

W. E. B. Du Bois' Indian Romance*

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Michael Burawoy¹

Abstract

Former colonial powers are living through a moment of self-discovery. They are examining the enormous benefits they reaped from colonialism as well as the heavy costs they inflicted on the colonised. Academic disciplines have set about questioning their own foundations, some more successfully than others. Sociology, in particular, is experiencing its decolonial moment. In the United States at the centre of debate is W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)—a brilliant sociologist, historian, novelist, dramatist, socialist, civil rights and peace activist and Pan-Africanist. Despite being the leading African American public intellectual of the 20th century, he was largely ignored by academic sociology. An ardent advocate of national self-determination and an enthusiastic admirer of Nehru and Gandhi, he was the author of a surreal novel *Dark Princess* (2007 [1928]) that placed India at the centre of world revolution. In this talk, I try to disentangle the global significance of canonising Du Bois for the decolonisation of sociology.

Keywords

Du Bois, decolonisation, India, United States

Thank you for inviting me to pay tribute to the life and work of Professor J. J. Kattakayam. I first met Professor Kattakayam in 2011 on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Conference of the Indian Sociological Society. It was a festive occasion, organised at JNU, in the open air, with planes flying above, and a huge crowd stretching into the distance. Professor T. K. Oommen was chairing the session, Vice President of India Hamid Ansari gave the inaugural address, and Professor Kattakayam, then President of ISS, delivered an urgent lecture on the importance of sociology in the social transformation of India (Kattakayam, 2012).

After outlining the distinctive features of India's social and economic crisis, and then treating us to an overview of the history of Indian sociology, he turned to

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¹ University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

Corresponding author:

Michael Burawoy, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA.
E-mail: burawoy@berkeley.edu

sociology's place in society, insisting that sociology plays a more significant public role, but not at the expense of professional, critical and policy sociologies. These four sociologies balance and feed each other. I think we can say the urgency for such an expansive sociology has only grown since 2011, whether in India or, indeed, anywhere else in the world.

Today I want to introduce you to another visionary sociologist who moved among all four sociologies in his long and tumultuous life. Although hailing from a distant land William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was nonetheless entranced by India—its history and its independence struggles. He straddled two centuries: born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1868, 5 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, he died in Accra, Ghana in 1963, 6 years after that country's Independence. As a scholar, he started out as a philosopher and then a historian, the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard. His true passion was sociology, which he picked up while studying in Germany at the University of Berlin between 1892 and 1894. Du Bois is still under-appreciated in sociology although it inspired his writing as a journalist, a novelist and a poet as well as his radical reinterpretation of US history. Carrying unquestionable credentials as a scholar he was best known as a public sociologist, probably the greatest public sociologist to have walked this earth. He brought sociology to his advocacy of civil rights, Pan-Africanism, socialism and peace activism.

In this talk, I will sketch his life and work through the lens of his theory and practice of 'decolonisation', both at home and abroad, before examining his significance for decolonising sociology today. I begin Du Bois' stance towards decolonisation with his most famous novel *Dark Princess* (2007 [1928]).

Dark Princess: A Revolutionary Romance

Du Bois never visited India but he did have a strong imagination of your country and its past. In 1928, two years after his first trip to the Soviet Union, already under the influence of Comintern policies, and pessimistic about the prospects of interracial working-class solidarity in the USA, Du Bois turns to a vision of international solidarity along lines of race—the unification of the 'darker races' for world revolution. He gives expression to this vision in a surreal novel, *Dark Princess*, revolving around Kautilya, the Indian Princess of Bwodpur and Matthew Towns, the African American medical student, escaping the intolerable racism in the USA. The two meet in Berlin where Matthew is living in voluntary exile. There, by happenchance, he rescues Kautilya from harassment by two white Americans. She then introduces Matthew to her friends meeting secretly in Berlin, a committee for international revolution with representatives from Japan, China, Egypt and India. They all believed in their shared racial superiority and they were attended by white servants and yet, ironically, they were steeped in Western art and literature. Or perhaps not ironically since Du Bois believed that Western culture did have a universal quality, one that did not recognise race: 'I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not' (1989 [1903], p. 90).

At the same time, their inverted racism had its own hierarchy that displayed itself in a contempt for African Americans, embarrassing Matthew to his face.

