Why is classical theory classical? Theorizing the canon and canonizing Du Bois

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Abstract

One of the most contentious debates coursing through sociology is what to do with the canon of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim: abandon the canon, start afresh with a new canon, or reconstruct the existing canon? In this paper I examine the claims of Connell, the foremost advocate of abandoning the cannon. She claims the canon is an arbitrary imposition that bears no relation to the actual history of sociology and we would be better off examining how the canon came to be. She does not consider the intrinsic value of the canon and instead advances the idea of Southern theory. It is not clear what is Southern about Southern theory nor what holds together the array of theorists she proposes. As an alternative I propose reconstructing the canon with the life and work of W.E.B. Du Bois who was propelled by precisely the issues that concern Connell. The canon is relational so that Du Bois is not simply added but brought into conversation with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, leading to a rereading of each theorist. The canon has always been subject to revision when it atrophies, when it moves out of sync with questions raised by the world and by sociology. I agree with others that contemporary questions push Du Bois to the forefront—however, not at the expense of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim but in dialogue with them. I outline a possible direction of such dialogues from which all would benefit. Just as the inclusion of Marx had dramatic consequences for the recalibration of Weber and Durkheim, so the same will happen with the inclusion of Du Bois with regard to Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, and, at the same time, stiffening and advancing a Du Boisian sociology. Incorporating Du Bois into the existing canon may appear to be a reformist move but if attention is paid to the whole gamut of Du Bois's oeuvre, then the consequences could be revolutionary, even to the point of sidelining one or more of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.

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The sociological canon is under fire! What is to be done? Should we abandon the canon? Should we start afresh with a new canon? Should we rebuild the existing canon? Retreat, revolution, or reconstruction? These questions have been coursing through our discipline for some time, as they have in other disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Revolts by graduate students against the veneration of three bourgeois European men from the 19th century have inflamed the debate. Can the canon or should the canon address the pressing issues of our time—racial injustice, climate change, pandemics, burgeoning inequality? Or is the point of the canon to establish shared foundational questions that transcend history, create distinctive methodologies, advance original theoretical frames, and design exemplary research all of which lead to new ways of seeing that connect us to the past, the distant, and the Other?

The canon dismissed

The fire did not begin with Raewyn Connell but she fanned the flames with her 1997 pioneering intervention: "Why is classical theory classical?" She answers: "the idea of 'classical theory' . . . can only be understood in the framework of global history, especially the history of imperialism" (p. 1545). For her, classical theory is an artifact of the context within which it was born. Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim were not considered major sociologists at the time of the founding of sociology in the late 19th century and today they do not influence much sociological research. So why, Connell asks, should they be referred to as founding fathers if they are neither founders nor fathers?[1]

In short, we have been lured into worshipping false Gods, variously called classical sociology, founding fathers or the canon. In coming to this conclusion, Connell leaves the object of investigation—"classical theory"—largely unexamined. She retraces the beginning of sociology to the end of the 19th century when the discipline aimed for "encyclopedic" knowledge (as opposed to "canonical" knowledge) addressing crucial questions of empire and difference, and when race and gender were central foci. Even if sociology adhered to "evolutionary theory" that justified the superiority and supremacy of the West, the white, and the metropole, it nevertheless had an expansiveness and inclusiveness that sociology would lose by the middle of the 20th century with the consolidation of the canon invented by Talcott Parsons, C Wright Mills, and others. They were responding to the crisis of sociology in the interwar period, as Connell writes, when the idea of progress—a central hallmark of earlier sociology—had been called into question. Sociology had turned inwards to examine social "pathologies" in the metropole, but in the aftermath of World War Two it turned outward to define the "American Century."

The canon that Parsons defined dominated sociology for two decades but, in Connells's (1997) view, to the detriment of sociology: "Gender, sexuality, and race relations, which were core issues for evolutionary sociology, were pushed to the margins in the process of canon formation" (p. 1545). Marginalizing race, gender, and Empire, the canon also failed to guide actual empirical research:

> . . . [N]one of the elected fathers actually motivates the empirical activities of post-1920 sociology at all well. Despite the designation of "methodological classics," the main line of

modern research methods does not run through Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, or Simmel (1997: 1545).

