

Education in Multiculturality Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by
Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi



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Enrica Ottone, Luca Pandolfi (eds.)
**EDUCATION IN MULTICULTURALITY
EDUCATION TO INTERCULTURALITY**
**In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy**

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Front cover

Pavel Égüez, *Grito de los Excluidos*, mural en cerámica.
Cotacachi, Ecuador 2001
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“

Diversity always proves a bit frightening, for it challenges our securities and the status quo. [...] In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society.

”

POPE FRANCIS

*Speech to the Hungarian Episcopal Conference
Apostolic visit to Budapest, September 12, 2021*

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Sociology and Intercultural Relations

Between Hegemonic Research Practices and the Critical Gaze*

❖ Ilenya Camozzi



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Abstract

Within the context of an interdisciplinary discussion on the epistemological statutes and research practices inherent to interculturality, this essay aims to reflect on the emancipatory potential of the discipline of sociology, in particular of that branch of sociology that looks at cultural differences. In order to reach this goal we need to question both the ways in which cultural differences reflexively transform the discipline and the heuristic validity of the analytical categories with which sociology has gained legitimacy. By chronologically articulating some of the main stages of the conceptualisation of ethnic and race relations – from Max Weber, Robert Park, William Du Bois to the more recent approach of Southern epistemologies and intersectional, post-colonial, and de-colonial feminist approaches – the essay highlights the hegemonic responsibilities of sociological reflection on intercultural relations. At the same time, it dwells on those critical views which, starting from the denunciation of the Eurocentric (but also patriarchal and bourgeois) character of the sociological canon, point the way to emancipatory research practices. Finally, the essay recalls the importance of a historical and reflexive sociology.

Keywords

Intercultural relations – Interculturality – Multiculturality – Critical sociology – Emancipatory research practices – Historical and reflexive sociology

Ilenya Camozzi is associate professor in Sociology of Culture at the University of Milano-Bicocca, where she teaches Intercultural Relations, and Cultures, Diversity and Conflict. Her main research interests are: everyday forms of multiculturalism, migrants' political activism and the second generation's sense of belonging. She is also interested in contemporary trajectories of transition to adulthood within mobile and cosmopolitan regimes. Her latest publications are: *Growing up and Belonging in Regimes of Geographical Mobility. Young Cosmopolitans in Berlin*, *Journal of youth studies* (2022); *Sulle tracce di Max Weber*, BUP – EGEA (with Cavalli, A., and Palma, M.) (eds) (2022); *The Rise of Multicultural Festivals. Beyond Cultural Commodification and 'Ethnic' Authenticity*, "Studi culturali" (2021).

* Translated from the original Italian by Polly Brooks

Introduction

My contribution to this interdisciplinary dialogue on epistemological statutes and research practices inherent to multiculturalism and interculturality will have a sociological slant. The aim is to share a reflection on the emancipatory potential of the sociological discipline and in particular of that branch of sociology that turns its gaze to cultural differences and to the coexistence between them. This commitment requires us to question first of all the possibility that cultural differences can reflexively transform this discipline, and the ways in which this may happen; but asks us, at the same time, to question the heuristic validity of the analytical categories with which sociology has gained legitimacy, taking into account the contexts (including geographical contexts) in which they have been produced and the canons that have been defined, whose implications in ethnocentric and essentialist terms are today more widely recognised and denounced.

In order to pursue this objective – a complex objective which would require an articulate genealogy of sociological thought as well as an accurate historicization – I have had to make choices and effect reductions which I believe, however, will be able to restore the process of affirmation, and the responsibility in hegemonic terms, of a discipline that came into being with modernity and which as such confronts social and cultural differences right from the outset. I will briefly bring attention to Weberian thinking on the categories of race and ethnicity and to that of the Chicago school to whom is owed the earliest systemisation in the analysis of *race relations*; these thematisations will be placed in dialogue with an author who was, for many years, disregarded; William E. B. Du Bois. This first passage allows us to highlight the problematic, even pernicious, union between the need for new knowledge that seeks to focus on the transition from community to society and its ideological foundations. A second passage of my reflection – a passage that is also of a chronological nature – is dedicated to the comparison between the so-called epistemologies of the North and the epistemologies of the South: hence the proposal of an emancipatory sociology created by Boaventura de Sousa to guide us in the critique of Western sociological imagination and its analytical distortions, which appear to be the product of the processes of modernization and the colonial experience. The concepts of the abyssal line, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences will be evoked.

