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Bringing the Global Home: Students Research Local Areas through Postcolonial Perspectives

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Abstract

This article describes a class that draws on postcolonial insights to create a global sociological imagination. Postcolonial approaches can make visible how global connections have shaped our local environments even if these relations are not always immediately visible. Specifically, students in this class highlight how global relations, such as the slave trade, settler colonialism, racial formations, or migrations, constitute the local. If we start to reconnect global ties, how do we interpret local inequalities differently? Whose voices do we fail to listen to, and why are these global linkages and histories silenced or forgotten? The article describes the development of the curriculum and local student research projects as the main class assignment. It then discusses how students grapple to understand how global ties are and always have been crucial to our everyday lives and think critically about giving voice to perspectives that have conventionally been marginalized.

Keywords

globalization, sociological imagination, social theory, critical pedagogy, critical thinking

> *Symbolically, we have been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea.* (Hall 1991:48)

> *Here for instance is a lovely British home, with green lawns, appropriate furnishings and a retinue of well-trained servants. Within is a young woman, well trained and well dressed, intelligent and high-minded. She is fingering the ivory keys of a grand piano and pondering the problem of her summer vacation. . . . How far is such a person responsible for the crimes of colonialism? It will in all probability not occur to her that she has any responsibility whatsoever, and that may well be true. Equally, it may be true that her income is the result of starvation, theft, and murder; that it involves ignorance, disease, and crime on the part of thousands; that the system which sustains the security, leisure, and comfort she enjoys is based on the suppression, exploitation, and slavery of the majority of mankind.* (Du Bois [1946] 2015:41–42)

Sugar, manufactured by slave labor in the colonial Caribbean, has always been a part of the British cup of tea. Ivory keys, likely exported from colonial Africa, make up a European woman's piano's keys. Her income, comfort, and security, Du Bois ([1946] 2015) writes, were a result of and dependent on colonial exploitation. These quotes point to

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the ways in which the history of modernity and everyday life in the West have been co-constitutive with colonial domination, exploitation, and slavery. Yet these global connections, such as histories of empire, colonialism, the slave trade, or migrations, are often hidden, and perspectives that may tell of these connections are often silenced. In fact, in the sociology classroom, we sometimes separate "domestic" issues from their global contexts; we tend to bifurcate the *here* and *there*, and we tend to think of global sociology as somehow pertaining to the *there*.

In this article, I argue that postcolonial insights offer a powerful way to create a global sociological imagination by teaching students how to make global connections visible in their everyday lives and communities. I also suggest that it gives students the theoretical tools to better understand local social inequalities around topics such as migration or race. At heart, the postcolonial perspective aims to question our sense of place in the world. It asks: If we acknowledge that the world has "always already" been global, how would that help us better understand contemporary sociological issues? If we recover global relations, how would we interpret local struggles differently? And why are some histories and some perspectives privileged while others are forgotten or actively suppressed?

In what follows, I describe a seminar-style undergraduate course titled *Global Sociology: Colonialism and the Making of the Modern World*, which seeks to address these questions. I discuss how and why I developed this curriculum and then created a learning tool—local student research projects—in which students could practice the postcolonial lens. I show how this approach enabled students to research local sites of interest and then led them to uncover conventionally hidden global histories, relations, and voices. In doing so, students began to change their understanding of their everyday surroundings, and it helped to "bring the global home." I start by illustrating how I found that postcolonial theories could inform global sociology curricula and describe some of the core readings I used in my class. I then sketch how students engaged this theoretical lens as part of their own research projects based in our university and community. Describing some of the student projects, I discuss learning outcomes and challenges alongside possible ways for instructors to address these concerns. In sum, I hope to show that through a postcolonial teaching framework, students can unearth histories and global relations that are often forgotten but are nevertheless—if not more—foundational to our understanding of our everyday lives.

THE POSTCOLONIAL LENS

Global sociologists have long made the case that we must look beyond the nation-state to understand important sociological processes, yet we still often fail to center colonialism and imperialism as central structuring forces in the making of the modern world (Bhambra 2007; Shilliam 2010). The social sciences continue to face a colonial legacy because our ways of looking at the world, the questions we ask, and the perspectives we favor reflect a colonial standpoint (Escobar 2007; Go 2016; Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 2002, 2007, 2012; Quijano 2000, 2007). This becomes clear not only in the rarity of colonial histories in sociology curricula but also in our tendency to draw from theorists from the Global North who "see and speak" from the metropole (Burawoy 2010; Connell 2007; Go 2013; Santos 2008). The postcolonial perspective asks us to start our approach from the perspectives of marginalized populations, which leads sociologists to ask and make visible new questions about the global (Go 2016). This recent postcolonial and decolonial influence on sociology could also profoundly inform global sociological teaching. Building on these literatures, I started an initial attempt to construct a global sociology curriculum that seeks to address some of these issues and to show how in turn this postcolonial emphasis allows for new insights into our immediate environments.

