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# Introduction

## Sociologists in a Global Age

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This anthology brings together a diverse group of well-known sociologists from various parts of the world to share their personal experiences in becoming exemplary practitioners of our discipline. The collected autobiographical essays emphasize the authors' respective journeys into the discipline and profession of sociology in special relation to the intellectual and social-political contexts in which their works have matured and in which they will surely continue to flourish. Edited books containing biographical representations of sociologists have been more readily available in recent years. But besides offering reflections from contemporary representatives of the discipline, the present volume has a unique approach in not only bringing together sociologists with distinctly international and/or comparative perspectives in terms of their research and other work experiences, but also in gathering sociologists from across different parts of the world. As such, the thematic orientation and personal scope of this book are, in however modest a sense, global and, hopefully, will also be able to appeal to a global audience of readers.

When planning this book, it was conceived as an attempt to bring together scholars from various countries to talk about their personal journeys in becoming sociological professionals. What was perhaps most striking about working to complete this work

was the ease with which sociologists from across the globe could be identified and contacted. Sociology has become an activity that is more readily than ever global in nature. The global dynamics of contemporary sociology are less a function of any specific theoretical or thematic focus of one's work, but instead characterize the organization of sociology itself. Not only could many sociologists across the world readily be found, most all of them were likewise enthusiastic about writing for this book. Besides the usual constraints of time and energy, the willingness to contribute to this book is different from most scholarly activities in writing as the contributions contain a distinctly personal side. This willingness to reveal aspects of one's self may relate to the present-day more readily recognized insight that work and life need not, and perhaps cannot, be as readily distinguished as some decades ago. A few words on the use of auto/biography in the development of sociology may clarify the evolving role of the self in sociological work and will also clarify how this book situates itself relative to the relevant literature and what some of the specific ambitions are that this book hopes to accomplish.

### **Sociology and Auto/Biography**

Reviewing the literature on auto/biography and sociology, it is clear that scholars of society have always been well aware of the rather unique place that one's biography plays in the development of one's work, particularly because the theme of analysis pertains so closely to the human condition. As practitioners of the discipline, we are fond to discover and talk about the details and trajectories of the lives of our discipline's founders and major representatives. Biographical materials can minimally serve to introduce a body of thought, but are sometimes also intertwined with the exposé of an oeuvre. Biographies exist on some of sociology's major classic scholars, such as Emile Durkheim (Lukes 1985), Max Weber (Marianne Weber 1926), Ferdinand Tönnies (Carstens 2005), Karl Mannheim (Woldring 1987), Jane Addams (Deegan 1988), Robert E. Park (Raushenbush 1979), and Alfred Schutz (Wagner 1983), as well as contemporary classics, such as C. Wright Mills (Horowitz 1983) and Talcott Parsons (Gerhardt 2002). Occasionally we are fortunate to have available for our reading and learning sociologists' autobiographies and other primary sources of personal experience, such as the book-length autobiographies of Pitirim Sorokin (1963), W.E.B. DuBois (1968), Robert M. MacIver (1968), George C. Homans (1984), Irving Louis Horowitz (1990), Charles H. Page (1982), Leo Lowenthal (1987), William Foote Whyte (1995), and Edward Shils (2006).

The biographical and autobiographical excursions of sociologists—especially when they concern some of our discipline's most cherished representatives—have intrinsic merit to our understanding of an important body of work but will also satisfy our all-too-human curiosity, particularly in an age of ubiquitous surveillance and routinized self-revelation, to know more of the other. Moreover, although sociologists and other scholars have not always been as eager to embrace the autobiographical form, there has over the years developed a growing sense that revelations of the self also contribute to the understanding of one's work. As such, autobiography fulfils an intellectual role intimately tied to professional goals. More broadly, sociological

autobiographies also tell stories of the trajectories of the discipline and profession of sociology and the sociologist's relation to the evolving field of sociology and the surrounding social order (Cain 2005; Killian 1994; Mills 2000).