A third passage of my reasoning – in the wake of a *pars construens* – evokes the need to reflect on the relationships to cultural differences, first of all by declining the latter in the plural and, at the same time, keeping the multiple cultural differences (of ethno-racial type, but also of gender, age, class) jointly in consideration if the objective of sociology is to consist in being a critical discipline, capable of exposing the apparatus of domination that regulates cultural differences, naturalising them, transforming them into inequalities. The intersectional perspective and that of postcolonial and decolonial feminisms are discussed here in relation to their theoretical and empirical value. The intervention closes by recalling the importance of a historical and reflexive sociology.

1

Max Weber, William Du Bois and Chicago School race relations studies

The choice to begin my reflection by placing Max Weber, Robert Park – the central figure of the Chicago School who is credited with the first theorisations on race relations – and William Du Bois in dialogue, is dictated by the different degree of influence that these authors, from different places and at different times, have had in elaborating the sociological view of intercultural relations. These are three coeval authors: Weber and Park are of the same age (they were born in 1864), Du Bois is a few years younger (he was born in 1868); Park and Du Bois are US citizens; Weber is German.

Their paths – intellectual and personal – often crossed, both in the United States of America – where Weber went in 1904 for three months with his sociologist wife Marianne Weber on the occasion of the Congress of Arts and Science in St. Louis – and in Germany, in Heidelberg and Berlin, where Robert Park and William Du Bois¹ studied. The colour line², i.e. their ethno-cultural background and the colour of their skin, weighs just as dramatically on their interpersonal relations as it does on their specific research on ethnic and race relations. As is well known, Max Weber is, together with Simmel and Durkheim, part of what is termed the sacred triad of sociology. In his monumental work, he touched on, albeit marginally, the theme of race and ethnicity, particularly in regard to nation building. In *Economy and Society*³, Weber deals with the idea of nation by placing it in relation to ethnic community and racial affiliation. While racial affiliation is ‘really’ based on a community of origin (i.e. a community of blood, of biological factors), Weber writes, ethnic affiliation, on the other hand, is based on perception, i.e. the subjective belief that one is part of a community of origin. Like ethnic community, nation is based on a belief in a shared life, on sentiment, on collective representation, but unlike ethnic community, it is fuelled by a passion for political power – for the greatness of the nation, to be exact. The elements that allow ethnicity to consolidate are, according to Weber, language and religion, which generate cognitive proximity and the sharing of the ultimate meaning of existence. To these two elements, the German sociologist adds the political dimension. The political community utilises the symbolism of the blood community, the family clan, the primordial and mythological origin, and represents the most artificial form from which the belief in the ethnic-type bond originates.

If race, by virtue of its biological ‘validity’, is a category that should not concern sociology, ethnicity and nation, by virtue of the social representations concerning them, are instead concepts whose elaboration and clarification sociology is obliged to deal with. It is a mature Weber who dilutes the colour line that was also present in his youthful writings of the 1890s⁴ and that dealt with the ‘Polish question’, the study of the condition of agricultural workers in the Prussian provinces east of the Elbe⁵. As Elke Winter⁶ has suggested, it is necessary to place Weber’s reflections on race in the historical era in which he lived: an era in which the division of humanity into biologically different races was accepted and social inequalities were interpreted as the gap between the subjects’ natural dispositions. However, Weber resisted the development of such ideological views in the field of social research, emphasising that racial characteristics did not determine social action.

His trip to the United States of America is an opportunity to nurture his interest in intercultural relations: he focuses his attention, for example, on the reasons for the increased discrimination perpetrated by the white population towards African Americans rather than towards Native Americans. The reasons, in Weber’s eyes, are not to be ascribed to ‘anthropological differences’ but rather to the weight of memory that anchors them inextricably to slavery and its institutionalisation. The causes are therefore due to the white population’s sense of superiority; racial inequalities are institutional, fed primarily by the education system⁷. Weber took an interest in the studies of William E. B. Du Bois, whom he met again on the American trip (the two had met in Berlin during Du Bois’s study stay between 1892 and 1894). His study of the plight of African Americans⁸ and the processes of racialisation of which they are victims contributes to the Weberian interest in ‘ethnic’ relations and the pervasiveness of racism. Du Bois is a scholar whose intellectual biography is emblematic in terms of the hegemonic processes in sociological production. His being non-white has in fact undermined his scientific legitimisation as much in the field of reflection on ethnic and racial relations as in relation to the emergence of American sociology. He embodies the ‘rejected’⁹ scholar: because of the social milieu of the time, steeped in anti-Afro-American racism in which the dominant and hegemonic practices of white (male) sociologists are also to be found, he was systematically and deliberately marginalised by the nascent Amer-

ican academy. Du Bois – whose scientific commitment is not dissociated from his political-militant one – always rejected social Darwinism and any form of a reasoning regarding natural laws in the understanding of ‘social facts’, preferring an exclusively social and historical interpretation of the condition of black Americans and the racial inequalities that located them at the bottom of the social strata. This is the hallmark of the Atlanta school of sociology that Du Bois founded as a former student.