The central premise of my seminar was the following: Modernity found its inception with the colonial conquest of the Americas (Wynter 1995), so our current moment and the social science we use to understand it cannot remain divorced from the analysis of colonial processes. Go (2016) suggests that these colonial legacies in our knowledge creation manifest themselves in two main ways. On the one hand, we tend to analytically separate histories of colonialism—or global histories more broadly—from histories of the metropole, seeing modernity "here" and colonialism "over there." On the other hand, we silence voices, concerns, questions, and viewpoints from colonized or racialized subjects or those who embody global connections, such as migrants. With this curriculum, I attempted to address both shortcomings through making local-global connections explicit and highlighting marginalized voices.

During class, these attempts to "decolonize" occurred in two stages. First, to *reintegrate* "here"

and "over there," we discussed the importance of global colonial histories and their continuing influence on our self-understanding. We drew on literatures that highlight how localities are embedded in and influenced by global relations, even if this is not always immediately obvious. Second, to *reorient* student research projects and focus on concerns of otherwise marginalized subjects, we engaged with postcolonial thinkers. These texts allowed students to ask research questions from different perspectives and shine a light on local-global connections. In the following section, I will explain both approaches in greater detail.

Reintegration: Contrapuntal Analysis and Relational Sociology

Postcolonial analytical strategies were deeply influenced by what Edward Said (1993) called "contrapuntal reading." Contrapuntal reading aims to make visible supposedly *external* influences on *internal* events, even when the external seems to be analytically divorced from the event in question. This means that we expand our analytical lens beyond the seemingly local event to follow the global traces inherent in local signs. As a second step, we then analyze why we may be prone to privileging the local and severing these global ties. For example, Said (1998) notes that Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* tells the story of an English family whose wealth depends on slave-based sugar production in the British West Indies. Even though the narrative focuses on the family's "local" story, Victorian life was structurally dependent on Britain's global colonial linkages. Through contrapuntal reading, Said follows the provenance of objects, such as sugar and tea, that feature in the novel as supposedly marginal objects, and he thereby reconnects the colonial context to the local narrative. When Stuart Hall points to the sugar in the British cup of tea or when Du Bois points to the ivory keys of a European woman's piano, they also both engage in this kind of contrapuntal reading. Therefore, while contrapuntal reading took hold in the Humanities to recover the colonial Other in literature, it could also be a powerful tool for sociological analysis.

Postcolonial sociologists have demonstrated how for sociology, contrapuntal reading rests on reconstituting relations that have been severed in conventional narratives (Bhambra 2007, 2013, 2014; Go 2013, 2016; Magubane 2005). This effort can draw on well-established relational sociology (Bourdieu 2000; Desmond 2014; Emirbayer 1997; Go 2013; Mische 2011), which views the social world not as made up of discrete entities but instead views it as one of relations. This way, the world is not composed solely of nation-states but also of transnational flows of goods, people, and ideas. In this sense, localities are always embedded in a history of empire or present-day global and transnational flows. This means that the object of study can be the relation itself, the interaction between different parts of the world, forged via long-standing histories of the slave trade, settler colonialism, or migration. Focusing on these global relations allows students to reconnect processes of modernity and empire, previously disconnected through a spatial rupture.

To provide examples of these intertwined histories, I used texts that are well established in the global sociological canon. World systems analysis, for example, demonstrates how European economic development cannot be understood in isolation from global connections (Wallerstein 1984, 2004). Histories of global capitalism, such as Arrighi (1994), Pomeranz (2009), Frank (1998), or Williams (2014), may similarly be useful in highlighting how capitalism was never contained to nation-state borders, neither in its origins nor in its development, but must instead be understood in a world system. Texts from the Black Marxist tradition can furthermore complement this literature, such as C.L.R. James's (2001) *The Black Jacobins* and Cedric Robinson's (1983) *Black Marxism.* These works show how supposedly marginal, colonial histories were central to the developments of European modernity at large.

