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When the Captor is Captive: Teaching Southern Sociology in the North?

Quando o captor é cativo: Ensinar a Sociologia do Sul no Norte?

Stéphane Dufoix* 

ABSTRACT

In the 1970s, the Malaysian sociologist Syed Hussein Alatas proposed an analysis to account for the teaching of social sciences in the developing world, and especially in Asia. He coined the phrase “captive mind” to describe those students whose training was biased towards Western theories, concepts, meanings and authors taught to them by “captor minds”, the latter being either Asian social science instructors reproducing what they had been taught in the West or Western teachers merely transplanting their “universal” sociology to students wherever they may be. Even if Alatas wrote in 1974 that “there is no counterpart of the captive mind in the West”, we may wonder whether, in the past and also nowadays, sociological teaching in the West has not suffered from the same drawback, almost constantly reproducing both the same kind of visual bias (hyperopia in the South and myopia in the North) and the same form of almost continuous reliance on the same canon. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that this “hegemonic” gaze also relies on a specific end of teaching in the West, examines its effects and proposes an alternative centered on a new understanding of universalism.

Keywords: History of Sociology, teaching sociology, captive mind.

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RESUMO

Na década de 1970, o sociólogo malaio Syed Hussein Alatas propôs uma análise para dar conta do ensino de ciências sociais no mundo em desenvolvimento, especialmente na Ásia. Ele cunhou a expressão “mente cativa” para descrever estudantes cuja formação foi influenciada por teorias, conceitos, significados e autores ocidentais ensinados a eles por “mentes captoras”, sendo estas últimas ou instrutores asiáticos de ciências sociais que reproduzem o que lhes foi ensinado no Ocidente ou professores ocidentais meramente transplantando sua sociologia “universal” a estudantes onde quer que estejam. Mesmo que Alatas tenha escrito em 1974 que “não há contrapartida da mente cativa no Ocidente”, podemos nos perguntar se, no passado assim como hoje, o ensino sociológico no Ocidente não sofreu o mesmo revés, reproduzindo quase constantemente tanto o mesmo tipo de viés visual (hipermetropia no Sul e miopia no Norte) como a mesma forma de dependência quase contínua no mesmo cânone. O objetivo deste artigo é demonstrar que esse olhar “hegemônico” também se apoia num fim específico do ensino no Ocidente, examina seus efeitos e propõe uma alternativa centrada numa nova compreensão do universalismo.

Palavras-chave: História da Sociologia, ensino de sociologia, mente cativa.

Introduction

Reflection about the teaching of sociology have usually been twofold. For a long time, it has been confined to teaching in the Western countries. Founded in 1973 by the American Sociological Association, the journal *Teaching Sociology* has only very recently started to publish some articles on non-Western countries. Similarly, the newly founded (2021) Thematic Group of the International Sociological Association devoted to Sociological teaching was created by two Canadian women sociologists, and its *Pedagogy Series* – whose Editorial Board members are only Canadian scholars – is almost entirely devoted to Western countries. On the other hand, after some early thoughts about the importance of new forms of teaching in order to counter academic hegemony – for instance with the Brazilian sociologist Alberto Guerreiro Ramos who insisted in the 1950s on the role that teaching could play in the cultural emancipation of the students (Ramos, 1957, p. 77-78 ; also see Ramos, 1996) –, challenging formal sociological education gradually became widespread in non-Western countries. The acknowledgement of the fact that formal teaching usually represented a mere reproduction of the Western sociological canon, but also the lingering of the traces of the colonial or imperialist past, triggered contestations of sociological teaching.

Recent movements such as the Rhodes Must Fall at the University of Cape Town in 2015, where the denunciation of the presence of the Cecil Rhodes statue in the center of the campus led to demands for curricular and recruitment policy changes (Chantiluke, Kwoba & Nkopo, 2018; Fataar, 2018), are of course relevant in this perspective. But it is not necessarily useful to go that far. Indeed, the Rhodes Must Fall movement, in elective affinity with other forms of knowledge critique in the humanities and social sciences that had developed in Europe, North America or Latin America – in particular postcolonial or decolonial approaches – served as a trigger for a wave of demands, particularly in the Netherlands, but also in Great Britain (Bhambra, Gebrial & Nişancioğlu, 2018). It resulted in the launching of several “decolonizing” movements in such prestigious institutions as the London School of Economics and Political Science,¹ the University of Cambridge,² or the iconic School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).³

¹ <https://decolonisinglse.wordpress.com/>

² <https://decolonisesociology.com/>

³ <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/about/>

This complex nexus now articulating the North and the South should invite us to think, more specifically than usually done, about the specificities of sociological teaching in the North and, even more precisely, in the very center of the center, i.e., in the Western countries considered to be the homeland of sociological “founders”. Focusing on the teaching of the history of sociology, I will try to show what it may mean to “decolonize” Western sociology.

