

BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

Julian Go, *Postcolonial thought and social theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, 265 pp., \$48.58 paper (9780190625146), \$108.95 hard-cover (9780190625139).

In *Post Colonial Thought and Social Theory*, Go presents a postcolonial challenge to social theory and sociology's understanding of the social. Go combines postcolonial thought, which is embodied in the works of Spivak, Said and W.E.B. Du Bois, with sociology's theoretical roots. He does this to illustrate the impact the imperial episteme still has on the epistemological foundation of contemporary sociology, and therefore the knowledge in which it produces. The purpose of the book, according to Go, is not to tear down sociology so that it is no longer a functioning discipline. But rather, to provide an alternative to discovering knowledge that incorporates more than one theory, and more than one way of knowing. As Go persuasively argues, if sociology fails to incorporate postcolonial theory into its mainstream modes of thinking, it is at risk of losing relevance during a time when epistemological challenges are reshaping ways of knowing. To avoid this, Go explores an epistemic project for the social sciences, which he calls the 'third wave of postcolonial thought'.

Go illustrates how classic sociological theory, which provides a foundation for modern sociology, was built upon ideas of empire. Colonialism, imperialism, and Euro-domination were central in developing the content of sociology, social theory and the sociological imagination, he argues. Go asserts that not only was social theory born in the *context* of empire, but to some extent, born *for* the dominance and preservation of empire. Through this analysis, he explores social theory as a knowledge producing entity that is not independent of its social context and location.

Go contrasts social theory with postcolonial thought, a modality that arose in the wake of decolonization and gained significant influence in the humanities. Postcolonial thought occurred in two waves. The first was born out of the anticolonial struggle (such as Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois) and focused on critiquing Western provinciality and racism, by challenging the modes of thought produced by the Enlightenment. The second wave built upon the first and took roots in academia (with authors such as Said, Spivak) and emphasized the Western construction of colonized people as objects of rule that effectively subjugated the abil-

ity for the subaltern to speak for themselves. The second wave sought to articulate a cultural world view that challenged the metrocentric way of producing knowledge. By combining postcolonial thought and social theory, two seemingly contradictory bodies of thought, Go suggests that social theory has potential to become more relatable and sustainable. Presenting sociology with a postcolonial challenge, according to Go, provides sociology with a perspective or world view that recognizes that “social forms, relations, social knowledge, and culture generally are embedded within a history and structure of global hierarchy and relations of power” (p. 197).

Go argues that due to sociology’s metrocentrism, there are blind spots within sociology that prevent it from being reflexive: analytic bifurcation, occlusion of empire, suppression of colonial agency, Orientalism, and substantialism. Go offers a compelling alternative for sociology, by reconciling social theory and postcolonial thought into a third postcolonial wave that emphasizes the epistemic action of postcolonial relationalism. Drawing on Bourdieu’s field theory and Latour’s actor network theory, Go illustrates how postcolonial relationalism draws attention to the relations between groups that have been thought to be distinct and independent of one another. It reveals how the colonized and the colonizer are mutually constituted, and thus cannot be bifurcated as sociology has done in the past and continues to do presently. Postcolonial relationalism is a tool in which Go is arguing to employ to avoid this weakness he sees within sociological analysis.

This perspective is employed to counter metrocentrism and push postcolonial thought into the sphere of the sociology. By bringing forth the subaltern standpoint approach – which recaptures subjugated views and knowledges of the colonized and intersect them within sociology’s main theories, concepts, and categories – the purpose becomes not merely to illustrate that these knowledges exist, but to use them to categorically shift our sociological understanding of the social and infuse an intellectual reorientation of sociology: he is advocating for a pluralism in terms of how we theoretically analyze the social.

Within this book, Go uses disruptive terms such as “deployed” (2), “mobilized” (2), and “assault” (29), to call out sociology’s imperial standpoint. This language linguistically reinforces the objective of the postcolonial challenge. By using these words, Go forces sociologists to question the pillars upon which social theory is built by unsettling our understanding of the impact that the origins of social theory has on our contemporary tools of analysis and production of knowledge. These terms highlight Go’s attempt to challenge the very ‘objectivity’ that is afforded social theory. This enables the reader, supported by Go’s clarity

in writing, to receive a coherent and convincing argument for why sociology should be critiqued through a postcolonial lens, and the importance of the epistemic project of the third wave of postcolonial thought to reorient the focus of social theory

Although this book compellingly outlines the waves of postcolonial thought and its potential impact on social theory, there remain questions about how a postcolonial sociology can be accomplished in practice. Go has accurately and convincingly presented an argument for the epistemological work that needs to be done, and highlights how Bourdieu's field theory and Latour's actor network theory can be strong starting points for this new analytical and theoretical approach. But, how do we practically liberate social theory from its imperial ontological origins? This point is not explored in as much depth, when compared with the discussion of postcolonial thought and social theory, leaving it open for future analysis and research to be done on this topic.

This book is ideal for audiences with some background in social theory and postcolonial thought who are looking to critically analyze and reflect on the discipline of sociology. Go is arguing for a perspective that affords more than one world view onto a specific issue. He is promoting a sociological understanding that allows for theoretical pluralism, rather than theoretical monism and a postcolonial challenge that amounts to far more than just attacking sociology's metrocentrism. Go offers a compelling argument to combine both social theory and postcolonial thought to bring in a level of reflexivity that will allow sociologists to not only accept that their conception of knowledge and the social is socially situated, but to actively seek other forms and voices of knowledge to aid in the formation of concepts, categories and theories.

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