To show how empire forged not just economic but also racialized links, I also included texts on global racial formations as examples for relational thinking. Here, we could draw on a long tradition in sociology, which goes back to W.E.B. Du Bois, who placed a racialized global labor regime at the heart of capitalist modernity (Du Bois 1935, [1903] 1999, 2014; Itzigsohn and Brown 2015; Morris 2015). Writing in this tradition, Winant's (2001) *The World Is a Ghetto* shows how "imperialism's creation of modern nation-states, capitalism's construction of an international economy, and the Enlightenment's articulation of a unified world culture…were all deeply racialized processes" (Winant 2001:19). Another useful text in this tradition is Paul Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, which spells out how the Atlantic is in fact the most suitable unit of analysis for cultural analyses. The point of these literatures is to give students a sense of how colonization and

racialization were not contained to the colonies but were in fact constituting processes of the modern world that structured the experience of colonized and metropolitan populations alike (Itzigsohn and Brown 2015). In this way, the boundaries between what is considered global and what is local blur, and it becomes difficult to understand the local without attention to the global.

Reorientation: Subaltern Standpoints

Another way to think about global connections is through the subjective experiences of anticolonial writers. Anticolonial writers' racialized and colonized experiences produced a series of insights on global questions, which may serve as starting points for students' research projects. For instance, subaltern voices force us to focus on the *process* of migrating, on feelings of *belonging* and on the *formation* of racial inequalities, rather than presupposing the static nature of these processes. In starting with lenses derived from anticolonial experiences, students uncover how global elements—for example, the transboundary journey of a migrant—are abundant *within* the local. These subaltern voices then tell the story of the global from the standpoint of those who cross borders or whose identities are implicated in global racial hierarchies.

Here are three examples that illustrate how the subaltern perspective might change students' understandings of race and migration: First, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B Du Bois [1903] (1999) moves away from studying "black social problems," but he changes the question to ask: "How does it feel to be a problem?" His starting point is one of black subjectivity, thereby exploding the seeming "social fact" of a "black problem." Instead, he urges us to start our analyses from the insights racialized subjects can provide on particular systems of oppression. In a similar vein, Frantz Fanon's encounter with a young French boy exclaiming, "Look, a Negro," led Fanon to understand how the young boy had fixed him racially (Fanon 2008:84). This autobiographic incident helped him shine a light on how racializing structures operated in colonial France; and without Fanon's subjective perspective, the fixing of racial identities may remain hidden to the researcher (Fanon 2007, 2008). Finally, Stuart Hall's diasporic experience allowed him to shift the pertinent question of (in-)migration to that of subjective belonging, as opposed to assuming the pregiven existence of a homogeneous nation state (Hall 1990, 1991, 1997). Placing the experience of the diasporic subject at the center of his analysis, Hall changed the question to understand how identity is formed in a world of moves and flows.

Anticolonial writings open up new questions and provide new analytical lenses for students to understand their universities and communities. They tell stories of global connections that make up the local but that are not often brought to light. In shifting our research perspective to that of the racialized subject or the migrant, students were able to uncover how histories of colonialism or long-standing migration flows shape a particular place. What is more, building a global sociology curriculum through the eyes of anticolonial writers makes the curriculum *epistemically* global. This not only reveals the ways in which the local is constituted via global connections but also draws on theories from the South and other marginalized perspectives, which are sometimes underrepresented in the syllabus.

The Politics of Knowledge

If the instructor feels that students are ready to explicitly discuss topics of epistemology and knowledge politics, the syllabus can also incorporate literatures on decolonizing methodologies, the construction of colonial knowledge, and the production of history. For example, one text students found particularly helpful was Stuart Hall's (1992) intervention on the rise of the "idea of the West." Hall asked how the idea of "the West" originated and how the concept itself has acted on the world. Hall suggests that "the West," or histories of conventional European modernity, serve as an orienting device according to which we can rank, order, classify, and compare various parts of the world. What is not included in the West's history of globalization are a myriad of colonial voices, which are instead seen as lagging behind the modern. How do we rectify the fact that even writings on the global have been produced by the West? This gives students the tools to address these epistemic imbalances in their own work.

One way to remedy the dominance of Global North–produced writings on the global is to engage theories from the South. This goes beyond treating the Global South as data to be inserted in preexisting theoretical models, but it is a practice of engaging theories and concepts that emerge from the Southern experience (Connell 2007; Richards 2015; Smith 1999; Tuck and Yang 2012). For student projects, this also meant thinking about the boundaries between being a producer of knowledge and an

object of knowledge. For example, students thought about how to involve local communities in knowledge production and approach research projects in ways that start from the perspectives of marginalized subjects. In other words, if we were to take seriously the idea of drawing on new perspectives, we also had to critically discuss the question regarding the power relationship between (student) sociologists and research "subjects."