Most autobiographical sketches by sociologists are available not as book-length treatises but as shorter essay-style contributions. Even a relatively modest delving into the relevant literature reveals that there are many such autobiographical accounts available. In the English language alone, the number of sociologists reflecting on their lives and works runs easily in the multiple hundreds. Many of these autobiographies either form part of an author's book or collected works (e.g., Merton 1996) or are available in sociological journals, especially those that focus on the sociological profession and the history of sociology. For instance, *The American Sociologist*, the journal that was founded by Talcott Parsons to be devoted to the sociological profession, regularly incorporates autobiographical contributions (e.g., Berger 2004; Hollander 2001), as do other sociological journals (e.g., Blau 1995; Coser 1993; Marshall 1973).

For present purposes most interesting are those essay-length autobiographies that have appeared as part of an edited volume aimed at presenting a coherent set of sociological portrayals of selves. As this volume fits among these collections, a brief review may illuminate the scope and aims of such books as well as situate our own contribution. Reflecting the nation-bound contexts of our respective sociological careers and their cultural-linguistic implications, this review is restricted to books that appeared in the English language. A slant towards predominantly American publications should be additionally noted, as the reader will understand this Introduction to be framed in the context of an American career with European ancestry.

To my knowledge the oldest collection of autobiographical essays of sociologists is *Sociological Self-Images*, edited by Irving Louis Horowitz in 1969. The book includes autobiographical sketches by more than a dozen well-known American sociologists (George C. Homans, Llewellyn Gross, James Short, Seymour M. Lipset, Wendell Bell, and others). The set-up of the book as a whole is relatively conventional in presenting not primarily a collection of personal life histories and reflections of self, but an overview of the authors' respective theoretical perspectives and research activities as well as their intellectual influences. Yet, although the aim of this book is thus primarily methodological, it does in many instances also reveal the subjective and personal sides of the sociological endeavor, in a manner, moreover, that was particularly meant to be useful to students of our discipline.

Not until the late 1980s would the next autobiographical collection of sociologists appear when Matilda White Riley edited the volume *Sociological Lives* as part of the American Sociological Association Presidential Series (Riley 1988). By 1988, female sociologists and other disciplinarians from more diverse backgrounds were no longer excluded. On the contrary, a deliberate effort was made for the represented scholars to represent a more diverse group. Amongst others, Alice Rossi, Bernice Neugarten, William Julius Wilson, and Theda Skocpol contributed their respective stories to make for a rich *mélange* of sociological lives. The collection was also focused in offering stories that reveal the interplay between sociologists' lives and their surrounding social structures.

Arguably the most ambitious and best collection to date, *Authors of Their Own Lives*, edited by the late Bennett M. Berger (1990), brings together autobiographical insights from no less than twenty sociologists, including leading scholars, such as James Coleman and David Riesman; iconoclasts and scholars on the move, such as Andrew Greeley, Gary T. Marx, and Donald Cressey; as well as women and émigrés, including Jessie Bernard, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Guenther Roth, and Reinhard Bendix. The advantage of this collection is that the sociological authors are left loose to tell their own stories free of any restriction of a guiding orientation beyond the attempt to bring out the relevant personal sides of the authors in relation to the development of their work. This collection is as such clearly a very modern work, appearing around the time when questions of identity and self had been marching on to the forefront of sociological inquiry, sometimes even with the aim of debunking the objectivity and universality of academic thought altogether. While such a hyper-relativizing stance will surely not have been shared among all the book's authors and its readers, it only behooves a sociological analysis mindful of structural constraints and opportunities to observe the correlation.

The resolute focus towards identity-oriented personal narratives marks the more recently published collections of sociologists' autobiographies. Not surprisingly, two volumes published in the mid-1990s focused specifically on the lives of female and feminist sociologists (Goetting and Fenstermaker 1995; Laslett and Thorne 1997). Unlike some of the prior collections, these volumes are very explicit in focusing on autobiography in terms of gender and feminine roles, class and academic mobility, community activism and personal isolation, and professional conflict and camaraderie. Instead of straightforward methodological lessons, these books present queries that are meant to be "sensitive" and "unsettling" interpretations of the self that are open to the multiple interpretations of others and straddle the boundaries of "fiction" and "truth". At least such are the self-stated ambitions.

