the sociological imagination differently, but only by pressing against disciplinary legacies. As a visionary sociologist held to be ahead of his time, Mills lays the scaffold for such an endeavor, to an extent. Extending Mills, for example, Michael Burawoy (2008) notes in his "Open Letter to C. Wright Mills" that needed alongside the sociological imagination is a political imagination, one that exhorts sociologists toward engagement with civil society and the creation of a more just social world. At the heart of Burawoy's response to Mills is the spot-on assessment, following Foucault, that knowledge is not liberating. Taking this Foucauldian critique further, other scholars seek a more fundamental disciplinary shift by bringing to bear a postcolonial critique on sociology. Thus, José H. Bortoluci and Robert Jansen (2013) call for a postcolonial sociology that more thoroughly engages, and contributes to, the study of colonial and postcolonial Latin America. In their turn, Sérgio Costa (2007) and Jayati Lal (2008) each calls for (de) provincializing sociology (pace Dipesh Chakrabarty), by way of enriching the discipline and historicizing especially its American roots that appear speciously universal. And, we could take such critical evaluations further still in the vein of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) has described as, "Europe as an Other." This, for Spivak, means uncovering how Europe triumphed as a Sovereign Subject by constituting its others, and offering a critique of imperialism that would, and here is the crucial point, restore a sovereignty for the

lost self of the colonies so that Europe could be put in place of the other that it always was. Decentering Europe and the United States is a challenge that I still have to come to grips with in my introductory sociology class, but it is well worth pursuing, collectively.

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Notes

¹ This paper is indebted to the rich conversations with Hyun Sook Kim, comments from Vrushali Patil, and feedback from the editors, Frinde Maher and Linda Dittmar.

² Questions of race and racialization were always at the heart of postcolonial theory due to the influences of pioneering scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Edward Said. Feminist scholars, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ann Stoler, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde, among others, variously honed thinking on the co-constitutions of colonial rule, anti-colonial nationalism, race, gender, and sexuality.

³ For example, the Caucus on Transnational Approaches to Gender and Sexuality, part of the American Sociological Association, includes a number of feminist scholars who routinely pay attention to the imperatives of post/colonialism. For example, see the work of Vrushali Patil (2007) or the piece by H. J. Kim-Puri (2005). Further, some sociologists engaging postcolonial theory have sought refuge outside the discipline's professional organizations. More recent work on sociology and postcolonial theory includes volumes by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Manuela Boatcă and Sérgio Costa (2010) and Julian Go (2013b).

⁴ <http://www.uni-muenster.de/PeaCon/dgs-mills/mills-texte/GitlinMills.htm>, consulted on September 15, 2014.

⁵ Quoted in Gitlin, *ibid*.

⁶ It is not that students are uninterested in other cultures, such as when several of them recently asked to read about gender in other contexts. But, when probed further, the interest was motivated less by learning and curiosity and more by the desire to encounter the unusual, the different, or what they see as the precursors to modern notions of queer and transgender identities. Davis (2010) also calls this the touristic imaginary, through which students wish to encounter a racial and/or global other in ways that do not unsettle or critically engage their privilege; p. 145.

⁷ For example, see the numerous editions of introductory sociology textbooks by the eminent sociologist, Anthony Giddens, including his book, *Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction*.

⁸ "It Gets Better" was an internet-based video project initiated by Dan Savage and Terry Miller in September 2010 to combat despair and suicide among LGBT youth, who are socially isolated and vulnerable to bullying or harm. This inspired hundreds of versions disseminated through YouTube, including one from my institution, aimed at showing support for LGBT youth. For a particularly useful critique of the "It Gets Better" project, see Grzanka and Mann (2014).



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