Synecdochical history and hidden curriculum

This section discusses the mechanisms through which Western dominance is enforced, focusing on the concepts of “synecdochical history” and “hidden curriculum”. The first one refers to how the mainstream writing of the history of sociology is mainly deployed through the display of authors, concepts, theories and books coming from a very short number of Western countries, while pretending to cover the whole sociology – hence the use of the “synecdoche” stylistic device.

The second one comes from an extrapolation of what the American education scientist Philip Wesley Jackson (1990, p. 33-37) had called, in 1968, the “hidden curriculum”, that is, the institutional expectations of the school that every student has to master. A more elaborated analysis of the hidden curriculum was provided three years later by the American psychiatrist Benson Snyder (1971) when he insisted on the fact that the formal academic curriculum was challenged by another, more instrumental one, aiming at success in college. Even if this notion is most of the times associated to the implicit rules of the institution in general (Margolis, 2001; Fuentes *et al.*, 2022, p. 39), it can be quite useful when connected to a more general cultural or ethnic background (Soldatenko, 2001). I would here suggest that the “hidden” or “invisible curriculum” of sociology is precisely the teaching of the synecdochical narrative under the guise of actual history.

More often than not, the history of sociology is taught much more in terms of its ideas, theories and “founders” or main authors than in terms of the “discipline” or disciplinarization of sociology as such. However, the fact remains that it is through this medium that most students learn its history. Therefore, the study of introductory textbooks or syntheses devoted to the history of sociology is of particular importance to try and understand and

assess the content of teaching. As shown in Dufoix (2022), it shows that authors insisted on mostly come from five countries of varying importance (France, the United States, Germany, Britain and Italy), thus reducing the global landscape of sociology to a very small minority. This restrictive synecdoche – that considers a small part to be representative of the whole – restricts the history of sociological practices and meanings, from the late 19th century until now, to those developed in these five countries. Despite their overall quality, and irrespective of when they were written, the great majority of Francophone (Bouthoul, 1950; Giraud, 2004; Simon, 2008; Cuin, Gresle, & Hervouet, 2017; Lallement, 2017; Delas & Milly, 2021), Germanophone (Kaesler, 1999; Korte, 2011; Fleck & Dayé, 2020) or Anglophone (Chambliss, 1954; Coser, 1971; Hawthorn, 1976; Swingewood, 1984) books, do not pay attention to non-Western authors, neither do they about other non-European ones. Of course, some do, either considering the development of sociology in most regions of the world (Barnes & Becker, 1938; Roucek, 1958; Maus, 1962), or in some of them (Gurvitch & Moore, 1945; Cuvillier, 1950; Wiese, 1971; Jonas, 1981).

What does this synecdochical history entail? Writing the evolution of the discipline as revolving around five Western countries makes it possible to retrospectively justify the limitation of the history to that of the history of ideas and theories, with the implicit reasoning that theorization and conceptualization only stems from the center. The absence – or relative absence – of sociology in other parts of the world, especially in the first stages of the disciplinary development, allows to point out this “late” development, and, *ipso facto*, its absence in the most general works on the discipline. “Sociology” does not need to be situated or geographically indexed since the definite article or the absence of any geographical indexation suffices to “demonstrate” its universal reality. The logic that is inherent to the absence of non-Western sociologies in textbooks is tantamount to what Tony Platt wrote some 30 years ago about the classless, genderless and heterosexist content of sociological textbooks:

Most textbooks adopt an essentialist, ahistorical, and compensatory framework that reproduces the baggage of hegemonic paradigms: underestimating the damage created by racism, treating “whiteness” as an unexamined monolith; reducing ethnicity to a classless, genderless, and heterosexist homogeneity; romanticizing survival techniques; and reinforcing the viability of sexism (Platt, 1992, p. 22).