The most recently published volumes of sociologists' autobiographies have likewise taken on a radical turn towards the explicit portrayal of life stories involving an intermingling of personal questions of self and broader, often political questions of society. The volume, *Our Studies, Ourselves* (Glassner and Hertz 2003), groups its twenty-two authors in sections on race and class, gender, and evolving identities. And the recent collection, *The Disobedient Generation* (Sica and Turner 2005), includes self-images of well-known social theorists who were educated during the roaring times of the late 1960s. Most of the contributing authors lock their narratives intimately into discourses on bureaucracy, gender, race, class, and politics, in terms that often betray the ideological bend of their initial aspirations.

The shift towards an interest in the subjective lives and identities of major contributors to the sociological discipline can today also be observed from the manner in which theoretical ideas are presented in scholarly textbooks. It is currently more often than ever the case that the personal stories of scholars are brought into play to contextualize the development and meaning of their thought. Several textbooks in sociological theory, for instance, are explicitly devoted to placing theoretical ideas in the context of the biographies of the theorists who have developed them (Fernandez 2003; Pampel 2000; Salerno 2004). Other textbooks contain short autobiographical excursions that are added to the theoretical exposé (Ritzer 2000).

Also to be noted, finally, is the increasing interest in sociological auto/biography as it is manifested on the internet. Besides the online availability of biographical materials on sociologists that can very easily be retrieved through search engines, several websites include biographical materials on famous sociologists (e.g., SocioSite; Wikipedia), with the occasional website even exclusively concerned in presenting such biographical information (e.g., AGSÖ). Although fewer controls exist to ensure the quality of internet contributions, the accessibility of such websites is less restricted by the boundaries of nationally distinct cultures to allow for a more global view of sociological lives.

## Objectives

The ease with which the internet and email communications have opened up the boundaries of national cultures has directly contributed to making the present volume possible. As indicated by the subtitle of this volume, our contributors were purposely selected from various nations across the world to present a modest but concrete effort in global sociology. The authors represent a diverse range of nations, extending from Germany to Korea, the Netherlands to the United States, China to Italy, and Poland to the United Kingdom. To be sure, practical and other limitations still prevented a wider diversity of scholars to be represented, but nonetheless it can be rightly claimed that the degree of internationalism that has been attained in this volume has not been matched by any similar volume. In consequence, also, it is hoped that the stories presented here may resonate widely as well.

Besides representing a variety of national contexts, all scholars in this volume have explicit and varied professional involvements with international and/or comparative issues, be it through a focus in their research activities and/or through the development of their own lives and careers. The contributors have engaged in research on international structures and processes or have undertaken comparative investigations of social issues in geographically dispersed societies. There is also a sharp awareness among the contributors of the localization of one's work in distinct socio-geographical terms, and there are manifold personal experiences in engaging in dialogue with scholars and sociological work from many different countries. Several of the contributing scholars have also enjoyed international journeys on a personal level as they have moved across countries in the course of their lives and careers.

When the authors were contacted about the prospect of this book, they were asked to write autobiographical accounts that addressed some of the following issues:

- Provide an autobiographical account of yourself and how, why, when, and where you developed your academic interests in sociology.
- Acknowledge significant individuals and mentors, as well as the social, political, cultural, and economic events that prompted your interests and inspired your sociological work.
- Share with us your theoretical and/or methodological orientation and how it was influenced by the social and intellectual context you enjoyed.
- Comment on the direction in which you see your work, your area of research,

and sociology in general heading.