It is in the collection of historical and sociological essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)¹⁰ that Du Bois presents three key concepts of his thinking – the ‘double consciousness’, the ‘colour line’ and the ‘veil’. The scholar, with lucid foresight, predicts for the America of the 20th century ‘the problem of the colour line’ that can be understood in relation to the ‘double consciousness’ experienced by the African American population.

«It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder»¹¹.

While in Atlanta, Du Bois is welding intellectual and civic commitment¹², in Chicago the emerging ‘white sociology’ finds in the figure of Robert Park its pygmalion. Within a handful of years Du Bois had published *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), Durkheim had published *The Suicide*¹³ and in 1892 the Department of Sociology had been founded in Chicago. Surprisingly, despite the innovation of his many works, innovative also in terms of methodology (a forerunner of mixed-methods), Du Bois is not counted among the founding fathers of American sociology¹⁴ – a fate which did not befall only Du Bois¹⁵. A slightly older and lesser-known Robert Park – and the entire Chicago Sociology Department – would deliberately marginalise and exclude him from the sociological canon also through the instrumental use of Du Bois’s more political conflict with Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute and at that time the most influential African-American leader thanks to his integrationist and conciliatory policies between blacks and whites. Morris¹⁶ writes in this regard that Park and the Chicago school excluded Du Bois from the American sociological community by systematically ignoring his work “because of the colour of his skin and the challenges to Park’s racist remarks”¹⁷. Du Bois is highly critical of both Park’s ‘Darwinist’ reading of race and ethnic relations and the concept of assimilation with which Park reads the ‘inevitable’ process of civilisation of European migrants in the city of Chicago and US society. A reading of urban ecology that does not grasp the deep seated mechanisms behind the actions of racism perpetuated by whites. Already in this first act, this nascent sociology falls into the colour trap.

2

Epistemologies of the North and Epistemologies of the South

From the very first pages of *Epistemologies of the South*¹⁸, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos makes it clear that three ideas underpin his thinking:

“First, the understanding of the world by far exceeds the Western understanding of the world. Second, there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. Third, the emancipatory transformations in the world may follow grammars and scripts other than those developed by Western-centric critical theory, and such diversity should be valorized”¹⁹.

Santos, a decolonial sociologist already engaged in anti-globalisation movements²⁰, starts from two assumptions: the first is that, from the perspective of the excluded and the subaltern (also in terms of processes of racialisation and ethnicisation), the history of global capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy is characterised by “institutionalised and harmful lies”²¹; the second is that the “epistemologies of the North” – underpinned by a Western-centric reading of the principles of justice and universalism – are co-responsible in having fuelled a hegemonic narrative of relations between culturally differentiated social groups, legitimising the power relations between them. Even the so-called critical theories of Marxist inspiration – first and foremost the Frankfurt School – are said to have betrayed the expectations of social emancipation, due to their admixture of bourgeois attitudes – connoted we might add for being masculine, white and heterosexual – which are the object of its critique but which are, at the same time, fuelled by shared epistemological foundations “which suppress the cognitive dimension of social injustice and render Western understanding and transformation of the world universal”²². This is where for Santos, the need for an epistemological rupture comes in, a *condicio sine qua non* for giving a voice to the oppressed by recognising and overcoming the injustices that pervade their life stories.

The epistemologies of the South proposed by Santos differ from those of the North – mainly Eurocentric epistemologies – in being ‘poor theories’, rear-guard theories that rest on the experiences of large minorities and marginalised majorities struggling against unjustly imposed marginality and inferiority, with the aim of strengthening their capacity for resistance. Santos’ critical theorising is not Eurocentric insofar as it prepares the ground both for valorising non-Eurocentric conceptions of emancipation or liberation and for proposing counter-hegemonic interpretations and uses of Eurocentric concepts, such as those of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and socialism.