So why then did the canon endure? Connell's answer is not that it had intrinsic value but that it provided "symbolic legitimation for the discipline" and "consolidate[s] the ideology of professionalism. . . a badge of membership in a professional community" (p. 1545). In her view, the corrective needed is to *replace the study of texts with the study of context*:

> Sociology can be introduced to students not as a story of "great men" but as a practice shaped by the social relations that made it possible. The full range of intellectuals who produced "theories of society" can be recovered for this history, including the feminists, anarchists, and colonials who were erased from the canonical story. The exclusions constructing the discipline can become part of the discipline's self-knowledge (1997: 1546).

For Connell, then, the canon is irredeemable; it should not be augmented or transformed but replaced by the history of its creation. But that history contains its own theory, let us examine it.

The canon historicized

Connell's argument is predicated on unacknowledged and often conflicting theories of knowledge. She begins with a "*reflectionist*" view of knowledge; the method and content of sociology conceptualizes the imperial context of its formation, centering on the contrast between the "advanced" civilization of the metropole and the "primitive" character of the periphery. She writes: "Sociology was formed within the culture of imperialism and embodied a cultural response to the colonized world" (p. 1519). This cultural response embraced a notion of progress built on hierarchies of race and gender and a "grand ethnography" that typologized societies into an evolutionary sequence. This theory of knowledge echoes Durkheim's view that the taken-for-granted categories of knowledge are socially produced.

Connell, then, proceeds to examine the social location from which this knowledge is produced. She points to the social movements of workers and women in the metropolis calling attention to inequality and domination, inspiring men of the liberal bourgeoisie to develop a universal science that obscured class and gender privilege. At the same time global differences were naturalized by laws of progress that conflated problems of Empire with those of the metropole (p. 1531). Here is a theory of knowledge that simultaneously expresses and conceals, that is *refracts* the interests of the middle classes, echoing *The German Ideology* of Marx and Engels.

Turning to the 20th century, Connell points to the interwar crisis of the old imperialism: nationalism rears its head along with anti-colonial struggles, and then after WWII the Cold War. Out of sync with the times, destroyed by the rise of fascism, sociology entered a crisis, manifested in an inward-turning professionalism directed to social problems of the metropole. Having lost its legitimacy and coherence, the discipline dissolved into random empiricism. But in the postwar era this was replaced by the rise of the canon.

Here is a third theory of knowledge: the canon was born as a symbolic and intellectual *reaction* to the earlier disintegration and marginalization of sociology. In the tradition of Max Weber, in times of crisis, ideas become the "switchmen" determining the tracks along which institutions develop—namely, the rise of the canon disseminated through translations, text books, curricula, exams, and so forth.

Connell's history of sociology, then, is, steeped with "classical theory," but unrecognized as such. Far from divorcing classical theory and empirical research, her historical account of sociology interweaves them. She picks up one theory of knowledge or another—reflecting, refracting, or reacting to reality—without acknowledging that they are rooted in quite different even contradictory frameworks. Connell, thereby, reduces classical theory to its functions (integrative, symbolic, legitimating) or to its context (the Cold War, imperialism) without ever specifying what "it" actually is. Without examining what they have to offer, she objects to the idea that the theories of three dead white men should dominate social theory to the exclusion of others. The canon is reduced to the conditions of it production, text is reduced to context, and, implicitly, theory is reduced to the theorist.

Yet, the most significant feature of canonical or classical thinkers is their ability to transcend context. We are still reading Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, with all their limitations, because they do speak to us in the present. They had to battle against hostile perspectives to defend their original orientations to social science, orientations that today are in danger of disappearing in a welter of professionalism. They had to engage a capitalist world in transition much as we do today. Each in their own way was alienated from the world they examined, leading them to contemplate the possibilities of a different world, possibilities so badly needed today. This suggests a fourth theory of knowledge— that theory can eclipse the conditions of its production to take on significance in different contexts. As Edward Said (1983) has said theory "travels" in time as well as space. That is precisely what defines classical sociology.

