

# Walking on Two Legs: Black Marxism and the Sociological Canon

Critical Sociology

2022, Vol. 48(4-5) 571–586

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DOI: 10.1177/08969205221085641

[journals.sagepub.com/home/crs](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/crs)**Michael Burawoy** 

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After years of ‘normal science’ and rising professionalism, sociology is beginning to twist in its roots. And the tree is shaking. One source of excitement is the long overdue entrance of W.E.B. Du Bois, now at the center of sociological debate. Aldon Morris has become a pivotal figure in promoting Du Bois both in his 2015 book, *Scholar Denied* and then as President of the American Sociological Association, 2020–2021. But following him are many others, including a new generation of sociologists, engaged in the project of ‘decolonizing’ sociology. One center of insurgency is Brown University where José Itzigsohn, together with colleagues and students, has been a major catalyst. At the recent Brown symposium he organized, my own foray into the world of Du Bois was greeted with critiques by Jordanna Matlon and Freeden Blume Oeur whose papers appear in this issue of *Critical Sociology*.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the first time sociology has been disrupted by insurgency. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the entry of Marxism and feminism brought sociology from crisis to renewal. As was the case with Marxism and feminism, today social movements in pursuit of social justice, but especially racial justice, have produced shock waves across US academia. Just as *The Insurgent Sociologist* was home to a critical sociology in the 1970s, so now its descendent, *Critical Sociology*, is home to debates about new directions of sociology, under the enterprising direction of its editor, David Fasenfest.

Even though critical race theory found its way into other disciplines, and even though the 1970s saw militant social movements demanding racial justice, whether integrationist or separatist, still the sociology of race – with notable exceptions – did not undergo substantial or lasting radicalization. The likes of Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney, Oliver Cromwell Cox – all with sociological provenance – and above all W.E.B. Du Bois rarely entered foundational courses. This is now changing. The issue is no longer whether to take Du Bois seriously, but how to take him seriously.

Indisputably, Du Bois was one of the great public intellectuals of the 20th century – the first African American to receive a PhD at Harvard, doctoral student at the University of Berlin, and twice professor at Atlanta University. He was a poet, novelist, and editor as well as an academic.

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He was a Pan-Africanist, socialist, civil rights leader, peace activist, and communist sympathizer. As we know from the ever-expanding library of Du Bois biographies and commentaries, no single sketch – short or long – can possibly do justice to his talents, his originality and his independence as a sociologist and historian. As a scholar he transformed our understanding of the Civil War and Reconstruction, he developed a global and anticolonial approach to the articulation of race and class as well as gender. As sociologists, we face the question: what to do with Du Bois?

All three of us – myself, Jordanna Matlon, and Freeden Blume Oeur – agree that sociology is long overdue for a Du Bois shake up, a move toward decolonizing the discipline. But we each propose to do it in different ways. Blume Oeur rightly presents me as a reformist. I outlined conversations between Du Bois and the three canonical figures, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, compelling, in the process, a rereading of the existing canon and a stiffening of Du Bois (Burawoy, 2021). In the original article, ‘Decolonizing Sociology’, I concluded that the canon would look radically different after the inclusion of Du Bois, just as it became radically different after Marx was introduced in the 1970s. Yes, reform, but reform with revolutionary consequences or, as André Gorz (1968) used to say, non-reformist reform.

Jordanna Matlon (in press) despairs of my imaginary conversations of Du Bois with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. She writes that the canon is not only ‘fundamentally incomplete’ but ‘fatally flawed’. Being Eurocentric, too often blind to race and gender as well as to the imperial order in which it was born, the canon is irredeemable. It has to be abandoned. That, indeed, is a revolutionary position, but how to stage such a revolution, that is the question.

Blume Oeur (in press) is more cautious. Instead of dispensing with the canon, he generously draws on what he finds positive in my reformism, namely the centrality of dialogue or conversation. Echoing Ali Meghji and Toni Morrison, he considers there is much to be gained from conversation. He illustrates the point by presenting three conversations: Du Bois meets Du Bois, Burawoy meets Burawoy, and Burawoy meets Du Bois. These are intimate dialogues, concerned as much with the reconstruction of the theorist as with the reconstruction of theory or, as he felicitously calls it, ‘aftershadowing’. His wide-ranging engagement across disciplinary boundaries suggests he has no interest in placing canonical figures on a pedestal. He disrupts sociology – and here I think he is on the same page as Matlon – by breaking down disciplinary boundaries.

My response meets Matlon and Blume Oeur half-way. While I hold to the idea of sociology as a contested ‘discipline’ of competing and interdependent research programs, founded on a dialogue among canonical figures, I readily concede there is always the danger of colonizing new members as a condition of their entry (Collins, 2016). Indeed, for so long, sociology domesticated Du Bois by reducing his writings to *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois, 1996a [1899]) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1989 [1903]), suppressing the radicalism of the last 60 years of his prolific life. Indeed, by focusing on the early Du Bois, on the professional sociologist who built the Atlanta School, and then by comparing Du Bois to Robert Park, Aldon Morris’ *Scholar Denied* (2015) underestimates Du Bois’ challenge to sociology.

An elementary but crucial feature of ‘conversational analysis’ is that who one talks to shapes the outcome. If Morris puts Du Bois in conversation with Park, then an empiricist Du Bois results. Putting Du Bois into conversation with Marx, Weber, or Durkheim not only pushes the latter toward an analysis of colonialism and imperialism, but also limits the Du Bois that emerges from the dialogue. Therefore, it is important to place the writings of Du Bois not only in a *cross sectional dialogue* within the ‘discipline’ of sociology but, in addition to locate him in a second, *historical dialogue* within a radical intellectual ‘tradition’, whether this be a Black Radical Tradition or, as I shall argue, a Black Marxist Tradition.