Kautilya, however, disagrees with her aristocratic internationalists, calling on Matthew to return to the USA and organise African Americans for revolution. The novel unfolds with him trying to organise railroad porters, and then trying his hand as a Chicago politician, dropping out at the very moment of success. Princess Kautilya appears unexpectedly at different points in their budding romance, and the novel ends with her bearing their child in Matthew's birthplace in Virginia. Kautilya proclaims the Black Belt of the South as originating a vision of a future emancipated world. Note that 1928 was the year the Communist Party declared its Black Belt Thesis for an independent Black Nation within the USA, a position Du Bois would later endorse in his own version, 'A Negro Nation within the Nation' (Du Bois, 1970 [1935]). The novel—or it might be better referred to as 'sociological fiction'—is intricate and complex, exploring relations of race, class and gender in a more nuanced way than we are accustomed to in sociology.

The back story of the novel is important (Desai, 2020). Du Bois never visited India, but he devoted much time to studying Indian history. He had read Tagore and learned much from his friend Lajpat Rai, the militant Hindu Nationalist exiled in the USA. Beginning after the First World War, *The Crisis*—the African American magazine Du Bois edited between 1910 and 1934—and indeed the African American press more generally reported regularly on developments in the Indian independence movement (Lal, 2021). For Du Bois, India was the epicentre of anti-colonial struggles. Du Bois worshipped Gandhi as a spiritual and political leader. But Du Bois was also drawn to Nehru with whom he shared an elite Western education, a commitment to a modernist socialism. Both had been deeply influenced by their visits to the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Du Bois would write encomia to both Gandhi and Nehru (Mullen, 2015).

In a fascinating article in the *Economic & Political Weekly*, Kapoor (2003) identifies Du Bois neither with Gandhi nor with Nehru but with Ambedkar. It makes a lot of sense. They wrote of African Americans and Dalits in the same way—a despised population that inhabits a zone of non-existence. In recognising the similarities, Du Bois often referred to African Americans as a 'colour-cast'. Their solutions were similarly radical. Just as for Ambedkar the liberation of Dalits required the annihilation of caste which, in turn, entailed the abolition of Hinduism, so for Du Bois the dissolution of the racial order and of the ideology of white supremacy was necessary for the liberation of African Americans, which, in turn, entailed the abolition of capitalism. If Ambedkar's nemesis was Gandhi, Du Bois' nemesis was Booker T. Washington. The parallels are powerful (Du Bois, 1989 [1903], Chapter 3; Ambedkar, 2014).

And yet, here is the paradox. In his writings on India, Du Bois was devoted to Gandhi and rarely mentioned Ambedkar or, indeed, the struggles of Dalits. Du Bois preferred to eulogise Gandhi's leadership of 'passive resistance' in the fight for Indian independence—a political tactic Du Bois, late in life, endorses as key to the US civil rights movement. When Indian independence arrived on 15 August 1947, Du Bois celebrated it as the greatest historical moment of the 19th and 20th centuries (Mullen and Watson, 2005, pp. 145–153). On the occasions Du Bois did talk about divisions in postcolonial India they revolved around religion or states, but not around caste, which

is all the more remarkable given his use of 'colour-caste' to describe the Southern USA. For Du Bois, it was national self-determination at all costs, but for Ambedkar independence was not enough, since it did not guarantee the dissolution of caste, the bane of India. In the remainder of this talk, I trace Du Bois' successive attempts to understand the struggles around race and class that followed the abolition of slavery, struggles absent in his enthusiasm for the decolonisation of India.

Scholar Denied: The Limits of Professional Sociology

Brought up in a largely white Methodist Community in Massachusetts, Du Bois was educated at Fisk University, a Historically Black University in Tennessee, and then at Harvard where he received his MA in history in 1891. He was then admitted to the University of Berlin (1892–1894) where he completed work for a PhD, although he was denied the formal credential because of residence requirements. Bereft of funding, he returned to the USA, where in 1895 he would receive a PhD in history for *The Suppression of the Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (2007 [1896]). Clearly a brilliant scholar, his race prevented him from obtaining a teaching position at a major US university. He was confined to Black universities, first Wilberforce University and then a temporary research assistantship at the University of Pennsylvania where he carried out the iconic study of African Americans in Philadelphia—*The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899. Between 1897 and 1910, Du Bois took up a position at Atlanta University—another Historically Black University—where he developed the Atlanta School of Sociology, which predated the famous Chicago School by some 20 years. These were his contributions to professional sociology.