The canon replaced—Southern Theory

Connell's critique leads her to abandon the canon and let a 100 flowers bloom. She is nostalgic about the true pioneers of sociology and their encyclopedic view.[2]

> "Classical theory" is a package that not only exaggerates the importance of a few great men but in the same gesture excludes or discredits the noncanonical. The sociologists of the late 19th century, to do them justice, were not like this. They had a sense of adventure, a skepticism about authority, and a breadth of interest, which we could still do with (1997: 1546).

Thus, her book *Southern Theory* (2007) exemplifies the encyclopedic track. It begins with a critique of three texts of general theory: Anthony Giddens *The Constitution of Society*, James Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory*, and Pierre Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice*. Each is a species of a flawed Northern theory—a theory that claims to be from nowhere, that turns the particularity of the metropole into the universal, and thereby excludes the experience and social thought of most of humanity. Instead, we

should open the doors to "Southern theory"—an impressive array of theories, ignored or side-lined, that adopt perspectives deemed "Southern."

But what is Southern theory? Is it theory *of* the South? Clearly not, as Connell will be the first to admit, the South is not a discrete entity that can be studied outside the domination of the North. There's no way of studying Africa without studying colonialism, imperialism, and latter-day coloniality. Is it theory *from* the South? Clearly not, as so many of her theorists had their theories shaped in the North. How can there be a Southern theory separate from the Northern theory that it contests. Is it theory *for* the South? Clearly not, because the interests any such Southern theory expresses are multiple and divergent, based on class, gender, or race. There is no homogeneous South. Does Australia belong to the South, as Connell implies, or does it belong to the North? If it is settler colonialism that positions it in the South, as Connell (2013) suggests then the US is also part of the South.

Returning to the North, is Northern theory so homogeneous? Can you reduce contemporary "Northern" theory to Giddens, Bourdieu, and Coleman? Postcolonial theory, dependency theory, world systems theory, critical race theory, and feminism were largely germinated in the North, even as they take the standpoint of the marginal, the excluded. To turn the tables on Connell, where do these heterogeneous and arbitrary categories North and South come from? What function do they serve? Bringing to light theorists we may not have heard of is important, but in reducing them to "North" or "South" she once again reduces text to context. Dissolving the canon into a wild field where everything grows is a powerful corrective, a point of embarkation but not a point of conclusion.

Guided by Connell's concerns—experiential, inclusive, global—I suggest we focus on texts before context. Starting with texts means locating texts in relation to other texts, those of the pre-existing canon, which is now being re-read in relation to a widely heralded new entrant, W.E.B. Du Bois.

Theorizing the canon

A theory of knowledge requires first a knowledge of theory. That's where I begin. *My first premise is that any discipline has foundational assumptions.*[3] Economics has its macro and micro foundations; sociology has its canon that is neither fixed nor arbitrary. Each canonical figure has a theory of history that anticipates or denies the possibility of an alternative future. Their theory of history must also rest on moral foundations—sociology is a moral science. It has a distinctive conception of the social as well as a methodology that captures the social, illustrated by exemplary studies of the concrete world.

The second premise is that the canon is dynamic. It is continually changing, even in its defining criteria. First, there is the genesis or pre-history of the canon and here Connell offers us a plausible narrative of sociology in crisis. Parsons (1937) swept away the cobwebs of the past to establish foundations in the writings of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim, and Weber, claiming that they independently converged on a "voluntaristic" theory of action that was forged in opposition to behaviorism and utilitarianism (Camic, 1989). This theory of action would, in due course, aspire to make the other social sciences a special case of sociology. As Parsons established himself at Harvard after World War Two he pioneered a theory of modernization, projecting the US as the "lead" society,

opposing totalitarianism whether fascism or communism. Marshall and Pareto drop out but Durkheim and Weber continue, laying the foundations of his general theory of structural functionalism.[4]

But history moved on. Based on the presumption of an underlying normative consensus, structural functionalism's domain assumptions diverged from the world it claimed to interpret especially once the civil rights movement, anti-war movement, and anti-imperial movements of the 1960s exploded on and off campuses in the United States and elsewhere. The new nations, the postcolonial world, turned modernization theory into an ideology that obscured deepening global inequalities. Structural functionalism's hegemony collapsed and Marx and Engels—dismissed by Parsons as an outdated branch of utilitarianism—enjoyed renewed popularity.