I call this walking on two legs. Putting Du Bois into a conversation with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim brings the canon into the 21st century and gives us a distinctively sociological Du Bois.

Its effectiveness, however, also depends on bringing to bear a separate conversation of Du Bois with C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Stuart Hall among others. This Black Marxist tradition is important in its own right but it also bolsters the canonical dialogue. The two dialogues are themselves in dialogue, just as when we walk we depend on two legs moving in sync with one another.

This walking on two legs was also a feature of the canonization of Marx in the 1970s. On one hand, there were Marxian conversations that led to the rereading of Durkheim – focusing on his radicalism embedded in the perfection of the division of labor represented as a species of guild socialism, thereby displacing the theory of value consensus – and to the rereading of Weber, leading to a focus on relations of domination thereby decentering his theory of social action. On the other hand, Marxist sociologists also advanced a sociological Marxism that took Marx's writing in new directions, new theories of the state, of the labor process, of class. For example, Erik Wright (1979) undertook a Marxian critique of Weberian views of class but at the same time, Wright (1978) was conversing with Marxists about his theory of 'contradictory class locations'. Each conversation fertilized the other. My own engagement with industrial sociology – itself influenced by Weber and Durkheim – in *Manufacturing Consent* (Burawoy, 1979) fortified and was fortified by my conversations with Marxism in *The Politics of Production* (Burawoy, 1985). The flourishing of both dialogues depended on the flourishing of each. I could have made a similar argument for the way feminism entered sociology – a debate within feminism sustained a debate against sociology.

Accordingly, my response to Matlon and Blume Oeur walks on two legs. The first part of the paper reaffirms and expands the discussion of canonical dialogues through the inclusion of Du Bois, while the second part extends Marxist dialogues by sketching a conversation between Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.

## Canonical Dialogues

If sociology is to be a discipline that develops, then it has to have foundations or roots out of which to grow. This is true of any scientific discipline. Sociology, however, is unusual in that it is founded on canonical figures. This makes sociology a rowdy, even unruly, science, precisely because it gives voice to different perspectives that arise in civil society. Sociology grew up with the emergence of civil society in 19th-century Europe and the United States, adopting the *standpoint* of civil society, a sphere analytically distinct from the economy and the state. Within that standpoint, there are a multiplicity of perspectives, reflected in the antagonistic relations among our canonical figures.<sup>2</sup>

But why 'figures'? Why theorists rather than theories? Here, I draw on C Wright Mills who defined sociology as lying at the intersection of biography and history – the way that people make history but not under conditions of their own choice. By examining the life work of individual intellectuals, we understand how their ideas are forged, how they are shaped by changing historical circumstances, and how, at the same time, they may contribute to that change. In this regard, W.E.B. Du Bois is the archetypal sociologist as he was acutely conscious of the way his ideas shifted over time as he engaged the world around.<sup>3</sup> Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are not so self-conscious in understanding how their ideas shifted over time, but as sociologists, we can undertake that task for them.<sup>4</sup> This is what we mean when we say that sociology is a reflexive science, namely one that reflects upon the conditions of its own production.

So much for the meta-foundations, but why Marx, Weber, and Durkheim in particular? Matlon suggests they were arbitrarily plucked from the early-20th century by Talcott Parsons and then sustained by power despite their obvious empirical inadequacies. They may share a common vision of social action, as Parsons argued, but that, Matlon avers, is a parochial concern next to their failure to adequately address defining features of modernity, especially racial oppression. Therefore,

it is high time they were abandoned. While there is much truth to what she says, I do not believe it is the whole truth. If it were the case that structural functionalism was an entirely arbitrary body of theory, then those who followed it would be mindless disciples without critical sensibilities. Yet, of course, it did attract some great minds of the time – Robert Bellah, Neil Smelser, Alex Inkeles, Seymour Martin Lipset, Edward Shils, and the list goes on, even entering the next generation to include Jeffrey Alexander, Mark Gould, Victor Lidz, and others. There was a kernel of truth to the architectonics of Parsonsian theory – addressing the fundamental question of what holds society together.

### *Theorizing the Canon*

Our canonical figures, therefore, are not arbitrary. In the original article, I proposed that they share the following four attributes:

- They possess a theory of history and thus of the future;
- They possess moral foundations that guide the development of their visions of the past and future, often utopian;
- They possess original methodologies that allow the social scientist to grasp the world, along with exemplary studies that gives rise to original perspectives;
- They have a critical disposition toward society – of its reproduction and its dynamics – that is analytically separate from state and economy.

Behind these attributes lies a theory of the canon.

*First, the Canonical Theorists Lay Foundations for the Research Programs That Define Sociology as We Know It.* The link between Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, on the one side, and empirical research, on the other, is neither simple nor direct, but it is there. As Arthur Stinchcombe (1982) has argued, they remain a continuing reference point for very good reasons. Inverting Alfred North Whitehead's (1916) famous aphorism – 'a science that hesitates to forget its founders is lost' (p. 413) – we can say: a sociology that forgets its founders is lost. As the canon changes so the research programs change accordingly. Thus, with the entry of Marx into the canon, the foci of research also changed, and so they will, of course, change with the entry of Du Bois. The founding figures remain inspirational to the conduct of research, irrespective of the substantive content. As we reread Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, we continually discover new elements in their thinking and new connections among the elements.

*Second, the Canon Is Not Fixed but Changes over Time.* The canon has its own history. The genius of Parsons (1937) was to break with sociology's incoherent prehistory to create a discipline initially forged from a constructed convergence of Weber, Durkheim, Marshall, and Pareto, an anti-utilitarian theory advanced in *The Structure of Social Action*. Both the voluntaristic theory of action and the structural functionalism that followed were not so much parochial as simply too general, missing the particularities and historicity of society. Even in the hands of Parsons, the canon changed: Marshall and Pareto were to drop out, leaving us with Weber and Durkheim, with Freud lurking in the shadows.