To enable understanding about how and why some knowledge gets privileged, students engaged a series of texts that discuss the politics of knowledge production, particularly with regards to historical narratives. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) *Silencing the Past*, for example, prompted students to discuss how the production of history does not occur in social isolation but is embedded in a struggle, marked with power and politics, that determines which narrative gets told and counts as more legitimate than others. Students learn to ask: Whose voices do we *not* hear from? Who is included in historical archives and why? Following from this, we engaged readings on the making of historical archives (Brown 2016; Mbembe 2002; Schwartz and Cook 2002; Stoler 2011), which prompted students to rethink how we could tell an alternative history of where we live in ways that take these kinds of power struggles into account.

One example that illustrates silences in historical narratives is the case of the Haitian Revolution and its common absence in our narratives of modernity (Bogues 2005; Buck-Morss 2009; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Fick 1990). While the French Revolution is commonly upheld as the defining event ushering in political modernity in locating power with the people, it was in fact the slave revolution in Haiti that pushed universal equality to its limits (Bogues 2005; Dubois 2012). In claiming concepts of equality and liberty for themselves, Haitian slaves redefined the meaning of these very concepts as a revolution against global racial formations. The important question arising from discussions on Haiti for our local research projects was once more why we do not hear from some voices in our own local-global histories. While we tend to universalize metropolitan history as seemingly applicable to all (Chakrabarty 2009), we tend to silence and forget histories that are nevertheless—if not more—foundational to our contemporary understanding of ourselves.

In sum, the class readings produced the following guiding questions for students: How are local social phenomena linked to global relations—historically and in the present? If we start to reconnect global relations—specifically, those of empire, colonialism, and racial formations—how do we interpret local struggles differently? Whose voices and perspectives do we fail to listen to? And why are these global linkages and histories silenced or forgotten? In designing the syllabus this way, I attempted to teach students postcolonial analytical strategies that can help them understand issues such as migration, race, or inequality from new perspectives. For example, it can be powerful to historically ground discussions regarding diversity in their universities' entangled histories of slave trade, slavery, and settler colonialism. With an epistemically global approach to sociology, students could begin to grapple with these topics from the perspective of communities, theorists, and voices who have conventionally been marginalized.

PEDAGOGY

To translate these theoretical ideas into a fruitful pedagogic approach, I drew from three strands of teaching literature: student research practices, action research, and decolonial teaching practices/critical pedagogies. First, the key experiential learning tool for this class was a semester-long undergraduate student project on a local-global case study. The benefits of hands-on research projects on learning outcomes are well established (Blank 2004; Crull and Collins 2004; Potter, Caffrey, and Plante 2003; Takata and Leiting 1987). A research project tends to produce a heightened awareness of epistemological challenges and the production of knowledge (Cordner, Klein, and Baiocchi 2012; Hopkinson and Hogg 2004). It allows students to understand how social context shapes the research process and how knowledge production can therefore never be ahistorical (Winn 1995). Additionally, it contributes to students' greater enjoyment of learning (Rohall et al. 2004). Since global sociological concepts in particular tend to be abstract, project-based and experiential learning can be very beneficial (Peterson, Witt, and Huntington 2015), and students' learning outcomes improve if they are able to apply theoretical concepts in practice (Scarboro 2004). For this reason, global sociologists have in the past created a series of innovative teaching tools, including simulation games for economic inequality (Norris 2013), place-based approaches (Hoffmann 2006), public data–based global stratification teaching (Arabandi, Sweet, and Swords 2014), and visits to the Global Village (Peterson et al. 2015). For these reasons, this class followed in this tradition and centered around student projects.

Second, the course built on action research, which seeks not only to analyze the world as it is but to actively bring about positive social change. Sociology instructors have noted how knowledge production in universities is not solely a collection of "objective facts" produced by "detached observers" but should in fact contribute to "social justice and social change" (Abraham and Purkayastha 2012). In uncovering global ties and global voices within and around the university, this class and its students aimed to achieve a more profound dialogue about social justice issues in our universities and with the surrounding communities.

Third, the course responded to calls in favor of making the global sociology curriculum more critical and epistemically global. Theoretical bodies of work developed in the "Global South" rarely make it into sociological mainstream frameworks of thought (Abraham and Purkayastha 2012; Sohoni and Petrovic 2010), and we at times fail to consider the knowledges of marginalized, dispossessed, displaced, or colonized subjects as valuable voices. To this end, the course added an epistemic critique to conventional global sociology courses in including subaltern perspectives on global processes.