Yet Durkheim and Weber did not disappear. Instead, they were reread through a more radical lens, being brought into conversation with Marx and Engels. So Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* that Parsons had read through the non-contractual elements of contract, that is the necessary consensus that underlies all institutions in society, including the market, was now read through the abnormal forms of the division of labor. Organic solidarity now appeared not as something imminent in contemporary society, but in a radicalized future, a form of guild socialism that eliminated inequality of opportunity and inequality of power. Similarly, Weber's theory no longer revolved around a typology of social action but a history of rationalization and domination—the focus shifted from the studies of religion and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to the essays critical of modern society, such as those collected together in Gerth and Mills' *From Max Weber*.

The third premise is that the canon is relational; it is made up of conversations among theories. In Parsons' vision the conversations were convergent on a singular framework, whether Durkheim, Weber, Marshall, and Pareto's serendipitous convergence on a singular theory of action or Durkheim and Weber's convergence on structural functionalism. For a short time, structural functionalism was a planetary reference point defining a dominant or, in some places such as Eastern Europe, a critical sociology. Its reign was as short-lived as its collapse was complete. In its obsessive systems building it had actually lost sight of the canon.

In *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, Gouldner (1970) became a prophet of its demise, but he could not yet envision sociology's revival—a revival that would be instigated by the reconstruction of the canon through the inclusion of Marx (and Engels) alongside Weber and Durkheim. The canon was no longer convergent on a singular framework, but became a dynamic *dialogue* among Marx, Weber, and Durkheim through the research programs each inspired. The tension among the three provided a renewed vitality. More recently, it has atrophied, giving rise to a new discontent expressed so well in Connell's critical essay. But where she calls for an abandonment of the canon I call for its reconstruction.

Canonizing Du Bois

In the past there have been several candidates for canonization—Simmel, Freud, Elias—but none have actually made it, instead hovering around the entrance.[5] I believe William

Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963), however, is the candidate that best fits the age and Connell's concerns. Du Bois interrogates race, class, imperialism, and to a limited degree, gender. He not only speaks to issues of the moment but fits the criteria outlined above. His theory of history (of global dimensions) is deeply rooted in moral foundations of social justice, inclusion, and freedom that are realized in visions of alternative futures. His methodology embarks from lived experience—his own and others. He produced exemplary studies, most notably *Black Reconstruction in America* (Du Bois, 1998 [1935]). When one takes into account his entire oeuvre he has on obvious claim to canonization.

But it is not simply a matter of adding Du Bois to the canon. It involves rebuilding the canon out of new relations and new readings of each of its members. Putting Du Bois into dialogue with Durkheim, Weber, and Marx calls for a recalibration of each.

Within sociology, if Du Bois is recognized as a significant figure it is usually with reference to *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996 [1899]) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1989 [1903]). Important though these works are, by themselves they do not qualify him as a canonical thinker. These are Du Bois's Durkheimian years, from 1898 to 1903, when he characterizes Black lives in Philadelphia in terms of the abnormal division of labor—the anomic and forced division of labor. Thus, he describes the recent emancipation from slavery and migration from the South in terms of dislocation, giving rise to confusion around norms. If anomie is one expression of "disorganization" in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia, a second source are the structural inequalities based on race, what Durkheim called the forced division of labor. While *The Philadelphia Negro* (unknowingly) approximates the theory of Durkheim's (2014 [1893]) *The Division of Labor in Society*, it does so by following the methodology Durkheim (2014 [1895]) lays out in *The Rules of Sociological Method*. *The Philadelphia Negro* is, indeed, a meticulous empirical study of social facts, carried out with the same hope of altering the collective consciousness, convincing white elites of the error of their ways. While acknowledging the pathologies of the "submerged tenth" Du Bois implores whites to recognize the human virtues of the Black "talented tenth."