As Alvin Gouldner (1970) demonstrated in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, the presumptions and questions of Parsonsian theory were out of sync with the turmoil of the times – the civil rights struggles, the women's movement, the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This would eventually lead to the disappearance of Parsons and the canonization of Marx, but this did

not happen spontaneously. It was the result of a struggle within the discipline, understood as a field of power – a struggle in part adjudicated by but not reducible to correspondence or lack of correspondence to the social movements of the day. Today, we have entered another period of struggle over the inclusion of Du Bois that should send tremors through our discipline.<sup>5</sup>

*Third, the Canon is an Assemblage of Relations among Theories that Develop Through Dialogue.* The canon is not a conglomeration of discrete, disconnected theorists or theories. One cannot randomly add a new theorist, assuming the rest will remain the same. They are dynamically interconnected. The genius of the voluntaristic theory of social action lies in Parsons' ability to show a serendipitous convergence in the theories of action of four great social scientists. This theory of action could easily be made to correspond to the world given its level of abstraction, even if it did not deal with 'race' explicitly.<sup>6</sup> Equally problematic was the way it sought to unify sociology and indeed social science around a single framework. As I argued earlier, sociology as a whole, takes as its standpoint the conflicting perspectives found in civil society. It is made up of competing and often antagonistic research programs, vying for power and appeal. The dominance of one to the exclusion of all others indicates a totalitarian order and, therefore, such dominance cannot endure in a pluralistic society.

The entry of Marx put an end to the idea of convergence and established the importance of dialogue among competitors or antagonists – dialogues that led to a rereading of each as I indicated earlier. In this view, the task is not to simply 'add' Du Bois but to put Du Bois into dialogue with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. This reopening of the discipline amounts to rejuvenation and we will see who survives.

### *What Shall We Do with the Canon?*

In laying out a theory of the canon – foundational, dynamic, and relational – I have implicitly mounted an argument for its retention. That is not the only perspective. Indeed, there are a range of responses. Deeply invested in the original canon of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim some make no concessions; others add an assortment of figures to the core, turning theory courses into an eclectic *mélange*. This is a *rearguard* action.<sup>7</sup> A second approach to the canon is to *retreat* from the canon. Positivists consider 19th social theory to have long since been surpassed by contemporary research both in topic and in method. Here, we also find postcolonial theorists who consider the troika deeply flawed by virtue of their colonial episteme, their Eurocentrism. This does not necessarily involve the rejection of canonical figures; they can become a part of an inclusive spectrum along with other theorists, what Julian Go (2016) calls perspectival realism. Raewyn Connell (2007) does something similar in advancing southern theory. In this view, there is no attempt to adjudicate between good and bad theory. A third approach is *revolutionary*, in other words, replacing the old canon with a new canon. Here, we might find the Du Boisian sociology of Itzigsohn and Brown (2020). Certainly, there were Marxist and feminists in the 1970s who wanted to replace the old canon with an entirely new one.

The fourth position, which is the one I favor, is to *reconstruct* the canon. It involves considering a new candidate through bringing them into dialogue with the existing canon.<sup>8</sup> That is, what I proposed in my original article (Burawoy, 2021): a first dialogue that showed parallel ideas of Durkheim and the early Du Bois; a second dialogue that showed the divergence of the ideas of Weber and Du Bois; and a third dialogue in which Du Bois advances a novel Marxist framework. I cannot rehearse those conversations here.

Blume Oeur and Meghji (2021) agree – conversations are essential to a decolonial sociology. In a conflictual world, monologues are always imperial. But what about the *results* of dialogue? As I concluded, Du Bois raises five challenges to the conventional sociological canon: an

*explanatory science* that takes a global and historical perspective on capitalism that centers race as well as class, beginning with the slave trade, and continuing through colonialism and imperialism; a *moral science* offering a utopian dimension and calling forth 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 contested fields of inquiry; an *interdisciplinary science* that recognizes disciplinary boundaries in order to cross them, in particular, a cross-fertilization between social science, history, and the humanities; and a *public science* that forces sociology out of its academic cocoon, entering the public arena with social theory and empirical analysis, framing public debates and public issues.<sup>9</sup>

This does not mean we abandon the canon – rather, it means reformulating the defining foundations of the canon – from, say the four original attributes to the newer ones just outlined. It means rereading the canonical figures in relation to the new attributes. With regard to the explanatory science, for example, it beckons sociologists to reread Durkheim’s collective consciousness through the idea of double consciousness (Fields, 2002), caste through the lens of race, abnormal forms of the division of labor through the lens of racial injustice and stratification. It means rereading and centering Weber’s account of agrarian capitalism, ethnicity, and the silent concept of imperialism (McAuley, 2019) just as we have to refocus on Marx’s later writings on the US civil war, colonialism, nationalist struggles (Anderson, 2010). Perhaps, one or the other of the canonical figures will disappear on interrogation but the proof of the pudding will be in the dialogue. There will be no preemptory dismissal.

But dialogue also advances the social theory of Du Bois. First, given the way Du Bois’ thought develops over his life, successive (imaginary) conversations with Durkheim, Weber, and Marx highlight the shifts in his sociology – the empiricist, the utopian socialist, and the Marxist – and his changing political engagement. Second, dialogue with Durkheim, Weber, and Marx compels the development of a more sustained framework, highlighting contradictions, and anomalies in his thinking – contradictions and anomalies, when tackled, help us take Du Bois’ thinking forward. A theorist is as great as the contradictions they engender, leaving followers to elevate, thematize, and wrestle with them. Third, dialogue calls forth a more systematic and generalizable theory, making it is easier to draw out implications of the past for the present and future. As social theorists that is what we do – make sense of social theory by systematizing classics. We have done it to Marx, we have done it to Weber, we have done it to Durkheim in multiple ways, and we have begun to do it to Du Bois by putting him into dialogue with these and other illustrious figures as well as with himself, analyzing the shifts in his own thinking.