LEARNING GOALS

Brown University is a competitive research and teaching university in Providence, Rhode Island, with approximately 6,580 undergraduate students (fall 2017). Admission is selective, with an acceptance rate of 9.3 percent for the undergraduate class of 2020. As part of its characteristically open curriculum, students at Brown are encouraged to take courses in a variety of disciplines. This class was offered as an elective, and even though students remarked that a background in sociology was helpful in grasping the course materials, there were no formal requirements for the class itself. As a result, it brought together students from sociology as well as environmental studies, political science, international relations, business, and history.

The class was conducted as a seminar with eight students, which made closer supervision of each research project more feasible (Takata and Leiting 1987). Given the focus on *implementing* postcolonial strategies, the student research projects comprised 60 percent of the final grade, which in turn was broken down into three sections: a written topic discussion at the beginning of the semester (10 percent), a final public oral presentation (20 percent), and a written research paper (30 percent). The remaining 40 percent of the grade was based on a series of written memos discussing the readings throughout the semester (20 percent) and class participation (20 percent). Written memos and class discussions helped me gauge student learning throughout the semester. The last three weeks of class provided a forum for students to present their research projects and engage with each others' projects and the postcolonial sociological research agenda more broadly. Student presentations were public, so students received feedback from faculty and graduate students studying similar topics. In future iterations of this class, it may be helpful to break down research projects into even smaller sections, which could aide students' time management, address potential issues of access, and help them narrow down the research topics throughout the semester. While we discussed student research progress in class discussions, it may be fruitful for students and instructors alike to anchor these discussions in short written research progress memos throughout the semester.

Brown University and Providence have always been entangled in global relationships, such as the slave trade, settler colonialism, and a variety of migratory streams. Yet in our narratives about the university, the city, and the region, we tend to bracket these global relationships. Given this local background, the assignment instructions were as follows: To start, students were asked to find a local starting point through which they could uncover larger global histories. Starting points could include physical sites such as buildings, streets, monuments, objects, tourism sites, ports, neighborhoods, or other areas with present-day or historical global components. Once students identified a local site, they pursued the following question: How are these local sites entangled in the global, both historically and in the present? Having identified these local-global relationships, I asked them to reflect on why the global links were silenced or pushed to the background. Conversely, if we were to reconnect local and global histories, how would that change our interpretation of this place and our understanding of migration or racial inequality? The initial assignment instructions were deliberately open to give students the freedom to work on the locality of their choice, but once students found a focal point, they were asked to reflect more specifically about their sites.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

To show how students employed the theoretical ideas discussed in class in a local empirical case of their choice, I will now sketch some student projects as illustrations. Drawing on these projects, I then discuss potential learning challenges and ways

in which instructors might be able to address them. In this first iteration of the class, students conducted research projects on Rhode Island's founding myths and some of its most notable sites, Brown University and its global linkages, and Providence's history of migration.

Some students focused on Rhode Island's historical myths and the global linkages that have been erased from our memory. For instance, one student sought to reconstruct the history of the state's industrial revolution as one of indigenous land dispossession. In doing so, the student used GIS and cartography to paint a different "map" of the past, a map that traced a colonial history of dispossession rather than one of industrial advancement. Another student traced the ways in which Rhode Island's founding father, Roger Williams—who is known as an icon for freedom—was deeply entangled with indigenous exploitation and the slave trade and then questioned why this part of Williams's life is little known. Yet another student highlighted how Providence's built environment shows traces of rich indigenous histories and how built objects provide one possible medium through which we could recuperate silenced histories. Focusing more on the relationship between historical landmarks and slave trade histories, a further student reflected on how the tourist industry contributes to memory creation around sites that are also sites of historical and colonial trauma.

Other students focused more specifically on the global history of the university and its meaning for campus politics. Brown University has in the past systematically investigated its role in the slave trade, alongside other universities, such as Harvard, Columbia, Georgetown, Princeton, Rutgers, the University of Virginia, William & Mary, and Yale, among others. Therefore, Brown's early global and colonial linkages provide interesting material for this kind of analysis. One student took Brown's history as a starting point and asked: What were the institutional and wider social configurations that made this research into Brown's involvement with the slave trade possible? How has the university's knowledge of its past shaped the institution? Given these global linkages to the slave trade, how does the university think of its own relationship to contemporary diversity, both in the student body but also in the curriculum? Another student continued this line of thinking with a more contemporary focus on epistemic diversity on social science curricula. How do social science departments include historically and socially marginalized voices, starting from core theoretical courses to major compositions? What are the institutional barriers to making knowledge more inclusive? And do arguments for diversity suggest a rethinking of modernity or get presented as an add-on while leaving dominant paradigms intact?