The conversation continues in a different register with *The Souls of Black Folk*—where he describes the lived reality of African Americans in the South after Reconstruction and during Jim Crow. Here he again appeals to his white audience, this time on an emotional plane, showing how remarkable is African-American resilience in the face of racism and poverty, how Blacks are no less human than whites, and again pointing to their contributions to the collective consciousness of the US despite inhuman degradation—a theme he will continue more systematically in *The Gift of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 2007 [1924]).

Turning the tables, we have to recognize Du Bois's challenge to Durkheim—to develop an understanding of racism. Karen Fields (2002) has taken up that challenge in her treatment of double consciousness, pointing to the similarity between Durkheim's experience of anti-Semitism and Du Bois's experience of racism. If one is looking for a Durkheimian approach to racism one might take up his account of caste in *The Division of Labor in Society*—a concept to be found in Du Bois and one that has recently gained renewed influence in the analysis of racism.

So much for the Durkheimian dialogue with Du Bois. While a faith in science and the progress it entails remained with him throughout his life, nonetheless he quickly became frustrated by academic exclusions, limited access to funding—funding often monopolized by Booker T. Washington. Moreover, the only jobs available to him were at Black Universities, notably Atlanta University where he developed the Atlanta School, rightly celebrated by Aldon Morris (2015) and Earl Wright (2016). By 1905 he was already engaged in political activities beyond the university in the Niagara Movement that in 1910 would become the NAACP. At that point Du Bois left the university to become editor of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's magazine, for the next 25 years. This a very different Du Bois from Durkheim. He is now a public intellectual using *The Crisis* as a staging ground for his developing radicalism. I call this his anti-Weber phase.

Darkwater (Du Bois, 1999 [1920])—a collection of essays, interweaving biography and history—is the counterpoint to *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois gives up addressing white folk and turns to Black folk. One of his most celebrated essays, and the foundation of whiteness studies, is entitled "The Souls of White Folk." Appalled by the barbarity of World War One, Du Bois traces its source to the struggle among imperial nations for Africa, famously represented in a separate essay "The Roots of War" (Du Bois 1915) published in *The Atlantic.* In *Darkwater* he spells out his indictment of Western Civilization whose superiority he endorses, but not the way it was achieved: through the appropriation of intellectual innovations, artistic accomplishments, and material resources from the rest of the world. The religion of whiteness, he writes, gave whites the "divine right to steal." For Weber, on the other hand, the violence of imperialism that supported Western civilization was relegated to a story of origins. Once modern western bourgeois capitalism is established, its predatory character recedes before a rising "rationalization."

Darkwater also includes an analysis of the 1917 race riot in East St Louis, attributed to the competition between white immigrant workers from Europe and Black migrants from the South. At root, this was a conflict engineered by capital playing off cheap Black labor against more expensive white labor. The solution, Du Bois writes, lies in socialism that will abolish private property to create industrial democracy and a realm of freedom. Continuing the prospects for socialism in other chapters, Du Bois marvels at the mechanization of industry and imagines a parallel elimination of degrading forms of personal servitude through automation, leading to what he pithily calls "service without servants." But such a socialism, he insists, can only be realized on the premise of the inclusion of the darker races who form the majority of the world. For Du Bois, in contrast to Weber, socialism will not run aground on the shoals of bureaucracy but on the exclusion of the majority of humankind.

This "anti-Weber" Du Bois embraces the idea of socialism as an appeal to the most progressive political forces of his time, demanding that they give priority to the question of racism. But it is not yet a Marxist Du Bois. That will have to wait, at least, until after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1926 and the subsequent discovery of Marx's writings. Although he had become familiar with socialist parties in Germany and the US, he resented their condescending approach to the race question, so his socialism was a utopia projected into some unknown future. It is detached from the present. There was neither a theory of the way capitalism sowed the seeds of its own destruction and simultaneously

the seeds of a new order nor a theory of the formation of an agent of social transformation. That would have to await his Marxist turn, exemplified in his masterpiece, *Black Reconstruction* (Du Bois, 1998 [1935]). Here Du Bois develops an original Marxist methodology in his treatment of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and its aftermath.