Authors were told to freely place variable emphases as they saw fit and to add any dimensions they considered relevant within the general scope and aim of the anthology. Authors were asked to be mindful to write essays that were especially useful for students of our discipline who are still in the process of developing their activities in the sociological enterprise. Students may be facing opportunities and challenges similar to the ones experienced by the contributors. While surely not so intended, the sociological life experiences recounted here contain lessons for others who can still primarily look forward to rather than back on a career in sociology.

Besides the explicit global and student-oriented focus, this book is also different from other works on sociological lives inasmuch as the autobiographical reviews here presented are highlighted in terms of the triple nexus: self–society–sociology. However it unfolds in a specific context, a scholar's personal sociological journey never takes place in isolation from the social world, involving others and their societal surroundings. Besides mere psychological leanings, the context of one's society and the professional and scholarly contours of influential intellectual traditions will also shape the course and outcome of a biography. As such, the chapters in this volume endeavor to bridge the distinction between a sociologist's autobiography and a sociological autobiography (Merton 1988) as they offer reflections on person and work that are not only written by a sociologist but are also sociological in kind. The chapters are intellectual autobiographies so that the usual restrictions of the specific form of a biography of the self will apply, especially in terms of empirical adequacy criteria. However, the narratives are also sociologically framed in the contexts of their respective socio-historical settings and professional fields, avoiding narcissism and irrelevance alike (Wacquant 1989). What unites these authors is their commitment to a sociological career that is always much more than just a career.

## **Overview**

The solicitation for contributions to this book did not follow any specific logic or plan besides the stated purpose of collecting sociological biographies of globally oriented scholars from around the world. In all other respects, the authors could be as diverse from one another as they might be. The inclusion of certain categories of scholars along the lines of gender and ethnicity is in the present-day context not something that has to be expressly attempted. Diversity in such respects is today a mere function of being a sociologist who is positioned in the profession as it exists and acknowledges the structure thereof. It is therefore fortunate that the authors' contributions strike a range of themes that nonetheless hint at certain common elements which can be used as a guide to introduce the chapters.

The chapters in this volume are divided into three parts. This division of chapters, however, is not to suggest that each author does not address at once several of the issues highlighted in each part, but rather that they place different emphasis upon certain elements from the varied experiences of their respective sociological careers. Opening our book are chapters in which the traversing of national boundaries is a central formative element of the authors' sociological lives. Martin Albrow provides a

very useful start to this book by recounting his journey as a European sociologist with increasingly global interests and significance. Beginning his career as an Englishman in Germany who was to become a leading figure in British sociology, Albrow's journey nicely illustrates the border-crossing trajectory of sociologists working in an increasingly international sociological field. Karin Knorr Cetina recounts her trajectory in creating a global self by working in various places in Austria, Germany, and the United States. Professional interests and personal experiences combined to create a story, narrated by Knorr Cetina in a beautiful manner that betrays her ethnological sensibilities, which reveals the enormous rewards of having colleagues in a horizontal rather than in a vertical structure of collaboration. The academic story of Joachim Savelsberg, a German who has spent most of his career in the United States, likewise reveals the cross-border dimensions of contemporary sociological life. Academic and personal motives meshed in Savelsberg's life journey and also greatly affected the comparative nature of his research interests. Diane Davis built an academic career in the country in which she was raised, but her research interests have extended beyond the boundaries of the United States to focus particularly on the urban realities of Mexico City. In the United States, also, Davis traveled from one city to another, crossing borders often no less dramatic than the ones that separate entire nations. Saskia Sassen's career is as globally transformative in its origins and further developments as are the cities she has been studying as one of the leading experts in globalization. Having gone through all kinds of twists and unexpected turns, Sassen also shows us how early rejections need not hamper a career that is built on a genuine interest in the study of social issues.