Some students instead chose a contemporary focus on migration. Responding to Wimmer and Glick Schiller's (2002) call to move beyond methodological nationalism, some students theorized migration not as a phenomenon that occurs "outside" state or city boundaries but as a "subaltern experience"—centered on the migrant—that in itself forms a global relation. This analysis does not automatically start with the (nation) state but with the migrant's journey. Students explored projects that focused on migrants' voices and their negotiations of identity and belonging. Shifting the discourse of (in-)migration to one of transnational links, the migrant assumes centrality in this movement. As the global relation takes center stage, agency lies with those who migrated. Paraphrasing a student, the goal was to achieve a shift from *studying* a community to *letting it speak*.

These postcolonial research projects enriched our understanding of seemingly local struggles. For instance, students made the case that current discussions of diversity and inclusion should incorporate a profound reflection on how we tell history itself in a more *inclusive* way. This insight—combining global sociology and epistemic critique—places students ahead of conventional sociological analysis. If we embed the university and our community more broadly in their global and colonial contexts, rather than telling a bifurcated, "contained" history, our contemporary understanding of why inclusion and diversity are important topics also changes. We start to pay attention to inequalities deeply rooted in our past. Concretely, the university's involvement with the slave trade provides the necessary global historical background to think about diversity today. As Brown's report on our slave trade past states, "[h]ave we entered so new a world that we have no further connection with the generation in which these colleges were born? To think so would be to show ourselves without the sense of either historic continuity or moral obligation" (Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice 2006:6). In this way, the students' investigations into historical and present-day global linkages shed new light on contemporary and supposedly local sociological questions.

LEARNING CHALLENGES

Generally, students highlighted that the semester-long research project and discussions thereof contributed to their learning. To quote one student's end-of-year assessment, "I think that I understood the [class] themes early on as we were going about the course, but it wasn't until seeing others' projects that I truly understood the impact of what I'd learned and how powerful the themes can be when applied to our research." Among the students in the earlier years, two students chose to extend their projects into their senior theses, seeking to pursue their research in the upcoming years. Students emphasized that they enjoyed the open-ended nature of the assignment, allowing them to follow their interests. This gave them the ability to pursue a longer standing interest or build on preexisting relations with a community. Similarly, some students emphasized that by locating the project in Providence, they were able to think about the class critically "whenever [they] walk around the city, even now, after class ended." Yet it is important to think about potential difficulties that could arise during the course of this class and discuss possible ways in which instructors might address them. I will do so by means of two examples: the question of positionality and the topic of epistemic critique.

One concern students faced as part of their research projects was the question of positionality. Research on the difficulties of teaching race and racial injustices has long found that students find it challenging to overcome feelings of personal guilt, which—if unaddressed by the instructor—may end in resistance or denial (Burke and Banks 2012; Hedley and Markowitz 2001). Discussing colonial histories and imperial knowledges produced similarly unsettling emotions for some students. For this reason, I focused a majority of class discussions on ways of overcoming these initial hesitations. One recurring question in class debates was: Could white students at Brown draw attention to the university's involvement in the slave trade, tell history in a more inclusive way, and focus on voices previously unheard, or was this representation just *another* form of epistemic violence? How could we ensure that we were not committing the same kind of symbolic violence and exclusions that colonial historiography had committed all these years ago?

Generally, I have found that contrapuntal analysis helped alleviate some of these hesitations. Students who feared recommitting symbolic violence to already marginalized (historical) subjects in representing and "speaking on their behalf" found it helpful to think of histories as relations. Histories of dispossession, for example, should not just be indigenous peoples' histories but the history of the American continent at large. In other words, students found that recovering silenced voices and therefore making history more inclusive has to challenge a history written from an imperial standpoint. They concluded that marginalized histories should not remain forever "specific" but must apply to all of us. While remaining mindful of the politics of representation and the dangers of oversimplifying histories of the subaltern (Mohanty 1984, 2003; Spivak 1988), students found that histories of colonialism had to be co-constitutive of the commonly told history.