In the origins of the Civil War, Du Bois takes the view that slavery, as a mode of production, has an inherently expansionist tendency, always driving for new land and more slaves. In the case of the US, this expansionism was further stimulated by the increased demand for cotton, fueled by the industrial revolution centering on the textile industry in England. The North was ready to tolerate slavery so long as it was confined to the Confederate states, but Southern expansionism was driving slavery to the border states and to the West. It was this expansionism that precipitated the Civil War.

This first Marxist step—the analysis of economic forces on a world scale—sets the scene for the second step, namely the examination of the balance of political forces. Du Bois attributes the victory of the North to the exodus of half a million fugitive slaves who supplied the Northern armies with vital soldiers and services. The enrollment of half a million slaves not only augmented the military power of the Unionist Army, it also depleted essential supplies to the Confederate armies. Du Bois writes of the slave participation in the Civil War as a General Strike, underlining the agency of the former slaves, connecting them to the idea of a revolutionary working class. It was Northern dependency on the slaves fighting for their freedom that prompted Lincoln to call an end to slavery in the Emancipation Declaration of 1863. In short, a product of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, the war unleashed class struggle.

After the war, the North supported "Reconstruction"—the development of an interracial democracy in which African Americans played an important role, varying from state to state, made possible by the Freedmen's Bureau and the presence of Northern troops in the South. This lasted for 11 years until Northern capital turned against Reconstruction, the Supreme Court annulled the expansion of voting rights, troops were withdrawn from the South, and the planter class was reinstalled as the dominant power in the Confederacy. A new racial order was established led by planters, who appealed to poorer whites to patrol and enforce the subjugation of former slaves, and based on a "public and psychological wage." The South moved "back toward slavery," a coercive economy based on share-cropping and convict labor.

Du Bois's Marxist turn was consolidated by his return to Atlanta University in 1933 that coincided with increasing opposition from the leadership of the NAACP, Walter White in particular, resulting in his removal from the editorship of *The Crisis.* Du Bois expands Marx's own analysis of the Civil War (Zimmerman 2018), locating the dynamics of race and class in the North and the South within the vice of global economic forces. A sophisticated Marxism, indeed. Reconstruction was not a disastrous mistake as historians of the time claimed but a failed utopia—a utopia ("abolition democracy") that was not some distant imagination but a vision embedded in the actual course of history. Writing in 1935 Du Bois's thinking was shaped by the politics of the times, not only seeking a real utopia in the past but also in the present—a cooperative commonwealth that would involve the self-organization of the African-American community, making segregation a virtue of a necessity (Du Bois 2002 [1940]). In both cases Du Bois applies

the Marxist method, namely the way the mode of production generates its own demise as well as its own alternatives.

The Marxist turn was instigated as much by frustration with the integrationist politics of the NAACP as by the Soviet Union's example of tackling poverty without racism. Clashing with the administration of Atlanta University, he was unceremoniously pensioned off in 1944. He was invited back to the NAACP as Director of Special Research with the expectation he would now, nearing the age of 80, use this as a sinecure. Quite the opposite. He seized the political openings of the immediate post-war period to renew his struggle for a radical politics that joined anti-racism in the US to a Pan-African anti-imperialism—a perspective extolled in *The World and Africa* (Du Bois, 2007 [1947]). With the onset of the Cold War, Du Bois deepened his communist sympathies together with his open support for the civil rights movement, repeatedly clashing with the NAACP as it began to purge its ranks of communists. In 1948, once again, he was forced to leave the NAACP. Untethered he now combined an open anti-colonialism with activism in the Soviet-influenced peace movement. In 1950 he campaigned as a Senatorial candidate of the American Labor Party that gave him receptive audiences for his denunciation of US policies at home and abroad—the hypocrisy of championing democracy abroad while perpetuating racism at home.