Epistemologies of the South are described by Santos as «...a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy»²³. Santos’ approach is decolonial, that is, aimed at highlighting the ‘abyssal lines’ drawn by the dominant abyssal thinking of our time through which both human and non-human realities on the other side of the line are rendered invisible or even actively constructed and produced as non-existent. This results in the most radical forms of social exclusion. The abyssal line is thus a boundary created in the colonial era that separates urban/metropolitan forms of sociability from colonial ones²⁴. The character of this boundary is imaginary, cognitive but also spatial and material²⁵; the abyssal line is a boundary that the social sciences and sociology in particular are unable to grasp. If the metropolitan form of sociability has substantiated the modern Western project – which has in the metaphor of the social contract its “atout”–, since the 16th century a second type of sociability has been determined: colonial sociability. This second type of sociability is governed by the tension between violence and appropriation (assimilation, co-optation, incorporation)²⁶. In colonial sociability, the excluded are not in a position to claim rights because they are not considered human. Their exclusion is abysmal. The abysmal thinking that Santos refers to corresponds in fact to Eurocentric rational thinking which, as such, does not recognise colonial sociability and what unfolds in the places and contexts characterised by this type of sociability.

A truly critical sociology – capable of creating the conditions of emancipatory thinking and generating factually emancipatory knowledge – must therefore “become post-abstract”: it must be able to illuminate the conditions of those who are excluded, marginalised, invisible, by examining them through new lenses. It is precisely invisibility that lies at the heart of the epistemology of blindness: an epistemology that obscures, that conceals. More than that, Santos advocates a sociology of absences ca-

pable of studying the way in which colonial domination relentlessly generates abysmal exclusion. The sociology of absences has the task of shedding light on the mechanisms of production and reproduction of the invisible subalterns, that is, of understanding how the invisibility of other sociabilities is achieved in the name of supposed epistemological superiorities. But to the sociology of absences, Santos also associates a sociology of emergences, the crucial component of the epistemologies of the South: here we value not only in political terms but also in scientific-analytical terms ways of being and ways of generating knowledge across the abyssal line. The thematisation of these two sociological 'strategies' makes it possible to show how 'the laziness of the dominant modern forms of reason leads to an enormous waste of social experiences that could otherwise be useful in identifying possibilities for emancipation'²⁷. It is interesting here to emphasise how for the sociologist, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences open up the possibility of both ecologies of knowledge and intercultural translation; the latter is 'the alternative to both the abstract universalism that underpins general Western-centric theories and the idea of incommensurability between cultures'²⁸. The call is for a strategic alliance between South g/local, for intercultural translation between scholars/academics/researchers capable of questioning colonial assumptions that establish social hierarchies that research takes as given.

Santos, in making us aware of the way in which colonialism still conditions sociological perspectives and research practices today, at the same time invites us to decolonise them, an operation only possible if supported by reflexivity, by new, participatory forms of research, in which scholar and 'studied' are thought of as actors in the research relationship – a relationship of reciprocity – and in which the subject/object of the research then turns its gaze on the researcher²⁹.

3

When intercultural relations cross gender and class relations

The intertwining of research practices and social movements – which in the case of the emergence of Southern epistemologies is mainly in relation to the action of anti-colonial and other-worldly movements and, in the case of Du Bois, is substantiated in his civic and political commitment to the Afro-American movement – is also decisive in the case of a further 'point of view'³⁰ on intercultural relations; a point of view that is not limited to the ethnic and racial dimension but also invites us to look jointly at the dimensions of gender and class: Examples of this are the intersectional approach and that of postcolonial and decolonial feminisms. The contestation of the Eurocentric character of the social sciences, which is associated with the valorisation of shadow perspectives from 'colonised cultures' and 'peripheral regions'³¹, moves within the conceptual perimeter of 'race, ethnicity, hegemony, nation-state'. These are concepts that, as we have seen, have been placed under a very critical lens. The concept of gender, on the other hand, is a concept that was only later indicated as useful in denouncing this Eurocentric drift: it is to post-colonial and decolonial feminist scholars³² that the role of forerunner in this direction is attributed. Again, the intertwining of movement activism and feminist thought is also of benefit³³.

In what follows, we will briefly take up the intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial feminist approaches in order to 'advance' our reflection on the questioning of hegemonic sociological perspectives – bourgeois, white, masculine. As we shall see, the 'third wave'³⁴ feminist movement is decisive in these approaches.