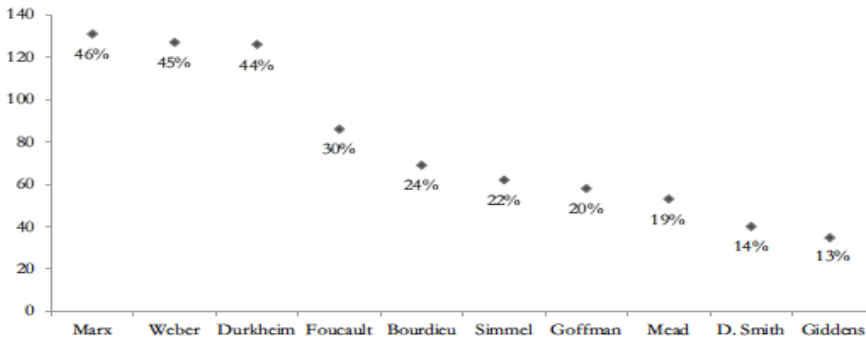
Another good example of this is the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science*, published in 1968 under the coordination of David Sills and Robert K. Merton. Although its title and introduction insist on the “international” dimension of the book, the analysis of the authorship (Gareau, 1988, p. 174) shows that it was mainly written by Euro-American authors: 78.1 % of the total authorship was American-affiliated. The addition of authors from the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia adds up another 10.6 % to Anglophone authors. Scholars with continental European affiliations (mostly from France and Germany) accounted for 9.4 % of the authorship. On the whole, Western authorship thus accounted for 98.1 per cent of the total. The 1.2 % remaining accounted for the Third World (0.9 %) and Communist Eastern Europe (0.3 %). All in all, there were only 14 contributors with Third World affiliations. Latin America had only one, who wrote an entry on a German ethnographer. As Gareau bluntly – but rightly – puts it (Gareau, 1988), that encyclopedia was a “mute witness to the provincialism of the disciplines whose name it bears”, disguising it under the banner of internationalism.

As far as teaching is concerned, it’s not always easy to know exactly what the content of courses is, especially when the habit of designing syllabi does not exist, as it is the case in France for instance. The Anglo-Saxon practice of syllabus makes it easier to list the authors actually cited and taught. Whether in the United States or in Canada, the most frequently cited authors are about the same (see Figures 1 and 2), the trinity of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim being first before only Western social science scholars. It is striking to notice this continuity while, at the very same time, the discussion about the need and very existence of a “sociological core” was taking place (among others, see Abbott, 2000; Keith & Ender, 2004; Ballantine *et al.*, 2016; Oromaner, 1968, p. 125-126).

The growing pressure to “decolonize” the curriculum and the textbooks (Stein, 2017) did not prevent a German study on the sociological canon (Schneickert *et al.*, 2019, p. 343) to ask German students about their knowledge of the “grand sociological theories” and presenting them a list of 26 names with only one woman (Judith Butler) and no non-Western scholar. In the same line, the results of the study conducted by Philip Korom from a sample of Western journal, textbooks, handbooks, and encyclopedias in the 1970s and in the 2010s (2020, 11-12) perfectly show that although the

names in the list of the top 50 sociologists may have changed in 40 years, Weber and Durkheim are in the top 4 or 3. The only woman in the 1970s is Margaret Mead, while three of them (Allie Hochschild, Saskia Sassen and Judith Butler) are listed in the 2010s. In both cases, not a single non-Western sociologist is listed.

Figure 1. Most frequently listed authors in Canadian Sociological Theory Syllabi



Source: Guzman & Silver (2018, p. 19, 2012-2015). n=285

This predominance of Western authors is not the prerogative of Western countries. Diego Ezequiel Pereyra (2008) demonstrates that sociology textbooks in Argentina and Mexico, in the 1940-1960 period, were also dominated by Western scholars. This situation has not really changed. Sergio Costa (2013, p. 113-114) has shown that listing the most frequently cited authors from 1999 to 2009 in the *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* and in the *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* results in an overwhelming presence of Western authors: in the first case, only two non-Western scholars – Florestan Fernandes and Gilberto Freyre in 7th and 10th position – enter in the top 10, far behind Bourdieu, Weber, Habermas, Giddens and Foucault while, in the second case, no Mexican or Latin-American social scientist appears before the 23rd position, the top of the list being occupied by Bourdieu, Touraine, Weber, Habermas and Foucault.