While Du Bois was at Atlanta University he wrote his most celebrated book, *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, a classic of public sociology. Some know it for its critique of Booker T. Washington, a more conservative figure but at the time the most powerful African American in the country. Others know it for the idea of 'double consciousness'—how African Americans live a double life, joined by the contemptuous gaze of white society. Yet others remember it for the moving accounts of the impoverished lives of sharecroppers in the Jim Crow South or of the death of Du Bois' firstborn son. *The Souls of Black Folk*, therefore, brought together a series of lyrical essays on African American life within, what he called the veil. It became an instant success, read widely to this day. However, it was no more successful than his scientific works in convincing whites that Blacks, at least the talented tenth, were both human and gifted.

Starting out with the view that sociological knowledge would break down barriers of racism, Du Bois soon discovered that white racism was not just a product of ignorance. It had an irrational component, and it was also driven by real material interests—what he later called the public and psychological wage of whiteness (Du Bois, 1998 [1935], Chapter XVI). Denied resources, status and recognition, he began to question the purpose of his academic career. His scientific studies were powerless to counter racial segregation, mob violence and lynching of African Americans.

Scholar Unbound: Public Sociology from Without

And so Du Bois left Atlanta University in 1910 to enter the public realm. He became the founding editor of *The Crisis*—the bimonthly magazine of the National Association for Colored People (NAACP), a civil rights organisation that he himself had cofounded. He remained editor of *The Crisis* for the next 24 years, during which time he became the leading Black intellectual in the USA. At its peak, *The Crisis* had a subscription of 100,000. It addressed every conceivable topic of interest to African Americans, art, music, politics, economy, education, race relations, religion, colonialism, war and international relations. Nothing was outside its purview. Du Bois turned his training in sociology into a public venture. He was no longer interested in convincing whites of the humanity of African Americans. On the contrary, he sought to convince African Americans of two things: that whites were inhuman beings capable of inflicting atrocities not just on Blacks but on one another and, second, that, despite slavery, African Americans were the inheritors of a great pre-colonial world civilisation.

This was the purpose of his essay, 'The Souls of White Folk' where he describes the horrors of the First World War, the ruthless destruction of European nations in their struggle for control of colonised territories. This was one of his early sorties into the history of imperialism, how Western civilisation had grown on the backs of the darker races of the world. 'The Souls of White Folk' was part of a collection of essays, called *Darkwater*, published in 1920. Other essays included a graphic account of the race riot in East St Louis in 1917, in which white capital played off cheap Black labour from the South against more expensive white labour from Europe. Another essay entitled 'The Ruling of Men' developed his idea of socialism—participatory democracy combined with public ownership of the means of production. And then there was his famous essay, 'The Damnation of Women', that anticipated intersectional feminism. Forced to divide their lives between domestic drudgery and wage labour, women—both white and Black, but particularly Black—were never able to develop their talents—talents that were demonstrated by such fervent Black abolitionists as Sojourner Truth and Harriett Tubman. These essays all pointed towards socialism as the future, but only, he warned, if the race problem could be solved first. That is to say, only if the socialists would make their priority the bringing together of Black and white workers into some sort of joint solidarity. But he was disappointed in efforts in this direction, whether by trade unions or the socialist party of the time.

Darkwater is a radical answer to and critique of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois moves out of the veil and into the world beyond, consonant with his editorship of *The Crisis*, his participation in NAACP and his commitment to Pan-Africanism—a commitment that began as early as 1900 when he participated in the first Pan-African Conference and led to his pioneering role as organiser of subsequent Pan-African Congresses in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927 and 1945. Throughout his life he was committed to Pan-Africanism, one that stretched to Asia, and especially India where he fantasised the origins of a Black Dravidian Civilisation that had endured invasion after invasion (Du Bois, 2007 [1947], Chapter IX).

Scholar Radicalised: A Critical Sociology of the Period of Reconstruction

One of the most significant moments in Du Bois' life was his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1926. Until then, he had been agnostic about the Russian Revolution. Violent revolution was not a solution to the problems that plagued the USA—there had been enough violence already—but it might be a solution elsewhere. After spending two months in the Soviet Union, impressed by the serious attempt at eliminating poverty, the apparent absence of racism, and forthright support for anti-colonial movements, he declared that if what he had seen and what he had heard was Bolshevism, then he was a Bolshevik. That experience and then the beginning of the depression years in the USA led him down a Marxist path, although he was careful to keep a distance from the Communist Party, USA.