The term intersectionality – proposed by African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw – emphasises the 'multidimensionality of the experiences of marginalised subjects'³⁵. This approach – which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the context of critical race studies, which were committed to problematising the supposed neutrality and objectivity of law – was immediately interested in the particular

intersection of race and gender. To this end, intersectionality rejects the 'single-axis framework' in the practices of analysis, a framework often embraced by both feminist and anti-racist scholars, and instead focuses attention on the multiple ways in which race and gender interact to shape the different dimensions of black women's experiences³⁶. The intersectional approach sets itself scientific and political goals, thus not disentangling that partnership between theory and praxis that allowed movements, as early as the 1960s, to 'bring' gender into the academy. Even if it is precisely the 'colour' of this sodality that is now problematised here. The aim is first and foremost to subvert, in an unprecedented way, the race/gender binomial in the service of theorising about identity.

In fact, the approach was born in that season of the problematisation of identity politics: the politics of difference that also concerned the 'multicultural' plane, which was first implemented in the United States of America and Canada³⁷. The intention is to provide an alternative vocabulary to the reading that, for example, political philosophy, in its opposition between communitarians and liberals, makes of the multicultural question, remaining anchored in the equality/difference axis. Crenshaw argues instead that the real problem with identity politics is that it eludes difference between groups, a problem that intersectionality claims to solve by highlighting differences within the broad categories of 'women' and 'blacks'³⁸. Thus, intersectionality seeks to demonstrate racial variation within gender and gender variation within race³⁹. By setting itself this goal, it has also effectively reversed the march of the universalism of the 'feminist we', which would only have been sterilely opposed to the faux-universalism of the male-dominated 'we'.

The aspect of the intersectional approach that interests us most here is the invitation it makes to shift attention to subjects long excluded from feminist and anti-racist studies and the impact this exclusion has on both theory and practice⁴⁰. The intersectional approach responds to this essentialism by placing at the centre the experiences of subjects whose voices have been ignored, in light of the fact that placing them at the centre means doing so precisely because of the specificity of their voices. It is strategic and 'right' here, also in methodological terms, to 'draw on the views of marginalised subjects', to 'look down'⁴¹.

The latter is also the point of connection with post-colonial and decolonial feminisms, which both fit into and clarify post-colonial and decolonial studies. The focus of the postcolonial approach is on a 'history from below', i.e. the 'countercultural' reinterpretation of the colonial (and post-colonial) history of colonised places, highlighting the 'everyday forms of resistance' of subaltern subjects. It is precisely through and on the alternative, that feminist history is constructed; it is in the margins that the history of the 'silenced subaltern' that Spivak tells us about is woven⁴². Giving voice to the subaltern, however, also means questioning how subaltern thought and discourse, on the one hand, and feminist thought and discourse, on the other, come into contact: how can one narrate the 'oriental woman', the 'third-world woman', without speaking for her, without condemning her to an archetype (the docile wife or the vengeful goddess)? This question translates into a more upstream question: how to emancipate feminism from monolithic Eurocentric thinking? How to construct a feminism that can consider cultural specificities and understand identity as 'relational and historical'⁴³? As with the intersectional approach, postcolonial feminism has gone right to the heart of the hegemonic, ethnocentric, essentialising representation of Western academic discourses and their self-styled universalist agenda, including readings of Western feminism (the so-called second wave) that, intent on identifying the forms of patriarchal structures that oppress women as a whole, fall into the trap of identifying a 'main enemy' and a 'unique type of oppression'. But it is precisely this identification of a 'single enemy' that has had the consequence of blurring all the specificities (whether social, racial, cultural or sexual) of this oppression and, consequently, of negating all other cumulative forms of oppression⁴⁴. Hence the need to advocate a feminism that

was racially, socially and sexually aware, and that identified as its 'main enemy' the sum of systems of oppression in Western countries. A 'postcolonial feminism' – that is, a 'postcolonial-conscious' feminist discourse that derives from an articulation of gender, class/caste/ethnic group/race oppression, and also geographical and historical oppression as an extension of Orientalist discourses⁴⁵. The very heuristic category of gender therefore requires an operation of decolonisation⁴⁶.

The intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality as an integral element of the modern/colonial matrix of power, are indeed also the analytical focus of decolonial thought⁴⁷. Extending the arguments of both Anibal Quijano⁴⁸ (especially his concept of coloniality of power) and Walter D. Mignolo⁴⁹, decolonial feminist María Lugones tried to show how coloniality not only divides the world according to a particular racial logic, but also generates specific understandings of gender that enable the disappearance of the colonial/raced woman from theoretical and political consideration. To this aim, she proposed her central idea of coloniality of gender. She refuses to consider coloniality of gender as exclusively a circulation of power, which organizes the private sphere, and the access to and the control over sexuality. She focuses on the relationship between the conquering of nature and the transference of exploitation from the (European/white) man to nature and the colonizing invention of gender⁵⁰. Coloniality of gender is not merely a classification but it also indicates the process of dehumanizing people to fit them into this category. To oppose the coloniality of gender, Lugones introduces "decolonial feminism" as a kind of theory which frees subjugated knowledges⁵¹.

Conclusions

What lessons are we to draw in summary from this investigation which has highlighted the Eurocentric, hegemonic and discriminatory character of knowledge in the social sciences and the sociology of intercultural relations? And what horizons can we delineate in terms of commitment and responsibility towards democratising knowledge? I would like to emphasise two points.

The first lesson concerns the relationship between sociology, history and historiography⁵². The historical contextualisation of epistemologies and social research experiences is crucial: only by placing sociology historically, i.e. by locating its 'birth' and development within historical contexts, is it possible to deconstruct the theoretical, research and academic postures that as a 'universal we' we have adopted as canon. In fact, a 'sociological philology' must be able to explain why sociological thought has asserted itself in a specific direction and locate the reflections of male and female scholars in the historical contexts in which they lived. Their specific formulations are always situated, they could never have been made if they had not been developed in a specific historical period. Such an awareness – about the relevance of the intertwining of the study of the historical context in which a male or female scholar was formed and the concepts they put forward – is essential in problematising the fecundity of the analytical tools that we, as 'us universalists', adopt and illustrate in university classrooms such as analytical tools of sociology. Adopting a historical approach – capable of drawing on multiple historiographical sources – not least helps in the problematisation of a sociology of the singular and in the dissemination and support of a plural idea of the discipline that makes of interdisciplinary contamination its strong point, as my reflection sought to highlight.

A second, more distinctly methodological aspect is connected to this first point: how does one decolonise knowledge? If awareness of the ethical value of a plural knowledge – with multiple voices – is what moves many male and female scholars who study intercultural relations and the entanglements that come into play in the complexity of such relations (understanding culture not only in an ethnic and racial

sense but also in terms of gender, generation, status), how can we reverse the gear of research practice? The key concept here is that of reflexivity. Ahead of his time, Alberto Melucci in the late 1990s⁵³, looking at the effects of the so-called cultural turn in the social sciences, wrote that “a reflexive sociology experiments with research methods that in their application, often enthusiastic or unreflective, nevertheless question the fundamental assumptions of the positivist tradition in scientific enquiry”⁵⁴. He further emphasised that ‘research is a situated social practice and that words remain its raw material. In a world where knowledge features as part of our forms of life and shapes these forms while being, in turn, shaped by them, we can no longer be naïve about the use of words’⁵⁵. For reflexive sociology, language and the awareness of its non-neutrality is central, just as it is decisive to rethink the relationship between the observer and ‘his field’; two subject/objects now unthinkable if not in a relationship of reciprocal influence or even role reversal. Not least, reflexive sociology recognises the partiality of knowledge, assuming it both as a set of ‘plausible interpretations’ and as one form of narrative among many⁵⁶.

Advocating a reflexive sociology, however, entails constraints that we must also read as opportunities, especially as far as the topic of intercultural relations is concerned here today: reflexivity generates reflexivity in a potentially infinite vortex and the multiplicity of interpretations and paradigms can silence rather than give voice. Nevertheless, it is precisely in these risks and limits, that one can and must see the constructed character of research practices to which is linked a specific responsibility towards the production of knowledge and everyday intersubjective relations in differences⁵⁷.