Furthermore, students were prompted to reflect on their own lives and their roles as researchers. Particularly following the final public presentations, students reinforced the importance of reflexivity. One student suggested: "The most fundamental change in my knowledge paradigm was to insert myself as a subjective knower in all instances. Reflexivity, positionality, the role of me in history, these ideas were totally new and really important." We also discussed how the postcolonial lens could allow students to relate to research production in new ways. Aware of the politics of knowledge and the construction of narratives—who is allowed to speak and who is not, whose voice we value and whose voice remains forgotten—students reflected on their position to research production.

Generally, students did connect their own lives to global processes. Here are some examples to illustrate how different students grappled with reflexivity. For instance, some students with an immigrant background or students of color particularly appreciated this class as it allowed them to connect their personal histories to the theoretical concepts discussed in class (Freire 2000). Anticolonial writings and the idea to start from a subaltern perspective at times resonated closely with these students' biographic experiences and thereby allowed them to bring these personal anecdotes into the classroom. White students also worked through questions of reflexivity in very powerful ways. Most strikingly, one student found *their* ancestor's name in the archives, as a settler who dispossessed the indigenous population. Not only did it bring home the applicability of global relations to the student's immediate context, but it also inspired a profound sense of humility: Giving voice to the indigenous population in the project,

they commented, required an immense commitment and time investment; and a failure to do so would repeat symbolic violence, following their ancestor's lineage. This sense of ethical obligation toward our research subjects was prevalent in all final projects. Put simply, students wanted to conduct the best possible research to "get the story right." This rethinking of university-community relations persisted beyond these particular projects, as one student suggests: "I continue to think about how research can be applied for the community rather than on the community. How can we use academia and our positionality and legitimacy in academia to empower communities rather than study them?"

The second difficult theme with which students grappled was the question of epistemic critique. Some students felt a sense of paralysis when faced with the realization that historical narratives, knowledges, and theorists provide *parts* or *lenses* on what we may call truth. Knowledge—especially stemming from "authorized voices"—is often taken for granted, so some students found it paralyzing to question expert knowledge or long-established narratives. For this reason, asking about voices that are not represented, historical subjects not included in the archive, silences in histories, or power struggles in knowledge production can be disorienting. Burke and Banks (2012:22) have suggested that paralysis results from feeling overwhelmed with "new information and the scope of institutional limitations," leading to resignation, thinking that "problems are too large to fix." Epistemic critique was, in fact, difficult to digest.

To combat this sense of paralysis, students found two possible solutions helpful. The first was to consciously "open up" the process of historical production, embracing the existence of silences and investigating their role in the construction of archives, memory, and myths. Since a large part of the research projects included a more detailed appreciation of historiography than standard sociological research requires, students were asked to examine the epistemologies underlying historical production. At the core of learning about global and colonial histories must be reflection on who is allowed a story or to be an agent in historical narratives. In the words of a student: "I became aware of not only colonialism and what it has done to people, but the ways colonialism has affected our abilities and willingness to discuss, remember, and challenge it." The second option was to follow the lead of anticolonial writers, who highlight the possibilities of the subaltern standpoint and present a different form of knowing. In fact, giving voice to colonized subjects may shift how we write, who the protagonist of the story is, and who attains agency. Anticolonial writings made the notion of epistemic critique tangible to students and helped them find the subaltern standpoints in their own research projects.

Students made interesting suggestions to improve the syllabus. Most importantly, they asked for more discussion on how to disseminate postcolonial analyses beyond the walls of the classroom. Others suggested that the course could include more discussions on how our knowledge of the past could inform arguments for policy decisions or debate in the public sphere. Some students did in fact make the choice to share their research projects with university administrators or student newspapers, thus searching for ways to directly influence campus and university politics. When repeating the course, I would spend more time discussing pragmatic concerns, with an eye to (campus) politics. For example, how can we create different forms of archives? How can we disseminate our final projects in university publications? How could we steer the diversity conversations in a way that also includes the decolonization of the curriculum in addition to institutional, structural issues? These are some of the remaining questions future classes could address.

REPLICATION AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES

The class provided an example for how the postcolonial turn in sociology could open an avenue for students to better grasp local-global linkages, how global linkages can produce a richer understanding of seemingly local issues, how students can reflect on their own lives in relation to large-scale global issues, and how they can become aware of knowledge politics historically and in the present. The class's guiding principle is that all localities are embedded in global relations. Though these relations may be hidden or not often placed at the forefront, the basic principle of this class—that the global deeply influences the local—should be replicable in all university settings. Another benefit is the course's pertinence to current conversations about diversity on U.S. campuses. In learning about global, colonial histories and the power struggles involved in how we construct histories and knowledge about ourselves and the places we live in, students can link this class to debates

around diversity and inclusion from a historical and critical sociological perspective. By means of research projects, students can take control of their learning and apply the class's theoretical materials to case studies that suit their interests and speak to their local ties. They could build their global sociological imagination while simultaneously learning from and acting positively upon their immediate surroundings.