Out of more than 20,000 bibliographic references from 479 academic texts written by Chilean social scientists between 2000 and 2006, Claudio Ramos Zincke (2014, p. 715) found that only four non-Western authors were included in the list of the 25 most often cited: the Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini (8th), the Chilean biologist and

philosopher Humberto Maturana (16th), the Argentinian political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell (17th) and the Spanish-Colombian communication scientist Jesús Martín-Barbero (22nd), whereas the first positions were held by Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck. Moreover, from data based on the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), Felix Valdés García (2019, p. 34) could show that, in 2007, 37 scholars in human and social sciences were cited more than 500 times. Whether they are classical references (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Freud, Nietzsche) or more recent ones since the end of World War II (Habermas, Bourdieu, Giddens...), they all come from Western countries except for Edward Said. Other examples could be given coming from other regions of the world (for Japan, see for instance Nishihara, 2014).

Figure 2. Most frequently listed authors in American syllabi (2000-2002)

Theorist	Syllabi Included on (N=46)	Average Weeks Spent Discussing
Max Weber	46	2.58
E. Durkeim	45	2.41
K. Marx	42	2.55
G. Simmel	20	1.45
G.H. Mead	16	1.00
S. Freud	8	1.00
A. Comte	7	.44
A. Smith	6	.93
H. Spencer	6	.72
A. Tocqueville	5	1.30
G. Hegel	5	.56
E. Goffman	5	.81

Source: Thomas & Kukulan (2004, p. 258). n= 46

All the above features concerning the synecdochical history of sociology in textbooks and syllabi with the omission of early non-Western sociologies (Dufoix, 2022), as well as the confusion between “sociology” and “Western sociology”, and the overwhelming presence of Western theorists among the most cited social scientists around the world should incline us to consider that this situation has nothing to do with the actual past of world sociology. If it has to be understood as the historical product of Western hegemony, its mechanisms still have to be properly pointed out.

I hereby would like to suggest that the telling of the same “legendary” – etymologically seen as “what has to be read” – narrative encompasses research, teaching, and the circulation of sociological ideas. As a compulsory part of both textbooks and courses, it indeed constitutes a “hidden curriculum” in the sense mentioned above. It constitutes one of the main vectors of canonization by imposing a number of founding fathers and important figures to the exclusion of women, members of minorities and non-Western scholars. It whitens sociology. It hardens and naturalizes the discipline through the establishment of a truth about it that becomes the foundational stone of teaching and the fundamental understanding of sociology by the students. It also perpetuates the constructed division of labor between the North and the South as far as theory construction is concerned.

Where are captive and captor minds?

The legendary narrative of sociology provides a framework within which the history of the discipline and sociological theories are blended. As the international division of epistemic labor is structured around the distinction between a periphery providing data on traditional societies and a center elaborating theories of social progress and development on the basis of these data and empirical work in some Western countries (Hountondji, 1990; Connell, 2007; Keim, 2008; Santos & Meneses, 2010; Collyer & Dufoix, 2022), the teaching of sociology does not differ much depending on where in the world it is delivered, even after the political independence of non-Western countries.

The Malaysian sociologist Syed Hussein Alatas elaborated a conceptual explanation of this phenomenon. After obtaining a PhD in Political and

Social Sciences from the University of Amsterdam, in 1963, his dissertation being devoted to “Reflections on the theories of religion” (Alatas, 1963b; see also 1963a), he came back to Malaysia where he joined the department of Malay Studies at the University of Malaya at Kuala Lumpur. In 1967, he founded the department of Malay Studies at the University of Singapore while being intensively engaged in politics in Malaysia, as a President of the Malaysian People’s Movement Party between 1968 and 1971, a member of the National Malaysian Consultative Council from 1969 until 1971, and as a senator in 1971 (on Alatas, see for instance Hassan, 2005; Maia & Caruso, 2012; Byrd & Javad Miri, 2022). From the late 1950s, he was extremely active in denouncing the consequences of Western academic domination on the social sciences practiced and taught in the developing countries. His analysis stems from the relationship between colonialism and Western thought:

The history of colonial societies has shown how the forceful introduction of western institutions has created chaos and maladjustments in their social structure. The incursion of western thought into the intellectual world of the native elites brought about similar results. This, coupled with other influences such as the feeling of cultural inferiority, has made them more susceptible and more receptive towards western thought and modes of life without consideration as to their merits if practised in their own society. The wholesale importation of ideas from the western world to eastern societies can only be successful if based upon carefully thought out planning, for shorn of their sociohistorical setting such ideas are liable to create only confusion and maladjustment (Alatas, 1956, p. 9).