Endnotes

1. Cf. E. SHILS, *The Sociology of Robert Park*, "The American Sociologist" 27 (1996) 4; A.D. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*, University of California Press, Oakland, CA 2015.
2. Cf. W.E.B. DU BOIS, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Bantam Classic, New York, NY 1903.
3. Cf. M. WEBER, *Economia e società*, Donzelli, Roma 2022.
4. Cf. G.A. ABRAHAM, *Max Weber: Modernist Anti-Pluralism and the Polish Question*, "New German Critique" 53 (1991) 33-66; E. WINTER, *On Max Weber and Ethnicity in Times of Intellectual Decolonization*, "Cambio" 9 (2020) 20, 41-52.
5. In the famous Freiburg Prolusion of 1895, Weber speaks of "racial, physical and psychic qualities between the two nationalities in the processes of adaptation to economic and social living conditions"; he refers to "less developed races" and to German labourers who "subjugate themselves to a race inferior to them"; he also makes the "stomachs" of Polish workers an indicator of their social difference and cultural inferiority. On this theme see S. MEZZADRA, *La comunità dei nemici. Migranti, capitalismo e nazione negli scritti di Max Weber sui lavoratori agricoli nei territori prussiani a est dell'Elba (1892-1895)*, "Aut aut" 275 (1996) 18-42.
6. Cf. WINTER, *On Max Weber*.
7. Cf. *ivi*.
8. Cf. W.E.B. DU BOIS, *The Philadelphia Negro; A Social Study*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 1899.
9. Cf. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied*.
10. Cf. DU BOIS, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
11. *Ibid.*, 2.
12. For this twofold commitment Burawoy pointed him out as "*probably the best public sociologist of the XX century*". Cf. M. BURAWOY, *2004 American Sociological Association Presidential Address: For Public Sociology*, "British Sociological Association" 56 (2005) 2, 259-94.
13. Cf. É. DURKHEIM, *Il suicidio. Studio di sociologia*, (Suicide: A Study in Sociology) Rizzoli, Milano, 1897.
14. Cf. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied*.
15. It is important to point out here, also in view of the continuation of this reflection, that the nascent discipline of sociology did not only restrict its perimeter to non-Western/'white' thinkers, as in the emblematic case of Du Bois, but also exercised a form of 'scientific exclusion' towards women who had long not been counted among the founding sisters of sociology. See in this regard the work of sociologist M.J. DEEGAN, *Early Women Sociologists and the American Sociological Society: The Patterns of Exclusion and Participation*, "The American Sociologist" 16 (1981) 1, 14-24 and *Id.*, *Women in Sociology: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook*, Greenwood Press, New York, NY 1991.
16. Cf. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied*.
17. Cf. *ibid.*, 141.
18. Cf. B. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, Paradigm Publishers, New York, NY 2014.

19. *Ibid.*, 8.
20. See also B. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *Another Knowledge is Possible*, Verso, London 2007.
21. *Ibid.*, 8.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 11.
24. Sociability is understood as the prevailing form of social relations that, anchored in specific socio-historical contexts, give rise to the geometries of social inclusion and exclusion.
25. G. RICOTTA, *Ripensare l'emancipazione sociale: sociologia delle assenze e delle emergenze*, "Quaderni di teoria sociale" 1 (2019) 179-198.
26. Cf. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *Epistemologies of the South*.
27. *Ibid.*, 11.
28. *Ibid.*, 11.
29. For an in-depth look at research practices in the light of De Sousa Santos' proposal, see V. PELLEGRINO – G. RICOTTA *Epistemologie dei Sud e decolonizzazione dell'immaginario sociologico*, in M. MASSARI – V. PELLEGRINO (eds.), *Emancipatory social science: le questioni, il dibattito, le pratiche*, Orthotes, Napoli 2020, 115-125.
30. See the work of Wylie, one of the proponents of the "standpoint theory". A. WYLIE, *Why Standpoint Matters*, in R. FIGUEROA – S.G. HARDING (eds.), *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, Routledge, London 2003, 26-48.
31. See, among others, the works of S.F. ALATAS, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism*, Sage, New Delhi 2006; R. CONNELL, *Southern Theory: Social Science And The Global Dynamics Of Knowledge*, Polity, Unwin 2007; J. GO, *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*, Oxford Scholarship on line (DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190625139.001.0001); W. KEIM, *Counter Hegemonic Currents and Internationalization of Sociology. Theoretical Reflections and One Empirical Example*, "International Sociology" 26 (2011) 1, 123-145.
32. See in particular C. MOHANTY, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship And Colonial Discourses*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 1986; Id., *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2003; G. SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in L. CHRISMAN – P. WILLIAMS (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1994, 66-111.
33. The lack of a thematisation of the possible contribution of a 'gendered reading' of intercultural relations, aimed at denouncing the Eurocentric character of knowledge, constitutes for Connell the main limitation of Santos' reflection. R. CONNELL, *Review of Epistemologies of the South*, "American Journal of Sociology" 120 (2014) 3, 949-951.
34. Of the four waves with which it is customary to distinguish the feminist movement, the third dates back to the 1980s and 1990s. This wave is characterised by an extension of women's subjectivities (in particular those of the so-called Global South, but also transgender women) and by the assertion of the intersectional perspective.
35. K. CRENSHAW, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, University of Chicago Legal Forum, Chicago, IL 1989, 139.
36. Cf. Id., *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*, "Stanford Law Review" 43 (1991) 6, 1241-1299.
37. Cf. I. CAMOZZI, *Sociologia delle relazioni interculturali*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2019.
38. Cf. CRENSHAW, *Mapping the Margins*.