As an example, consider a dialogue between Weber and Du Bois around the origins of capitalism. In his famous essay, ‘The Souls of White Folk’, Du Bois (1999 [1920]: 17–29) asks the same question as Max Weber (2001 [1905]) in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* – what are the origins of Western Civilization? Being products of Western Civilization, both believe in its significance, but whereas Du Bois sees it as emerging from the violent appropriation of material and cultural artifacts through colonialism and then imperialism, Weber emphasizes the cultural uniqueness of the West as a process of systematization or rationalization, without denying the importation of ideas and inventions from elsewhere. If the dialogue forces a Weberian to consider imperialism and its religious justifications, it challenges Du Bois to contemplate how non-Western elements are transformed by Western institutions, how ivory, for example, from the Congo is transformed into piano keys that make possible Chopin’s Piano Concertos. What happens in the production of the keyboard and of the music it renders? Weber, after all, writes at length on the rationalization of industrial production and of classical music.

All theories, if they are to be theories at all, are partial theories, they adopt stances toward the world, and, therefore, necessarily have a certain blindness built into their assumptions. This is not

only true of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, but also of Du Bois – blindness reveals itself through dialogue. In the second leg of these reflections, I point to Du Bois' limitations, surfaced through dialogue within the Black Marxist tradition, specifically here with the writings of Frantz Fanon.

## Marxist Dialogues

From Blume Oeur's dialogues, I would like to extract two types. On the one hand, there is the dialogue he constructs between Du Bois and Burawoy, leading to mutual critique and self-clarification. This corresponds to the cross-sectional dialogue between the competing and antagonistic members of the canon, taking place within a *disciplinary field of power*. On the other hand, there is the dialogue of Du Bois with his past, reconsidering claims he had made earlier, what Blume Oeur calls 'aftershadowing'. I extend the idea to a historical dialogue in which a *tradition of thought* develops through continually reconstituting itself on moving foundations. If it is successful, or 'progressive', this internal dialogue *grows as a tree – with roots, a trunk, and branches (and even twigs)*. Some branches die and drop off the tree, while new branches emerge and blossom.<sup>10</sup>

## Living Marxism

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim all spawned their own traditions, grounding expanding research programs. The Marxist tradition is the most clearly elaborated of the three and it is the one that concerns me here. It has roots in the postulates of Marx and Engels: human beings are active producers and reproducers of their lives; history is a succession of modes of production, each having their own dynamics; class struggle drives the transition from one mode of production to the next, culminating in a projected but under-specified communism leading to the self-realization of human potential; ideas we form of society are a product of our practical engagement with the world, and that applies to Marxism itself. As roots do, these roots sink and shift around as the Marxist tree grows. The tree trunk is Marx's theory of the rise and fall of capitalism expounded in the three volumes of *Capital* – the masterpiece without which the rest would be of incidental significance. From the tree trunk spring its branches – auxiliary theories that emerge in different places and different times, aimed at tackling the contradictions and anomalies in Marx's original theory.

The Marxist tradition advances on the basis of Marx but also against Marx. Take Marx's theory of the rise and fall of capitalism. It did capture important features of competitive capitalism. However, competitive capitalism did not give rise to socialism – though there were serious attempts – but to organized capitalism, that is capitalism organized by the state under a system of imperialism. German Marxism was defined, therefore, by debates on how to tackle this anomaly, that is the capacity of capitalism to rectify itself in the face of crises on the one hand and the reformism of unions and political parties on the other hand. While Rosa Luxemburg held to her revolutionary politics with an original theory of imperialism, Eduard Bernstein adopted the opposed theory of evolutionary socialism, leaving Karl Kautsky to theorize a position in the vanishing middle.

Russian Marxism comprised debates that arose from a very different soil, a backward largely agrarian economy, with a small working class concentrated in a few cities. The Bolsheviks – Lenin, Trotsky, and Bukharin – expected the Russian Revolution to trigger revolution in the West that would come to the aid of the fledgling state. Western Marxism in its various strands – Gramsci, Lukács, Frankfurt School, and so on – asked why there had been no successful revolution in the West and answered with theories of monopoly capitalism, late capitalism, and imperialism.

Third-World Marxism, influenced by the Soviet experience but also the Chinese peasant-based revolution had to develop a further branch of Marxism – Mao, Rodney, Fanon, and others – that called attention to the systematic underdevelopment of the South by the North. In other words,

Marxism developed through the recognition of specific conditions of struggle, calling for ‘auxiliary’ theories in new branches that also entailed the rearticulation of the foundations of the tradition. Roots cannot stay fixed if the tree is to survive.

How does W.E.B. Du Bois fit into this tradition? Here, there is a battle over attachment: do Du Bois along with C.L.R. James, Oliver Cromwell Cox, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and Stuart Hall to name but five other figures, belong to the Marxist tradition or do they belong to an alternative Black Radical Tradition. By emphasizing different features of their voluminous works, they can, of course, belong to both. Certainly, these six figures identified themselves as belonging to the Marxist tradition. Thus, I find it hard to follow Cedric Robinson (1983) in his claim that they – James and Du Bois, in particular – turned away from Marxism at the end of their lives.<sup>11</sup> In their engagement with these radical intellectuals, Reiland Rabaka (2009) and Anthony Bogues (2003) discern a distinct Black Radical Tradition, but in doing so, they reduce Marxism to a static body of thought – what they call mainstream, organized, orthodox, Eurocentric, or white Marxism – a Marxism they dismiss out of hand.