The critical problem comes from the fact that intellectual imperialism is not tantamount to political imperialism. If the latter may come to an end with independence and its recognition by international organization, intellectual “swaraj” (Bhattacharya, 1977; Uberoi, 1977) – from the Sanskrit word used to denote self-determination – is much more complicated to achieve because of the incorporation and naturalization processes taking place:

These problems in turn need a solution, but the very method and process of solving them have themselves become a problem, the most vital and fundamental problem of all. Under this type of problem fall such phenomena as uncritical transplantation of thought from the West to the former colonies, the continuation of the process of forcefully

introducing western institutions without the necessary caution, and the assumption of a corrupt attitude by an influential section of the leading group (Alatas, 1956, p. 10).

This “uncritical transplantation of thought” led to what Alatas called the “captive mind” in an article designed “to awaken the consciousness of the social scientists in Asia to their own intellectual servitude” (Alatas, 1972, p. 21⁴). He further developed the idea in 1974, linking this intellectual servitude to the consequences of epistemic imperialism. He coined the phrase “captive mind” to describe those students whose training was biased towards Western theories, concepts, meanings and authors taught to them by “captor minds”, the latter being either Asian social science instructors reproducing what they had been taught in the West or Western teachers merely transplanting their “universal” sociology to students wherever they may be:

There is not a single university in Asia that realizes the need to introduce a special course on captive thinking in the sciences, to make students aware of the need to adapt the sciences which they imbibe from Western sources. What happens is a mere transplantation of thought. Again I do not mean here a simple adaptation of techniques and methodologies but of the conceptual apparatus, systems of analysis, and selection of problems (Alatas, 1974, p. 695).

The captive mind is therefore understood as a huge problem in Asia – even though it is obvious that Alatas identified a process the reality, relevance and efficiency of which goes well beyond Asia. The definition of the “captive mind” is actually broad and generic enough to capture a more general phenomenon (which does not mean that it would take place exactly the same way everywhere). Given the frequent ignorance of Alatas’ analysis in academic circles, it seems important to give a full quotation of this definition:

A captive mind is the product of higher institutions of learning, either at home or abroad, whose way of thinking is dominated by Western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner.

A captive mind is uncreative and incapable of raising original problems.

⁴ This article relies on a presentation, with the same title, delivered at the 11th World Conference of the Society for International Development in New Delhi, 14- 17 November 1969.

It is incapable of devising an analytical method independent of current stereotypes.

It is incapable of separating the particular from the universal in science and thereby properly adapting the universally valid corpus of scientific knowledge to the particular local situations.

It is fragmented in outlook.

It is alienated from the major issues of society.

It is alienated from its own national tradition, if it exists, in the field of its intellectual pursuit.

It is unconscious of its own captivity and the conditioning factors making it what it is.

It is not amenable to an adequate quantitative analysis but it can be studied by empirical observation.

It is a result of the Western dominance over the rest of the world (Alatas, 1974, p. 691).

The three words that could summarize these statements are the following: epistemic imperialism, irrelevance of universal science, and colonization of the minds. They relate to the three main realms – historicity, intellectual life, and epistemology – pertaining to the captivity of the minds. If the former two are immediately visible, the third one is harder to see. It yet constitutes a fundamental stone in Alatas' analysis for it makes it clear how much the lingering of colonization in mental structures not only has direct consequences on the way people act or don't act but also on their framework of thought, thus making a number of things thinkable while many others will not be at all. Once again, we see here a concrete example of the consequences of the hidden curriculum:

Another great problem of the captive mind is that it is not able to differentiate the universal from the particular: it subsumes both under the universal. When a captive mind studies the sciences from the West, phenomena which are distinctly Western are often considered to be universal. This is a trend which, for lack of better terms, I would suggest we call "methodological imperialism" (Alatas, 1974, p. 691).

While awareness of the mechanisms at work in the establishment and reproduction of intellectual captivity is essential for reflection on how to put an end to it, it is by no means sufficient: “What we need are alternative models, methodologies and concepts to modify, supplement, or substitute those already available. This could and should be done by Asian scholars for strictly scientific reasons” (Alatas, 1972, p. 20).