39. Crenshaw, as is well known, is concerned about re-interpretations of the approach in Europe; concerns that also arise in light of the specificity of European contexts and their influence on the conceptualisation of terms such as race, class, gender. Cf. G. KNAPP, *Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories*, "European Journal of Women's Studies" 12 (2005) 3, 249-265.
40. Cf. CRENSHAW, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, 139.
41. Cf. M. MATSUDA, *Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations*, "Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review" 22 (1987) 323-399.
42. Cf. SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*
43. *Ivi.*
44. Black feminism, for example, denounced the universalising elitism of such discourses, produced by and for the white, middle-class, heterosexual woman. Chandra Mohanty advocates a 'feminism without borders', which promotes both the decolonisation of feminism and the recognition of differences and thus borders. Cf. C. MOHANTY, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 1986; EAD., *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2003.
45. Cf. E. SAID, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London 1978.
46. On this issue see, among others, Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí's work on the processes of imposing gender differences through colonisation. 'Gender' as it is usually perceived today – i.e. in terms of male/female gender hierarchy and male domination/female subordination – is not as universal as it is believed to be. Colonialism imposed this way of conceptualising gender on the Yoruba, as well as on many other colonised populations, in Africa and elsewhere. See also María Lugones' work focused on understanding the indifference that men, who have been racialised as inferior, show to the systematic violence inflicted on 'black women'. Cf. O. OYẸWÙMÍ, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN 1997; EAD., *What Gender Is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire 2015; M. LUGONES, *The Coloniality of Gender*, "Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise" 2 (2008) 1-17.
47. While postcolonial studies limited their critical vein mainly to the cultural sphere, the modernity/coloniality approach was strongly linked to world-systems theory from the outset, to scholarly work in development and underdevelopment theory and the Frankfurt School critical social theory tradition. The modernity/coloniality school emerged from the work of, among others, the sociologists Anibal Quijano and María Lugones, and the philosopher and semiotician, Walter D. Mignolo. Cf. G. BHAMBRA, *Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues*, "Postcolonial Studies" 17 (2014) (2) 115-121.
48. Cf. A. QUIJANO, *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*, "Cultural Studies" 21 (2007) (2) 168-178.
49. Cf. W. MIGNOLO, *The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference*, "South Atlantic Quarterly" 101 (2000) (1) 57-96.
50. Cf. M. LUGONES, *The Coloniality of Gender*.
51. Cf. M. LUGONES, *Methodological Notes toward a Decolonial Feminism* in A. ISASI-DIAZ – EDUARDO MENDIETA (eds), *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (FUP), New York, NY 2011, 68-86.
52. It is well known that C. Wright Mills, back in the 1950s, invited the sociological community to conceive their research according to a historical purpose and to conduct it by drawing on historical material. Although this invitation has been taken up by many scholars thus promoting a 'historical sociology', its epistemological boundaries remain ill-defined. Cf. C. WRIGHT MILLS, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford Press, New York, NY 1959.
53. Cf. A. MELUCCI, *Verso una sociologia riflessiva. Ricerca qualitativa e cultura*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1998.

54. *Ibid.*, 8.
55. *Ibid.*, 10.
56. Cf. *Ivi.*
57. As Marco Antonsich suggested with regard to the famous debate between Ted Cattle and Tariq Modood on the relationship between interculturalism and multiculturalism, the question we must ask ourselves today as researchers can no longer be 'how to live with diversity' but 'how to live in diversity'. A shift that is not only terminological but above all conceptual in that it embraces two ideas: the first is that 'minorities' will, in the near future, be majorities as a result of demographic processes; the second implies that the preposition *in* represents a tactical move to pave the way for an exploration of diversity. M. ANTONSICH, *Interculturalism Versus Multiculturalism – the Cattle-Modood Debate*, 'Ethnicities' 16 (2016) 3, 470-493.