Unquestionably, Marxism has had its dogmatic and doctrinaire branches. Indeed, when Marxism becomes a ruling ideology as it did in a number of countries, then it is likely to calcify as we have seen, most obviously, in the case of Soviet Marxism. Marxism, however, cannot be reduced to its degenerate branches. It remains a living tradition and has to remain so as long as capitalism rules the earth. A living Marxism revitalizes itself through taking on the new challenges that history throws up, challenges that are deliberately chosen. I believe sociology would profit from following other disciplines and bringing a vital Black Marxism out of the shadows – a Marxism that wrestles with the question of racial oppression as central to the development of capitalism.<sup>12</sup>

### *Phenomenology of Racial Subjugation*

Here, I only gesture toward such a Black Marxism, by sketching out a conversation between Fanon and Du Bois. Instead of turning away from Marxism, I will show how both Fanon and Du Bois make a turn toward and into Marxism. Accordingly, I will draw parallels, first between Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk* and Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* as studies in the phenomenology of racism and second, between Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction* and Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* as the development of Black Marxism.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1989 [1903]) famously advances the idea of 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’ (p. 5). Striving to be an American but labeled a ‘Negro’ and a ‘problem’, the African American aspires to ‘merge his double self into a better and truer self’ (Du Bois, 1989 [1903]: 5). In the *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois seeks to demonstrate the humanity of African Americans and their eagerness to integrate themselves into US society, especially through education, but without casting off their distinctive Africanness, their music, their religion. But it becomes apparent that integration is a futile exploit: the more they try the more they are rejected.<sup>13</sup>

In parallel fashion, in *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon (1967 [1952]) describes how Martinican immigrants to France discover they are despised as Black rather than embraced as French. They, too, strive to become French – demonstrating their facility in language, seeking sexual partners of the opposite race as desperate attempts to overcome the dehumanization they face. Each move toward white society, however, only cements their exclusion as the very attempt becomes the object of white mockery and disgust. Whereas Du Bois appeals – albeit unsuccessfully – to whites to recognize an African American elite, the talented tenth, recognizing an internal stratification within the Black community, Fanon pays little attention to divisions within the immigrant



community. Du Bois after all is a sociologist and constructs a rich account of life within the veil whereas Fanon as a psychoanalyst reduces the account of racism to a unidimensional domination of white over black. Despite the differences, despite the very different context – the Jim Crow South at the turn of the 20th century as opposed to France after the Second World War – the outcome is the same in both cases: striving for recognition proves hopeless, deepening their double consciousness and impelling them toward political activism.

### *Fanon's Path to Marxism*<sup>14</sup>

After practicing institutional therapy for 2 years, Fanon leaves France in 1953 for Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria where he confronts the psychic effects of raw colonial violence on both its victims and its perpetrators. It becomes apparent that psychiatry has no answer to colonial oppression, because, as he sees it, psychological pathologies stem from the social-political-economic-ideological pressure cooker of colonialism. Fanon joins the National Liberation Front (FLN), organized to overthrow colonialism. Writing in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963 [1961]) argues that, maintained by violence, colonialism can only be deposed by violence. This is the destructive side of violence, but Fanon also sees violence as a constructive force in the creation of the new society. Colonial subjugation as internalized oppression can only be expurgated through the catharsis of counter-violence which brings unity to the colonized, holding future leaders accountable to the led.

If the first phase is an assault on the structures of colonialism – what Gramsci called a War of Movement – the second phase is a War of Position, a struggle for the future of the postcolony. Fanon defines two roads of decolonization. On one hand, there is the National Bourgeois Road led by the incipient bourgeois class made up of civil servants, teachers, small traders, nurses, journalists, and lawyers, supported by the Black working class, a labor aristocracy bent on preserving the (relative) security they have won under colonialism. The National Bourgeoisie is focused on replacing colonists, Black replacing white, but without fundamental change to the social structure. Reminiscent of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon is contemptuous of this imitative National Bourgeoisie, appendage of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, pursuing a high-life of ostentation. They are not a true bourgeoisie capable of capital accumulation. The consequences are catastrophic. Without a material basis for class compromise, the inauguration of liberal democracy gives way to a one party state which, in turn, degenerates into a one-man dictatorship.

Anticipating that the National Bourgeois Road will end in catastrophe, Fanon calls for a National Liberation Struggle which seeks a radical transformation of the class structure, a transition to a democratic, participatory socialism, propelled forward by an organic fusion of dissident intellectuals, fleeing the city, and a volcanic peasantry erupting in violence against land dispossession. The ensuing War of Position is a struggle for hegemony between these two blocs, an urban bloc behind the National Bourgeois Road and a rural bloc behind the National Liberation Struggle, each vying for the support of intermediate classes, in particular, the lumpenproletariat that has settled in the urban peripheries and the traditional chiefs, once a screen for the colonists. As the die is cast for colonialism, the colonists throw their weight behind the National Bourgeoisie. Written in 1961, *The Wretched of the Earth* is a prophetic document, anticipating the trajectory of so many African states. But it also offers a path to a radical new society, making it the bible for revolution in Africa and beyond. A clear break with *Black Skin, White Masks*, it 'stretches' the legacy of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, and Mao to inspire African independence struggles, centered around class divisions within the colonized in addition to the primary racial division between colonizers and colonized.