The great originality of Alatas’ conception is to associate the figure of the captive mind with that of the “captor mind”: “The captor mind is the Western scholar or his Asian disciple who imparts knowledge through books or lectures in a manner which does not promote consciousness of the fundamentals of scientific thinking and reasoning” (Alatas, 1974, p. 698). Very clearly, captive and captor minds do not distribute themselves in a binary way, South vs North, since the Western presence in the world via both colonialism and the Cold War has to be considered, as well as, in the other direction, the long-term migration of non-Western students to Europe and North America. Yet, his or her singularity is shown by his/her acceptance and diffusion of this specific version of the social sciences that insists on universalism: “The main characteristics of the captor mind are that its presentation of the sciences is not contextual, is not philosophical, is not relational, and is not intercultural” (Alatas, 1974, p. 698). Although it’s possible to consider this stance as a consequence of a singular academic trajectory, it mostly results from structural forces:

The captor mind does not necessarily become such by intention, just as the captive mind does not necessarily seek captivity consciously. They are the instruments of a gigantic and imposing intellectual superstructure (Alatas, 1974, p. 698).

One important thing to note: for Alatas, no Western society is so entirely infused with Oriental thinking as Oriental societies are with Western thinking. Therefore, there would not exist any mirror mechanism: “The hypothetical captive mind in the West would be more familiar with Oriental history than his own” (Alatas, 1974, p. 698). Does that necessarily imply there are no captive and captor minds in the West? What if we tried to understand the possibility of such an existence without any strict symmetry but with the possibility of a specific captivity of the West?

Even if Alatas wrote in 1974 that “there is no counterpart of the captive mind in the West” (Alatas, 1974, p. 691), one has to take into consideration that there indeed was some form of Western captivity too. Although Northern and Southern scholars were not on the same side of the rope, the former ones giving knowledge while the latter only receiving it – taking into consideration what I mentioned above about the fractal positionality of captive and captor –, they both suffered from some kind of visual bias (hyperopia in the South and myopia in the North) and the same form of almost continuous reliance on the same canon.

According to the “captive mind” pattern, Southern societies are characterized by their academic dependency on the epistemic framework of the West – always to be specified along periods, locations and dependency to which country. Their situation can be seen as being characterized by hyperopia, that condition of the eyes in which distant objects are seen more distinctly than near ones. Most academics are in a relative or total incapacity to grasp the singularity of one’s society or the irrelevance of foreign concepts. On the contrary, the Western epistemic eye is rather suffering from myopia insofar as closer social situations are the most visible ones – greater reliance on Western authors and theories even though considering them universally applicable – while distant societies can hardly be distinguished in their singularity because of the universalized Western narrative of sociology.

Textbooks, curricula, syllabi, books about the history of the discipline hardly ever move from the canonical yet unconscious understanding of sociology as a mere Western and universal social science. Hence, the “captive mind” of the Western students is actually locked in the synecdochical narrative I mentioned earlier and that is transmitted to them by former captive minds. Wherever they work – in the North or in South – captor minds are also captive minds, being captive of the very narrative they have been trained in and that they constantly reproduce and expand through the social prestige of scholarship, thus training new captive minds to become captor minds emulating the vision of the social sciences that had been incorporated and naturalized during their training. Their capacity to captivate is subordinated to the situatedness of their own knowledge. Eastern or Southern scholars can be both captive – after their training in the West or in their country by someone trained in the West – and captor minds – merely transplanting or reproducing Western ideas through teaching. Teachers – notably those who deliver introductory courses

to sociological theory – become the channels through which the paradoxical de-historicization of the discipline is made possible.

Decaptivation and decolonization

Though not identical, captivation processes are similar in the core and in the peripheries. The teaching of the history of sociology as a history of sociological theories turns the historical past of the discipline into a solid narrative about the truth of the discipline and fosters the application of Western sociological concepts to all social situations irrespective of the cultural and historical contexts. In the West, it but confirms the idea that sociology is a Western discipline and validates the superiority of a few national sociologies under the guise of universal sociological knowledge.

Captivity is thus a vicious circle reproducing itself through the very logic of academic institutions and the widespread circulation of legitimate knowledge. The analytic bifurcation that implicitly or explicitly designs a strict geo-epistemic dichotomy between the West and the East, or the North and the South (Go, 2017; Meghji, 2021) is not limited to Northern epistemologies. It also shows up in Southern epistemologies, either through some form of “Orientalism in reverse” (al-Azm, 1981) or in regional (African, Latin-American or Asian) singularities. The proclamation of non-Western sociologies and non-Western theoretical potential calls for an epistemopolitical “name of one’s own” in order to guarantee a better relevance against false universalism. Yet, the overcoming of this phase (in the center and in the peripheries) should lead to a more global discussion about the meaning of universalism.