In 1935, Du Bois published *Black Reconstruction in America*—an avowedly Marxist account of the US Civil War of 1861–1865, the post-Civil War period of Reconstruction 1865–1876, and the capitalist and racist reaction to Reconstruction that would follow. This is now regarded as his masterpiece, so let me give you a flavour of its contribution to the sociology of decolonisation.

Written at a time when white historians and folk wisdom viewed the period of Reconstruction after the Northern victory in the Civil War as a period of utter depravity and unmitigated catastrophe—a view that reflected contempt for African Americans. Du Bois' account of Reconstruction turned this picture upside down. For him, Reconstruction was a short period—a decade—when African American men assumed the vote, when Black politicians assumed a modicum power, when progressive social legislation was passed—to be sure in some Southern states more than others—and when universal education expanded to include Blacks and poor whites. All this would be reversed after Reconstruction.

Du Bois not only challenged the reigning interpretation of Reconstruction, but he also introduced a novel account of the origins and conduct of the Civil War itself. Against the idea that it was fought to preserve the union, Du Bois gave it a global capitalist twist, arguing that the expansion of the British textile industry in the first half of the 19th century, led to increased demand for cotton and, thence, to the intensification and expansion of slavery. To meet demand, Southern planters needed to extend slavery to new geographical areas and that, Du Bois argued, was anathema to Northern industrial capital and, of course, to the Abolitionists. The Republicans in power could accept confining slavery to the Confederate states but they would not allow it to move West or North. The expansion of slavery was the real bone of contention that precipitated the Civil War.

Once the war began, it looked as though the distribution of military forces would favour the South. Inspired by the presence of Unionist troops, however, half a million of the 4 million enslaved fled the plantations, eventually turning the balance of power in favour of the North. Their disaffection disrupted supplies for the Southern armies, but more important the Northern armies enlisted the fugitives, first reluctantly and then enthusiastically. For when they fought, African Americans did so with courage and determination, possessed as they were by the

idea that this was their war, especially after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Du Bois termed this defection from the plantations as a General Strike, not only to liken them to a revolutionary proletariat, but also to underline the way that African Americans had temporarily taken history into their own hands, thereby becoming authors of their own future.

After the war, the Northern military established itself in the South in an attempt to contain the reign of white terror that had spread through the Confederacy but also to support the extension of franchise, education and a broad racial equality. However, once the Northern capital had vanquished the planter class and with it the slave system of production, they were ready to strike a compromise that would see the Northern armies leaving the South a decade later. Power was handed back to the planter class that set about inducing poor whites to throw in their lot with white rule rather than join forces with Blacks. The 'wages of whiteness' divided white from Black, even though both were engaged in new forms of tenancy and share-cropping. If Reconstruction demonstrated the *possibility* of an interracial democracy, it nonetheless proved to be a failure, what Du Bois called a 'splendid failure'. He understood why the enslaved saw emancipation as 'the coming of the Lord'—the winning of freedom—and how that anticipation was dashed by the 'counter-revolution of property'—a lesson in the obstacles to decolonisation.

It took conventional US historians another 30 years to catch up with and accept Du Bois' ideas. Such was the genius of Du Bois, today his ideas are taken as received wisdom. As for so many the 1930s were a turning point in Du Bois intellectual life. His radicalism became unpalatable to the NAACP and he was forced out of editing *The Crisis*. He returned to Atlanta University in 1933, plunging into the writings of Karl Marx (Du Bois, 1995 [1933]). As he was writing *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois was searching for a socialist vision for the contemporary United States. He found it, ironically enough, in racial segregation. His vision was to build a 'A Negro Nation within the Nation' (Du Bois, 1970 [1933]), a cooperative commonwealth that would be separate from the mainstream economy and take on socialist characteristics (1985 [1936]). This was another splendid failure—one that barely got off the ground.

Scholar Persecuted: The Politics of Anti-imperialism

Du Bois was 10 years at Atlanta University before being expelled, formally because he had exceeded the age of retirement, but his independent radicalism once again became a thorn in the side of the administration. At the age of 76, he left the university to rejoin NAACP for four years, before again clashing politically with its leadership. He was cast out of the NAACP in 1948, whereupon he began to fight battles on new terrains, battles that turned increasingly to Africa and other Third World countries where anti-colonial struggles were heating up.