### Du Bois' Path to Marxism

By comparison to Fanon, Du Bois' path to Marxism is drawn out. When neither systematic knowledge of the lives of African Americans nor his superior educational qualifications and intellectual accomplishments carried much weight with the gatekeepers of the academy, Du Bois turned increasingly to the political realm. When the Niagara Movement, starting in 1905, morphed into the National Association for the Advanced of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910, Du Bois became the renowned editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*. Marking his shift to a more militant approach to politics, Du Bois (1996b [1909]) penned a celebration of John Brown and his militant band of abolitionists who were defeated at Harpers Ferry in 1859, a dress rehearsal for the Civil War. Early on Du Bois flirted with the socialist movement – he had attended meetings of the Social Democrats in Berlin (1892–1894). Starting in 1907, his commitment became more open to the point of joining the socialist party in 1911, if only for a year.

His essays in *Darkwater*, published 1920, were full of encomia to a democratic socialism which called for democratization of ownership of the means of production. But he warned, there can be no socialism until the race problem is solved – you cannot build socialism on the backs of the 'darker races', the majority of the world's population. Still a utopian socialist, not yet a Marxist, he remained agnostic about the Russian Revolution. He visits the Soviet Union for the first time in 1926, coming away impressed by its tackling of poverty and inequality and by the absence of racism, yet still not convinced of its relevance to the United States. As he became more impatient about social change, especially as regards the abiding racism, and as he steeped himself in *Capital* and other Marxian writings for the first time, his deepening radicalism brought him into conflict with the NAACP. It came to head in 1934 when he was effectively fired as editor of *The Crisis* whereupon he rejoined Atlanta University to chair the sociology department and complete his magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction in America*. This was his Marxist masterpiece.

Du Bois would overturn the contemporary view of Reconstruction as an unmitigated disaster brought on by the enfranchisement of 'ignorant' African Americans and the 'corrupt practices' of their elected leaders. For Du Bois, far from being a catastrophe, Reconstruction was a 'splendid failure' that had harbored the possibility of an inter-racial democracy. Twenty-five years earlier, in an article that appeared in the *American Historical Review*, Du Bois (1910) had defended Reconstruction as a progressive experiment that brought to the South democratic state constitutions, egalitarian social legislation, and free public education – all accomplished if not initiated by African Americans even while facing the reign of white terror. By 1935, Du Bois gave this assessment an entirely novel Marxist formulation, curiously parallel to Fanon's trajectory analyzed in *The Wretched of the Earth* – anticolonial struggle, postcolonial democracy, autocratic degeneration.

Du Bois begins with the dynamics of global capitalism. The increasing demand for cotton, brought on by the growth of the textile industry in England, and the inherent tendency of slavery to exhaust both labor and land combined to intensify the expansionist ambitions of the planter class. The North entered the Civil War not against slavery per se, but to prevent the Confederacy from encroaching into free states. This was the context for a Gramscian War of Movement – the mobilization of classes in the South – Black workers, white workers, and planters. The lynchpin of Du Bois argument lies with the weary Northern armies enlisting, albeit reluctantly, Black fugitives from the plantations without whom victory would have been beyond their grasp. Half a million of the enslaved peoples deserted to the Northern armies – some enlisted in combat while others provided services and supplies. Du Bois, provocatively, called it a General Strike to underscore the collective agency of African Americans, bringing to mind a proletarian revolution.

The North's dependence on the enslaved peoples prompted the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 as well as the Reconstruction effort after the war, itself guaranteed by northern military presence and the all-important Freedmen's Bureau. The passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments – the abolition of slavery, defining citizenship as a birthright, and the protection of voting rights – became the context of a War of Position aiming at the advance of an inter-racial democracy. Where Fanon saw two alternatives – democratic socialism and dependent capitalism – in the postcolonial struggle for hegemony, Du Bois saw an array of possibilities, shaped by the balance of racial and class forces. The prospects for inter-racial democracy were most promising in South Carolina, and least promising in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida while Louisiana and Mississippi lay in between, but in all states the material basis of an ongoing democracy – land redistribution – would never be realized.

The revolutionary experiment came to an end after 11 years as the balance of power in Congress shifted toward the Democrats. Northern capital struck an alliance with the defeated planter class, which orchestrated a return to white supremacy by holding out material and psychological benefits to poor whites. The planters turned a blind eye and often collaborated with extra-legal terror, while Blacks were forced into share-cropping backed up by convict leasing.<sup>15</sup> This set the stage for Jim Crow segregation.

### *Mutual Engagement: Du Bois versus Fanon*

Du Bois advances from the *imaginary socialist utopia* found in *Darkwater* (Du Bois, 1999 [1920]) to the *real utopia* of *Black Reconstruction* (Du Bois, 1998 [1935]), that is from an abstract utopia to a Marxist analysis of the conditions of possibility for an inter-racial democracy, assessed in terms of the material and political forces at work – forces that operated at the local, regional, state, and global levels. In considering Reconstruction, Du Bois had the advantage of hindsight, denied to Fanon who tried to discern a future postcolonial road to socialism. In so doing, Fanon downplayed the importance of international capital, arguing that dependence on Africa's natural resources and its unexplored markets will compel concessions – even reparations – to make an independent socialist road feasible. In reality, international capital and Western states have been all too ready to subvert socialist projects that hardly got off the ground.

If Fanon underestimated the power of international capital, Du Bois had his own limitations. Although he was acutely sensitive to the class forces at work in the dynamics of Reconstruction, when it came to the African independence movements his long-standing Pan-Africanism got the better of his Marxism (Du Bois, 2007 [1945]). Although he recognized the danger international capital might pose to postcolonial Africa, he overlooked the significance of internal class divisions that were at the center of Fanon's concern. Surely, one of the reasons for Du Bois' rose-tinted view of African independence lay in his limited experience of internal divisions. Whereas Fanon lived those divisions, Du Bois could only observe Africa at a distance. He was locked out of Africa because of his anticolonial politics, and when it became feasible to visit Africa after the Second World War, his passport was denied by the State Department.