Declared an enemy of the US state for his peace initiatives, he was charged with being an unregistered foreign agent in 1951. After a widely publicized trial, what turned out to be a fabricated case was dismissed. Du Bois had rustled up so much support from so many sources, the Department of Justice feared mounting adverse publicity. His passport confiscated, he could no longer travel abroad. Deserted by a largely fearful Black bourgeoisie, Du Bois spent more time addressing the burgeoning civil rights movement in the South and the trade union movement in the North. When his passport was restored in 1959 he traveled to the Soviet Union and China where leaders honored him for his courageous stands. His position in the US was becoming untenable. He thumbed his nose at the state by joining the Communist Party in 1961 and departed for recently independent Ghana where he died in 1963 at the age of 95 on the eve of the civil rights March on Washington. All this is narrated in his *In Battle for Peace* (Du Bois, 2007 [1952]) and his final autobiography, published posthumously in English (Du Bois, 1968) —a powerful denunciation of the forces crushing humanity.

Throughout his life Du Bois was a sociologist ahead of his time—his urban sociology anti-dated the Chicago School by 20 years; his anti-imperialism and socialist visions, cultivated between the wars, had to wait for the New Left of the 1960s; his innovative Marxism has still to be fully assimilated; and to this day his vigorous opposition to the Cold War and sympathy for the Soviet Union and China discredits him in the eyes of conventional sociology. But a new generation is catching up with his uncompromising anti-racism and anti-capitalism. The jury is still out whether sociology can embrace this radical Du Bois and in so doing give itself a new life fit for the challenges of a new age.

Reconstructing the canon

This preliminary sketch of imaginary dialogues between Du Bois and Durkheim, Weber and Marx constitutes a case for bringing Du Bois into the canon. That may appear to be a reformist move, one that accepts the terms of the existing canon, but it has

revolutionary consequences—that is if we take seriously the entire range of Du Bois' writings. It leads to the transformation of the canon which now might include the following elements:

- A global and historical perspective on capitalism that pays attention to the centrality of race, beginning with the slave trade and continuing through colonialism and imperialism.
- A moral science, centering a utopian dimension that, in turn, calls for an anti-utopian analysis of the changing limits of the possible.
- A reflexive science that places social scientists within the world they study as well as within their contested fields of inquiry.
- An inter-disciplinary science that recognizes disciplinary boundaries in order to cross them, in particular a cross fertilization between social science, history, and humanities.
- A public engagement that forces social science out of its academic cocoon, entering the public arena with social theory and empirical analysis, framing public debates, and issues.

As I have suggested, this calls for a rereading of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.[6] It is possible that one or more of these theorists might not be able to stand the test of such a reconstruction, and will drop out of the canon. That depends on the canonical dialogues that will ensue. Indeed, the inclusion of Du Bois could sow the seeds of the destruction of the canon. At a minimum the canon would come to look very different just as it came to look very different once Marx was included.

The canon will benefit from the inclusion of Du Bois—as long as we do not confine ourselves to his early writings. But what impact would the reconstructed canon have on Du Bois? It could be said that Du Bois drifted away from sociology as he became more politically engaged in both policy and public arenas. Other disciplines can rightly appropriate him—African American studies, Ethnic studies, English literature, History, Anthropology, and Philosophy. That is as it should be, and he becomes a vehicle to connect sociology to other disciplines. But that doesn't mean there can't also be a sociological Du Bois, shaped precisely by bringing him into dialogue with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Such canonical dialogues are not designed to reduce Du Bois to the existing canon, but to enrich and enliven the canon with an original sociological Du Bois. It would lead to a distinctive sociological reading of Du Bois, lifting and developing sociology based on his life and works.[7]

And what does it mean for Connell? In presenting her survey of sociology, she gives but passing mention to Du Bois. Yet her critique of sociology as a distorted expression of imperialism finds its counterpoint in the writings of Du Bois. A product of Western civilization, Du Bois calls into question the very idea of Southern theory: his struggles against colonialism in the South are always connected to his promotion of the civil rights movement in the North. He not only dissolves the separation of Northern and Southern theory, but also the separation of text and context. Du Bois's sociology is a self-conscious and ongoing reflection over 75 years of political engagement with the world he studied. For him theory and practice, text and context are inextricably interwoven

because both are driven by his unyielding public and scholarly commitment to movements for social justice.