Following the Second World War, his energies were divided between two projects—one was directed towards the struggle for independence among colonies in Africa and Asia, both at the United Nations and at the Pan-African Congress of 1945. In this period he wrote two books. *Color and Democracy*, published in

1945, underlined the importance of self-determination for the colonised people of the world. Democracy will only survive, he claimed, if it takes root across the world. The second book, *The World and Africa* written in 1947, extended ideas he had presented in two earlier books (Du Bois, 1973 [1939] and 2007 [1915]), elaborating the history of Africa and its civilisation, the way imperialism had plundered the continent, first through the slave trade and then through the exploitation of its labour for the extraction of natural resources.

If his Pan-Africanism was his first project his second project was a deep involvement in the international peace movement, organising and attending the post-war opposition to nuclear arms. This put him in the Soviet camp and in direct opposition to the US state. He was indicted by the Justice Department as an undeclared agent of a foreign principal and put on trial in 1951. Du Bois campaigned far and wide in his own defence, and letters of support poured in from all corners of the world. At the trial itself, it became clear he was being framed by a colleague who had turned state witness and the judge threw the case out. Du Bois was free but in revenge, the State Department revoked his passport (Du Bois, 2007 [1952]). He could not travel until 1958 when the Supreme Court deemed the confiscation to have been illegal. He was now free at the age of 90, to travel. And travel he did! To Europe, the Soviet Union and China. Wherever he went in the communist bloc he received VIP treatment—an internationally renowned critic of the USA who openly declared his support for socialism (Du Bois, 1968).

Here his two projects became one as he took the Soviet Union and China to be models from which Africa and other former colonies could learn as they became independent nations. Returning to the USA after nearly a year of being dined and wined by world leaders, fearing imprisonment he and his second wife, Shirley Graham, accepted President Kwame Nkrumah's invitation to make his home in Ghana. He moved there in 1961, where he died in 1963 at the age of 95—the end of an extraordinary life.

US Sociology's Appropriation of Du Bois

Why am I telling you all this? First, I want to convey to you, with this thumbnail sketch of Du Bois' life, what it can mean to be a politically engaged scholar. I want to give you a sense of his ideas and how his ideas were shaped by his political engagement. I want to convey how he wove together the professional, critical, policy and public sociologies with a view to understanding and challenging the limits of decolonisation in the United States and beyond.

But I'm telling you this story for a second reason. W. E. B. Du Bois has been discovered by US sociology, and in recent years he has become central to 'decolonising' our discipline. A major figure in today's renaissance of Du Bois is Aldon Morris—an African American sociologist, President of the ASA in 2021 and author of a very important book on the battle for civil rights in the South—but, no less important, author of the 2015 book, *Scholar Denied*, an account of the way Du Bois has been systematically ignored, excluded and disparaged by the

sociology profession, a sign according to Morris of its racism. Morris argues that Du Bois' leadership of the Atlanta School between 1897 and 1910 makes him the true founder of US sociology and not Robert Park of the famed Chicago School.

A number of things have to be said about Morris' powerful intervention in sociology. First, and most important, is his bringing of Du Bois to the forefront, accelerating a process that had been taking place for the previous 20 years. Second, there is no doubt that racism was key to the exclusion of Du Bois from the sociology profession, but racism was not the only issue as other African Americans were accepted by white sociologists.

A further factor is professional sociology's repudiation of public sociology, or at least a public sociology that is advanced not from within the university but from the trenches of civil society, from the public sphere. Du Bois did spend a good proportion of his life in the university, in toto some 25 years after receiving his PhD, but his real power as a public sociologist came as editor of *The Crisis*, his writings in numerous magazines and newspapers, his lyrical essays and his writing of novels, and then his more directly political role in the NAACP, in the Council for African Affairs and the Peace Information Center. Professional sociology turns it back on sociologists who dare to pronounce on matters of public importance outside the control of the academic community. Such adventurers are condemned for their politicisation of sociology. Du Bois, however, did not bend before such critics. Indeed, his innovations, his scientific breakthroughs came about precisely *because* he was not the prisoner of professional sociology. He had internalised the strictures and rigors of academic work, but he pursued them outside the academy for a wider public audience.

To make matters worse, as he was excluded from the academy, as he turned to the public sphere, as he fought for civil rights, at the same time he became ever more critical of the USA, ever more radical in his politics. While he only became a member of the Communist Party just before leaving the USA in 1961, a final symbolic gesture of hostility to the US state, nonetheless he never made a secret of his sympathies for the Soviet Union and China. He never made a secret of his commitments to socialism and Marxism for the last 30 years of his life. You can be sure that did not win him friends within US sociology, at that time a largely conservative discipline.