Yet given the multifaceted nature of the course, it is important to be aware of the challenges that come with such a course. Since the class covers literatures in global sociology, history, as well as postcolonial theory, some questions do not get as much discussion time as others. As such, the primary emphasis could lie with giving students the tools to develop a global sociological imagination—to analyze and think beyond the local and the immediately visible. To ensure that students know the literatures that are most relevant to their specific projects, a seminar-style class size could be helpful as the instructor could meet with students in office hours. In my iteration of the class, students did not require specific historical knowledge as I tried to include all necessary historical background in class readings, but they did note that they benefitted from knowing some social theory as a background for this class. Generally, it is important to know that the course is time-intensive for students and teachers alike, in line with other research-based classes (Schmid 1992), which always require additional efforts to discuss research progress.

Since the assignment is heavily integrated with local histories and social issues, instructors may want to modify the assignment according to their localities to best capture students' interests. Contrapuntal analyses could include slave trade histories, questions of settler colonialism, histories of slavery, histories of dispossession, or trade linkages. Subaltern standpoint analyses could capture indigenous or racialized perspectives, historical or contemporary migrant and diaspora views. Some universities have also launched efforts into exploring their own global or colonial histories, which may provide an interesting background and additional motivation for student research projects. Depending on the wealth of materials for a particular local-global link, instructors may be able to assign readings that are specific to their localities, which additionally gives students a chance to engage with their own university's or region's history.

Generally, this class should be of interest to students of global sociology just as much as those who are new to the discipline. The course draws on themes common to introductory sociology courses by linking biography (or the local), structure (or the global), and history (Mills 2000), thus aiming to create a (global) sociological imagination. For those well versed in conventional texts in global sociology, the course adds an epistemic critique by including subaltern voices and asks students to apply global concepts to research projects. To tailor this class to lower-level students, instructors could limit readings on the politics of knowledge and instead focus more on fostering a global sociological imagination. If instructors feel that the research project requires too much independent work for students, it might also be possible to arrange a series of field trips to local points of interest. This way, students could explore the (hidden) global relations and connections in groups or as part of class discussions.

With its emphasis on research projects that may require additional instructor supervision, this class works best as a seminar-style class. However, with field trips, the class may also be possible with a larger class size. Moreover, it does not have to be taught solely at the undergraduate level and could be adapted for a graduate-level seminar with more ambitious research projects. For example, in addition to global sociology, it could be adapted to a historical or qualitative methods class or incorporated into social theory courses. Graduate students could tackle epistemological questions on the limits of the archive, examine the politics of knowledge production in more detail, and gain more extensive research experience in local archives or communities. This could also combat the widely critiqued parochialism and presentism of ethnographic method classes (Burawoy et al. 2000; Marcus 1995) by highlighting historical global linkages. Lastly, postcolonial theory can bring a global dimension to classical sociological theory classes in situating racial formations and colonialism as a foundational process in modernity and diversifying the canon (Bhambra 2007; Connell 1997; Go 2016; Morris 2015).

CONCLUSION

The postcolonial lens could inform global sociological teaching as it allows us to show how the local is embedded in larger global relations, which may be hidden or obscured. This article described a course—from the development of the curriculum to the pedagogic approach and learning outcomes—that mobilizes the postcolonial framework to

recover global stories. For example, histories of the slave trade or settler colonialism are commonly analytically contained to the past or the global realm but have deeply informed our local histories. By shifting our focus to the perspectives and histories of migrants, formerly colonized populations, diasporas, and racialized subjects, this class and its students attempted to listen to the tale of global connections and gain a better understanding of our communities. The class not only produced a sense of reflexivity in students but also included anticolonial theorists and colonial histories in the global sociology curriculum, thus taking a step in making global sociology also epistemically global. While instructors may need to adapt the readings to their specific contexts, the basic principle of finding local-global histories and present-day global relations is transposable and may inspire global sociology curricula elsewhere. Therefore, as students develop this kind of global sociological imagination, the abstract idea of the global may become more concrete, our shared colonial past may become more central, and the global may become more important to all our life stories.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I would be happy to share the syllabus with interested readers.

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