This search for an alternative universalism is closely related to a new understanding about teaching the history of sociology. It would require three steps.

The first step is to raise awareness of silences and to produce what the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “a sociology of absences” (Santos, 2002). Indeed, the product of the relationship between capturing minds and captive minds is an almost total amnesia of the disciplines’ real past. Anamnesis is the first means of opening the eyes of specialists, especially Western ones, to the global dimension

of the disciplines in question. If their institutional creation is always European, their dissemination is far from being always a simple export. The appropriation by national intellectual elites of European or American ideas, theories, concepts and authors gives rise to the formation of a singular tradition marked by the specific histories of each country. Even today, our knowledge of this past is very incomplete, which necessarily influences the way we teach the history of our discipline, from which the particular forms taken in Latin America, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Arab world, Sub-Saharan Africa or Oceania are excluded.

Secondly, we should note that the teaching of the history of disciplines is generally limited to the history of theories or authors. The historical links between the development of the social sciences and European and North American colonialism – and/or coloniality – have imposed an international division of epistemic work, where theoretical and conceptual work is the prerogative of the center, and thus of the West. It follows logically that the list of “classics” to be read or known by students is almost invariably the same in all countries and most of the time includes only Western men. Opening up the canon is a fundamental issue. This does not mean that it should necessarily be representative in terms of gender, world regions, ethnicity, race or religion. But neither can it remain an unthought. Producing a more open history of the disciplines and working on the processes of canonization should make it possible not to reject all ideas of the canon *en bloc* and to make it more inclusive and diverse. The anthropology of the peasantry would benefit from reading the Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1992), just as the epistemology and methodology of anthropology would benefit from the work of the South African anthropologist Archie Mafeje (1991) or the Maori and New Zealand education specialist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), while gender issues can hardly be thought of today without the texts of Maria Lugones (2010) or the Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (1997). These are just a few examples of the possibilities offered by a broadening of perspectives, especially for students.

Finally, a focus on the actual history of the disciplines and the dynamics of the constitution of the canon also aims to open up a sense of the universal. The search for general laws of social evolution, the desire to model the social sciences on the natural sciences, and the Eurocentrism of classical theorists have often led to the conflation of two forms of universalism: the positivist

quest for laws or concepts that are largely trans-historical and trans-spatial, and the postulate of a science of the social for which the production of knowledge would be disconnected from the cultural and social dispositions of the producers of knowledge. According to this postulate, sociological knowledge could not be explained and understood sociologically! It is however well anchored, as much in the defense of the neutrality of researchers, in the ideal of objectivity of the investigation, as in the refusal to think of an epistemology of the social sciences other than a mimic of the epistemology of the hard sciences or to recognize that knowledge and the production of knowledge are situated, intimately linked to the multiple positionality of the investigator. This determination is not univocal (gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, geographical or other affiliation), even when one or other of these different dimensions is put forward. We may thus wonder: can there be a situated universalism?

The vast majority of challenges to Western universalism are certainly based on a defense of the relevance and indigeneity or endogeneity of concepts and theories, but also on the distinction between a Eurocentric universalism and a scientific universal to be constructed on the basis of the plurality of situations and modes of knowledge. In 1958, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1996, p. 125) already mentioned the “false universalism” (*universalismo equivocado*) on which the denial of the existence of national sociologies is based. This did not prevent him from proclaiming the universality of science, as can also be read in Syed Hussein Alatas (2002) or in the Egyptian sociologist Anouar Abdel-Malek (1975) in his theory of specificity. It is therefore a question of a transformation of the status of universality, the search for the “lateral universal”, a notion that the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne borrows from French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty to differentiate it from a vertical and overhanging universalism (Diagne, 2017, 2018). The universal is not always already there: it is always a historical product of struggles to define what the social sciences are and what the social is. It can then be seen as a horizon to be constructed, as the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (2016) points out. The universal is combined with the plural to examine the tension between the general and the particular, between the global and the local. Thus, conceived between the universalism of nowhere and the autochthony of an endemic thought, the universality to be constructed means always a scientific struggle.