Consistent with an image of professional sociology, Morris and others confine their attention to the early Du Bois of *The Philadelphia Negro* and the Atlanta School, the more conservative and empiricist of his writings. Even the *Souls of Black Folk*, written in 1903, undoubtedly a work of sociological genius, had a conservative ethos, appealing to the humanity of whites. As I have argued, by the time he publishes *Darkwater* written 17 years later, he has given up on the humanity of whites, now portraying them as inhuman—brutal to Blacks but also to one another, manifested in the atrocities of the First World War. *Darkwater*, therefore, addresses African Americans, giving them the confidence to fight for civil and political rights, giving them a vision of an alternative socialist world. Even to this day, the Du Bois embraced by sociology is largely the professional Du Bois, the conservative Du Bois, and above all the Du Bois focused on the USA, conveniently overlooking his Pan-Africanism, and his campaigns against imperialism and his enduring commitment to socialism.

Du Bois and Decolonising Sociology

Now, finally, we can come to the question of decolonising sociology. Aldon Morris's book is addressed to US sociologists—the claim that Du Bois' professional sociology antedated the Chicago School by 20 years. But that's no achievement! Indeed, it only diminishes Du Bois to compare him with Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and the Chicago School—so provincial, so empiricist. Who now reads the Chicago School? If we are in the business of decolonising sociology, then the sparring partners for Du Bois have to be the more formidable troika of social theorists—Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Decolonising sociology must tackle the blind spots of these canonical figures, but it must do so by placing them in the context of their times.

Moreover, engaging these figures will only strengthen Du Boisian sociology, surface his contributions and send sociology in new directions—centring the experiential, recognising that we are part of the world we study, making explicit the values that drive our research rather than hiding behind so-called value neutrality, developing theories of global capitalism as seen from the standpoint of the subaltern, and above all endorsing sociology's public role. These are the issues that Du Bois forces us to confront—that is, if we take into consideration the entire gamut of his writings. This is how I see Du Bois' contribution to decolonising sociology.

It is important to attend to our founders, how their blind spots have shaped the development of our discipline. We should attend to their Eurocentrism, to their decentering of race and gender and sexuality and much more. But we should be careful not to reproduce another colonialism in the process. US sociology is uniquely unconscious, and, if conscious, uniquely uncritical of the way it dominates the global field of sociology. There are obvious reasons for this domination—the USA harbours the greatest concentration of resources for the pursuit of science, the USA controls the majority of so-called international journals, all published in English, the USA defines what is a good university through international rankings, US universities train the highest proportion of foreign PhDs who then dominate the sociology of their home country. This is not all bad, and fortunately, US sociology is not of a single mind on so many issues, but still my point is that what happens in the USA does shape what happens elsewhere, and so the issue becomes: when US sociology decolonises itself by reformulating its foundations how does this affect its relation to other sociologies, especially Southern sociologies.

If decolonising sociology in the USA means drawing on Du Bois' early and most conservative sociology, pitting him against the provincialism of the Chicago School, then we cannot be surprised that it does not resonate with sociologies elsewhere. Yet, even if we draw on Du Bois' more anti-imperialist sociology, represented by his writing on Pan-Africanism, we have to acknowledge his systematic discounting of fundamental divisions within postcolonial nations. whether these be of ethnicity, caste, class or gender—divisions which are at the centre of *Black Reconstruction*.

Thus, *Dark Princess* captures the paradox, combining a romantic account of the 'darker races' outside the USA with a much more pointed account of class and

race within the USA. Similarly, at different times he will embrace authoritarian regimes—Japan, China and the Soviet Union—as hostile competitors to US imperialism, side-lining internal oppression. If Du Bois is to mean anything to Indian sociology it cannot be his embrace of a fictive India but his magisterial account of the origins and conduct of the US Civil War, Reconstruction and its denouement. That, indeed, will bring him closer to Ambedkar than Gandhi or Nehru—stressing the incompleteness of decolonisation.

More generally, appropriating Du Bois might mean one thing in the USA, and quite another in India. Given the provinciality of US sociology, decolonisation there is always in danger of appearing in the guise of colonisation elsewhere. There can be no monopoly on the reading of Du Bois or any other theorist. As Edward Said (1983) insisted, theories travel and as they do so, they assume very different significances. Engaging the canon has to mean different things in different places. Just as the canon changes over time so it must also change across the globe.

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