Still, I believe there is something deeper at stake here. His first visit to Africa is telling. It took place in 1923 when Du Bois visited Liberia as a representative of President Cooley at the inauguration of President C.D.B. King. He spent time with the African American leadership unaware that they imposed a colonial rule as brutal as that of white Europeans. So enamored by the African American leadership of Liberia, Du Bois enthusiastically supported Firestone's investment in Liberia's rubber plantations, even if later he would regret that decision (Levering Lewis, 2000: 123–126; Robinson, 1990).

Du Bois' romanticization of Africa, already manifest in *The Negro* (Du Bois, 2016 [1915]), colored his vision, but the coloring extended beyond Africa to any country where he sympathized with the goals of the leadership. Juliana Góes (in press) analyzes Du Bois' embrace of the Brazilian elite's claim to racial democracy based on miscegenation, ignoring the plight of Afro-Brazilians. Miscegenation may have been an appealing antidote to Jim Crow segregation, but it hardly signaled a racial paradise. Anaheed Al-Hardan (in press) explores how Du Bois' advocacy on behalf of Israel after the Second World War obscured the subjugation of Palestinians though that would also later change when he observed the geopolitics around the Suez Crisis of 1956. We cannot escape the fact that throughout his life Du Bois identified with leaders, starting with his boyhood valedictory speech on Wendell Phillips, his commencement speech at Fisk on Bismarck and, even more controversially, his disquisition at Harvard on Jefferson Davis, not to mention his later defense of Stalin and Mao. His commitment to the 'talented tenth' and later the 'guiding hundredth' put considerable store by the claims of leadership.

In summary, I have suggested parallels between Fanon and Du Bois: how their early phenomenology of race became a cul-de-sac, prompting their turn to Marxism. Both *Black Reconstruction* and *The Wretched of the Earth* situate class and race struggles within a political economy, analyzing roads taken and not taken toward imagined goals of abolition democracy and socialism respectively. If Fanon's strength lies in his analysis of internal struggles, his weakness lies in his underestimation of international forces. The genius of *Black Reconstruction* is the bringing together of the national and the global – internal struggles shaped by and simultaneously shaping international capitalism. And yet, when it comes to studying the rest of the world – Africa, Latin America, Middle East, Asia – he is guilty of downplaying internal divisions and giving credibility to the perspectives of the dominant classes, reflecting a faith in leadership that threads through his writings. But still, there is the paradox of *Black Reconstruction* where leadership plays a role, but one limited by class forces. Why did his Marxism not stretch to Africa? Could it be that Du Bois was living out the contradictions of a racialized subject within an imperial nation, first as an ambassador of US imperialism and later identifying with anti-imperial sentiments of Pan-Africanism, but in both cases, eliding the class interests of foreign leaders? By contrast, Fanon made the class interests of a National Bourgeoisie central to his account of Africa.

Despite their different projects, both *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Reconstruction* have a close kinship to Marxist classics – from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, and Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. What both Du Bois and Fanon add, of course, is the centrality of racial domination. Within Marxism, this sets them apart, along with C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney, Stuart Hall, and others, advancing a Black Marxism, a thick and vibrant branch of an ever-expanding tree.

## Conclusion

Initially conceived of as a social psychology of racial subjugation, Du Bois' double consciousness – 'an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring deals in one dark body' – expands into a tension between his vindication of African civilization and his critique of racial capitalism centered in the United States. If the former can be found in *The Negro* (Du Bois, 2016 [1915]), *Black Folk, Then and Now* (Du Bois, 2014 [1939]), and *The World and Africa* (Du Bois, 2007 [1947]), the latter develops in *Black Reconstruction* (Du Bois, 1998 [1935]), *Russia and America: An Interpretation* (Du Bois, 1950). Simply put, his double consciousness starts out at an individual level, ascends to the level of society in 'A Negro Nation within the Nation' (Du Bois, 1970 [1935]) and *Dusk of Dawn* (Du Bois, 2002 [1940]) and then moves to a

global level, a dialogue between Pan-Africanism and Marxism, an early version being the novel *Dark Princess* (Du Bois, 2007 [1928]).

Similarly, I have moved from double consciousness to a double dialogue: the first is a dialogue among canonical theorists within the discipline of sociology, conceived of as a field of power; the second is a dialogue within a tree-like growth of a Black Marxist tradition. A field implies a cross-sectional engagement whereas a tree implies historical development. Trees are planted in fields, so disciplines are host to competing traditions which through dialogue strengthen, deepen and invigorate each other. My reconstructions of sociology and Marxism turn on the life and work of W.E.B. Du Bois.

In Blume Oeur's (in press) quest for 'intimate dialogues', he asks me to 'aftershadow' the significance of my early Zambian research for decolonizing sociology. Fresh out of university, swept up by the euphoria of African independence, I was shocked by the continuing racial order I found on the Zambian Copperbelt, how the color bar reverberated untouched through the mining industry after independence. I traced the continuity of the color bar to the class interests operative in the postcolony – those of the national bourgeoisie, the state, multinational capital, divided managerial strata, the trade unions and the Zambian working class. To be 'decolonial' in that context was, therefore, relatively straight forward. It meant, at least for me, provincializing *The Wretched of the Earth* which I attempted in *The Color of Class on the Copper Mines* (Burawoy, 1972). I followed Fanon in focusing on the class basis of the postcolony but, in so doing, I did underestimate the importance of international capital and mischaracterized the postcolonial state.<sup>16</sup>