Du Bois' inclusion in the canon establishes and strengthens a research program with global dimensions—a global sociology—deepening the significance of recent innovative postcolonial departures developed in the North as well as in the South. Canonical dialogues would bring forth new dimensions of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim just as they would fortify and clarify a Du Boisian sociology advanced most recently by Morris (2015), Wright (2016), Itzigsohn and Brown (2020) amongst others.

Returning to the narratives of its pre-history would restore an encyclopedic perspective, to be sure, but leave sociology bereft of a contemporary, critical vision of its own. Dismiss the canon and sociology will lose its body and its soul—a part merging with a rootless anthropology, a part colonized by economics, a part reduced to aimless empiricism, a part ready to be bent this way and that into a minor managerial science or another arm of neoliberalism.

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Notes

1. In a personal note Connell writes that her paper originated in an introductory graduate course on social theory that she was asked to teach at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She considered the conventional view of classical theory as the story of three great founders to be a misrepresentation of the actual history of sociology. That's where her paper began, an attempt to set the record straight. For my part, I have never thought of the "classics" as "founders" in the sense of representing the origins of sociology, but precisely as a *break* with its origins. The true history of the discipline began with the formation of the canon, until then—and this is the importance of Connell's paper—we are dealing with an incoherent, pre-history. The characterization of the classics as "fathers" is equally fraught for obvious reasons, although, as we know, parental influence works in mysterious ways, rarely direct, never predetermined, never fully understood, often unconscious, and often indirectly through siblings. In that regard the same can be said of the influence Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—it

can't be reduced to citation counts, manifest connections, or loud declamations. Stinchcombe (1982) and Merton (1968) offer a more variegated and nuanced framing of the significance of the "classics" for research.

2. These questions are a truncated version of reflections on sociology in, of, and for the "South" as it applies to South Africa. See Burawoy (2010, 2012).

3. Here I have been influenced by the postpositivist or historical view of the growth of knowledge as found in the work of Kuhn (1962) and, in particular, Lakatos (1978). Where they apply their ideas of paradigm and research program to specific scientific theories, I extend those ideas to the discipline.

4. The disappearance of Marshall and Pareto has already taken place by the time Parsons gives his Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association in 1949 (Parsons, 1950). In a personal communication Camic notes that Marshall dropped out soon after the publication of the *The Structure of Social Action* (Parsons, 1937) and by 1945 Parsons had written Pareto off as a "failure." Interestingly, Camic suggests, that in the 1930s Parsons found Marshall and Pareto to be important figures as both were economists who saw the necessity of going beyond economics, but by 1949 they were no longer needed as Parsons considered narrow economism to have been defeated. Camic further suggests that changes in the canon also reflect a changing context, in this case the academic context. In the early years Parsons was heavily influenced by the champions of Marshall and Pareto at Harvard, but by 1949 those champions were either dead or no longer necessary for the Parsonsian project of structural functionalism, while Durkheim and Weber were rising in intellectual stature. All of which is to underline the dynamic character of the canon!

5. In my interpretations I have relied on a series of marvelous intellectual biographies of Du Bois—Horne (1986), Lewis (1993, 2000), Marable (2005), Rampersad (1976), and Reed (1997) as well as the writings of Du Bois himself.

6. These conversations with Du Bois have already begun. Apart from Karen Fields (2002) who has constructed an imaginary conversation between Du Bois and Durkheim through the lens of the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]) rather than his *Division of Labor in Society* (1984 [1893]), Christopher McAuley (2019) has devoted a fascinating book to the clash between Weber and Du Bois, and Kevin Anderson (2010) has uncovered a late Marx that repudiates historical teleology in favor of astute analyses of race, class, and slavery in the US Civil war, struggles against the colonization of Ireland, India, and Indonesia, and nationalist struggles of Poland—ample material for a conversation with Du Bois.

7. Du Bois might even lead us to develop entirely new genres. Just as historians have their historical fiction so Du Bois' novels *Quest for the Silver Fleece* (2007 [1911]), *Dark Princess* (2007 [1928]), and *The Black Flame Trilogy* (2007 [1957], 2007 [1959], 2007 [1961]) may be seen as sociological accounts of historical processes.

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