The second part of our book includes chapters that particularly highlight the evolving nature of sociological work. German sociologist Richard Münch attended the University of Heidelberg, like Max Weber and Talcott Parsons before him. Like Weber and Parsons, also, Münch never avoided the big questions of sociology during his academic travels from one German university to the next. Ewa Morawska was born in Poland, earned her Ph.D. in the United States, returned to Poland, but subsequently received political asylum in the United States, the country where she also worked most of her career until she recently moved to the United Kingdom. Under such conditions of high mobility, it is perhaps no wonder that Morawska's research is heavily involved in the study of immigration and ethnicity. Raised in Cairo and London, Leon Grunberg eventually went to the United States to become a professional sociologist. There, he developed his interests in economic activities and workers' conditions in a distinctly comparative manner that was well aware of internationalization trends. In South Korea, Hyun-Chin Lim has observed drastic changes in a society that went from having third world status to becoming an economically highly modernized nation. Lim's interests in the sociology of development accompanied these changes handsomely, as did his keen humanitarian devotion to improve the conditions of his society. In Italy, Pierpaolo Donati became immersed, via the work of Talcott Parsons, in dealing with important questions of modernity. Once these questions were asked, Donati developed his own perspective of relational sociology that has taken him beyond functionalism. Also in Europe, Ruut Veenhoven is a Dutch sociologist who as a student was deeply immersed in social issues and who has devoted his sociological work to a resolutely scientific

analysis of some of the hot topics that initially moved him and his generation politically. Purposely oriented at disseminating his work very broadly, Veenhoven's research on the conditions of happiness has also involved intimate cooperation with scholars from other nations.

The final part of this book includes chapters in which transformations of sociological identities become paramount topics of reflection. Piotr Sztompka's early career involved important moments of movement, not across nations, but across worlds of interests, from music to academics. Once Sztompka had taken up the global language of sociology, he traveled outside the boundaries of then-Communist Poland to learn the ideas of Western scholars, yet he remained firmly committed to work in and about his homeland. To become a sociologist, Eiko Ikegami not only traveled from Japan to the United States; she is also a scholar who has built a commuting identity through her continued travels between her native and adopted countries. Ikegami has thus been able to develop a sociology of Japanese society that does not intellectually subjugate Japan to the West, in terms of a comparative research, but more independently highlights the role of culture in state formation, in a manner, moreover, that is historically informed. Horst Helle is a German sociologist in every sense of the term, yet he underwent substantial border-crossing experiences through his deep knowledge, ideal and personal, of American sociology and societies beyond the borders of Germany. As such, his intellectual journey has been in every sense international as well. Tiankui Jing is one of the leading sociologists in China who has seen his country undergo important changes in terms of economic and political conditions. Processes of transformation have been so much a part of China's history that the country provided Jing with a wealth of transformations that beckoned for sociological analysis. Finally, Edward Tiryakian provides a thorough tale of his journey from New York to southern France and back to the United States, where he became a sociologist who would see a lot of the world. As much as he has seen, Tiryakian has also engaged himself with many pressing sociological questions, especially in matters of religion, nationalism, and ethnicity.

An introduction can help set the tone of a work and clarify its intentions. But the real value of this book can only be determined by its readers. Irrespective of their individual judgments upon examining this book, however, I hope that the readers will recognize that the authors have honestly and with the very best of intentions conveyed a meaningful sense of their ongoing journeys into and within the sociological enterprise. These personal accounts should at least serve to show the variety of ways in which one can become and be a sociologist in the hopes that the narratives of such a becoming and being will also inspire other aspiring scholars to take on their own sociological career paths.

I am extremely grateful to all contributing authors for taking the time and courage to write so candidly and usefully about their lives and works. I know that much will be learned from their works. I thank Mary Savigar at Ashgate Publishing for her tremendously helpful feedback throughout the preparation of this book and for undertaking its production. I thank Samantha Hauptman and Gary T. Marx for reading and commenting on a prior version of this introduction. I am grateful to Shannon McDonough for helping to prepare the index. Finally, I acknowledge the wonderful help in getting this book into publishable shape by my research assistant

Lisa Dilks, who, as a student of sociology, was ideally placed to comment on the true value of this book.

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