In those days, I was not thinking of the colonial legacies in Britain even as they were becoming a growing theme in the work of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and others. They show how much more complicated it is to think through the meaning of 'decolonization' in the heart of advanced capitalism with its complex ideological formations. Fanon's rupture with colonialism is very different from Hall's ideas of rearticulation (Hammer, 2017). Following Antonio Gramsci, Hall concluded that advancing a radical anticolonialism could not, of itself, dislodge hegemony. Rather, radicalism only marginalizes itself and is easily defeated if there is no direct grappling with hegemony itself. However, without that radical tradition, hegemony remains impervious to critique. In short, we need to rearticulate sociology by confronting it with alternative traditions. It is necessary to walk on two legs.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to José Itzigsohn and his colleagues at Brown for staging the exciting symposium on decolonizing sociology. Special thanks to Jordanna Matlon and Freeden Blume Oeur for writing such stimulating papers, giving me so much to think about and then to David Fasenfest for giving me the opportunity to respond. Thanks as ever to Chris Muller who carefully read a draft, helping me understand what I am trying to say. Finally, I'm grateful for a year's fellowship at the Du Bois Research Institute at Harvard University where I first delivered an abbreviated version of this paper.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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## Notes

1. 'Decolonizing Sociological Theory and Knowledge', Brown University, 22 October 2021.
2. Postcolonial theory seeks to ground sociology in the colonial context it occludes whereas I root sociology in the civil society that it affirms.

3. Another archetype, sensitive to the intersection of biography and history, is Simone de Beauvoir, curiously abandoned by feminists. They share a similar 'aftershadowing', that is, a continual reconstruction and situating of lived experience in its widest historical context. Here I am thinking of her multi-volume autobiography as much as *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1989 [1949]). The latter does have its biographical and historical parts, it is just that they are separated from each other.
4. Following a 'contrapuntal' method (Said, 1994), Bhambra and Holmwood (2021) do an excellent job introducing the largely missing colonial context into the writings of canonical figures and drawing lessons for a contemporary sociology. They, too, adopt a conversational approach with a view to reconstruction. They do not, however, consider the traditions these canonical theorists have spawned.
5. Feminism has had an ambiguous relationship with the canon, perhaps, because it refused a single representative of its tradition, forcing its way into sociology as a social movement with multiple representatives. Left out in the cold, feminism has developed an antipathy to canonization. It is not surprising that Raewyn Connell, for example, would be simultaneously a leading feminist and canon iconoclast. Despite an absence of a 'feminist revolution' in sociology (Stacey and Thorne, 1985), it can be said that feminism has had an abiding impact on the field as a critical theory (Ray 2006). The jury is still out as to whether Du Bois will actually be canonized, and if so whether he may open the gates to feminism.
6. When Parsons (1965) did finally address the question of race, he tended to emphasize progress and inclusion.
7. In his study of graduate courses in theory, Markovsky (2008) shows that Marx, Weber, and Durkheim remain central, but there is a little consensus as to who else should be included.
8. I cannot forget the shock, dismay and frustration of graduate students when I taught Marxism in tandem with the work of Talcott Parsons. This project began in Chicago when I was a graduate student in Adam Przeworski's seminar on theories of the state found in Gramsci, Althusser, Balibar, Godelier, and Poulantzas. I insistently asked Adam the question: how does this French structuralism differ from structural functionalism? In order to pacify this disruptive student, he proposed we teach a course on Marxism and functionalism, which we did on several occasions. I took that course with me to Berkeley, but followed it up with courses on the history of Marxism.
9. Blume Oeur is correct to point out that there is a convergence in the way that I have conceived of reflexive sociology and the way Du Bois practices sociology: the experiential point of departure, the attention to social process, situating micro processes in their macro-context, and finally, the importance of theory reconstruction (Burawoy, 1998). I had not thought about this until he pointed it out.
10. My understanding of science as the development of research programs derives from Lakatos' (1978) post-positivist philosophy of science. I depart from Lakatos' assumption that science advances through the replacement of 'degenerate' by 'progressive' research programs. I believe a discipline, such as sociology, necessarily contains competing research programs without any tendency toward convergence on a singular one. See Burawoy (1989).
11. In his Marxist critique of Cedric Robinson, Tommy Shelby (in press) questions a number of elements in Robinson's analysis, namely his essentializing of the African legacy, his dismissal of Western thought as irredeemably Eurocentric, and his notion that the Black radical tradition has to emerge from Black revolt with intellectuals as mere transmission belts. When it comes to Du Bois, Shelby characterizes him as an 'analytical Marxist'.
12. There are parallels in the debates between radical feminists and Marxist feminists, see for example, MacKinnon (1982) who borrows much from Marxism even as she powerfully demarcates it from radical feminism.
13. José Itzigsohn and Karida Brown (2015) show how the theory of double consciousness is not confined to *The Souls of Black Folk* but further developed in *Dusk of Dawn* (Du Bois 2002 [1940]) where Du Bois reflects on the social psychology of race on both sides of the veil. They argue that the theory of double consciousness advances parallel ideas of self-formation in William James, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley and Alfred Schutz, laying the foundations of Du Bois' theory of racialized modernity. In the view of Itzigsohn and Brown, there is no break between Du Bois' phenomenology of race and his Marxism.
14. Just as some might emphasize Du Bois' phenomenology of double consciousness and downplay the shift to Marxism, so others do the same for Fanon – *The Wretched of the Earth* is read through *Black Skin*,

*White Masks* and the Marxism sidelined. See, for example, Gordon (2015) and Hammer (2017). In both cases, I am suggesting there is an ‘epistemological break’ to Marxism, reflected in their politics, their analysis and their self-identification.

15. It is from Chris Muller (2018) that I have learned much about the intricate relationship between share-cropping and convict leasing.
16. Following Du Bois, I have devoted much time to rethinking (‘revisiting’) earlier research, including my Zambian study of mining (Burawoy, 2014).

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