Is it utopian to defend a vision of the universal to be constructed between researchers based on the very diversity of their relationship to reality? I don't think so, for at least two reasons. The first is based on the fact that, over the last thirty years, reflections on alternative epistemologies have been developing in an increasingly visible way in social science journals and in the catalogues of major publishing houses, whether in Latin America, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa or the Arab world. The second insists on the fact that scientific reflection is more than ever in need of a utopian dimension that is only waiting to be realized. The asymptotic horizon of a universal in the social sciences towards which to strive without giving up the plurality of means leading to it seems more reasonable than a blind belief in a universal that is always-already-there and that must be discovered. The desire to create it in order to move towards a common objective that is likely to bring researchers together, to overcome their differences in the production of knowledge that can be translated and discussed among themselves, is a commitment that can be envisaged if what I call a state of “decolony” is progressively put in place (Dufoix, 2023).

The conditions of possibility of these transformations seem to me to be of four kinds:

- It seems to be compulsory to offer a knowledge of knowledge in a broader perspective – temporally and spatially – than that which has generally been erected as a unilinear, universalized and diffusionist narrative (Dufoix, 2022a, 2022b). Instead, a complex, circulatory and global history of knowledge is needed. The situation of decolonization thus requires, first of all, an awareness of epistemic hegemony and the obligation to “provincialize” it in order to restore its historically and geographically situated character.
- A second move consists in providing access to this complex history to students, teachers and researchers by encouraging translations of texts that challenge Eurocentrism or propose a more “open” version of disciplinary histories, theoretical systems and concepts. In the French case, there is a serious lack of such translations. For example, the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's *Southern Theory* (2007) is still unpublished in French and its original English version is only cited in a limited number of cases in France. The publication of Latin American, African or Asian works by recognized publishing houses

or the publication of critical articles in generalist journals in the various disciplines is still far too weak to lead to anything other than a fixation on the most directly political aspects of postcolonial or decolonial thought without allowing for a more distanced reflection on the scientific value of these works.

- In the same way that disciplinary knowledge – especially extra-Western knowledge since it is this that has been the object of the greatest epistemic injustice – must be grasped in its historicity, current knowledge must be apprehended in its globality. The alternative epistemologies that have emerged over the last century need to be integrated, if not into a new canon, at least into a more general corpus that takes into account the diversity of ideas and the conditions of disagreement between those who carry them (Alatas & Sinha, 2017).
- Engaging the university – higher education and research in general – in integrating these contributions – both the critique and deconstruction of legendary narratives and the formulation of new epistemological frameworks – would provide a space for real debate around the issue of decolonization. Despite the presence in several parts of the world of work on this issue, this development suffers from two defects. On the one hand, they are still rarely linked to each other, most of them focusing on a regional and/or continental logic. On the other hand, they are still too rarely discussed at official international academic events. This space for inter-regional and international disputation is still sorely lacking today.

Why does the question of “decolonization” prompt us to consider the question of coloniality, from which we must emerge? First of all, because imperialism has not disappeared from the face of the earth. From Ukraine to the West Indies and Australia, its shadow still hangs over many peoples and cultures, albeit in different, more or less visibly, brutal ways. Secondly, because, although the French, Americans, British and Dutch of today are far from being all nostalgic for the empire – particularly because part of their population has suffered it in its flesh and spirit, or in those of their ancestors – their perception and apprehension of everyday life remain marked by the coloniality of the narratives transmitted and disseminated. It follows that the immense challenges we must collectively face in terms of equality, non-discrimination, our relationship with republican principles, universalism

and openness to difference and the world are not solely dependent on current events. They depend closely on our ability to change the mental frameworks in which many of us are still caught, most of the time without even realizing it. Their transformation can only benefit from social and political activism, but it also requires, perhaps above all, a commitment on the part of teachers and researchers to take greater account of global epistemic structures, of the epistemological debates underway in various disciplines (sociology, anthropology, geography, international relations, etc.) and of the need to open up our teaching to concepts, theories and movements of ideas that are different from those in which we are still mostly stuck.

Only a thorough work of reflexivity on the social, intellectual, political and epistemic conditions of the writing of the history of social sciences, as much by the social scientists of the North as by those of the South, will allow, in the years or decades to come, to gradually transform the traditional frameworks inherited from the last century and a half of sociology. Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) invited us to “unthink social science” by separating it from the paradigms that governed its constitution in the 19th century. However, if his approach in this book, as well as in the report of the Gulbenkian Commission (1996), or in his presidential address to the World Congress of Sociology in Montréal in 1998 (Wallerstein, 1999) advocated greater interdisciplinarity, a stronger attention to the role of women in social science, as well as an important call to take social specificities into consideration, it did not claim for an innovative way to write and teach the history of social science. This task is ahead of us.

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