In defense of a polyphonic sociology: Introducing female voices into the sociological canon

Cynthia Lins Hamlin[*] (iD)
Raquel Andrade Weiss[**] (iD)
Simone Magalhães Brito[***] (iD)

Abstract

Recent controversies surrounding the sociological canon have foregrounded the need to think about the process of erasing and silencing 'non-Western' and female contributions to the discipline. By emphasizing the androcentrism of the sociological canon, our goal is to contribute to the construction of a less biased and limited sociology through the inclusion of female voices previously excluded from its official history. We start by briefly describing the conditions that enabled this exclusion, taking the Chicago women sociologists as an example, along with the emergence of a particular conception of theory and research associated with the formation of the classical canon. Next, by questioning the use of terms such as 'founders,' 'classics' and 'canon,' we maintain that the existence of a canon, classical or otherwise, plays a central role in the identity of the discipline and of social theory itself. Finally, in order to productively include the contributions of sociology's women pioneers, we propose substituting the literary metaphor of the canon with a musical one: a type of polyphony that emphasizes the contrast between different voices and simultaneously establishes how they can be combined in a common tradition that makes dialogue possible.[1]

En defensa de una sociología polifónica: introduciendo las voces femeninas en el canon sociológico

Resumen

Controversias recientes acerca del canon sociológico han puesto de manifiesto la necesidad de pensar el proceso de borrado y silenciamiento de las aportaciones "no occidentales" y femeninas a la disciplina. Al enfatizar la dimensión androcéntrica del canon sociológico, nuestro objetivo es contribuir a la construcción de una sociología menos sesgada y limitada a partir de la inclusión de voces femeninas excluidas de la historia oficial de la disciplina. Inicialmente, hacemos una breve descripción de las condiciones que permitieron excluir esas voces, tomando como ejemplo a las sociólogas de Chicago, posibilitando el surgimiento de una particular concepción de la teoría y la investigación asociada a la formación del canon clásico. Luego, al enfatizar el uso de términos como "fundadores", "clásicos" y "canon", argumentamos que la existencia de un canon, sea clásico u otro, juega un rol central en la identidad de la disciplina y de la propia teoría social. Finalmente, para incluir productivamente los aportes de las pioneras de la sociología, proponemos sustituir la metáfora literaria del canon por una metáfora musical: una especie de polifonía que enfatiza el contraste entre diferentes voces y, al mismo tiempo, establece cómo esas pueden combinarse en una tradición común que hace posible el diálogo.

Palabras clave: canon, clásicos, pioneras de la sociología, polifonía.

Introduction

A retrospective survey of the major debates in sociology offers a glimpse of something that would not go unnoticed by a historian of science, an epistemologist or indeed any remotely attentive reader: we are always in the midst of different crises of legitimacy and identity, seeking to justify our existence as a necessary and minimally autonomous field of knowledge. Surprisingly, sociology itself does not seem to have taken very seriously the ways in which these crises have helped shape our identity, excluding from its official history the social, political and cultural processes involved in the construction of canonical texts and authors in search of legitimation.

A cursory examination of our course programs reveals highly unrealistic conceptions of the history of the discipline, suggesting to our students that sociology emerged almost entirely as the product of the genius of just a few individuals (all white men) intellectually capable of exploiting the conditions provided by the revolutions that characterized European modernity. As a consequence, academic training in sociology has been based on curricula whose relationship with theory is deeply attached to study of the classics, "a small canon of big books and foundational authors everyone should be familiar with" (Abrutyn; Lizardo, 2021, p. 1). This constitutes one of our most distinctive features as a discipline. What is often left out of our curricula is the antagonistic and exclusivist dimension of our discipline's constitution, something that has been questioned in recent decades, especially from feminist and decolonial perspectives.

As has become increasingly evident, social theory bears the imprint of a Eurocentric and androcentric bias (Alatas; Sinha, 2017) that undermines its purported universality and objectivity. Reactions to this contemporary crisis are many and varied, but one aspect seems to be shared by them all: the need to rewrite the history of sociology and social theory in order to account for the innumerable voices erased and silenced from the 'official' history told in the canonical texts. What remains a matter of debate is whether this canon should be expanded or whether we should abandon any reference to it so as to make space for the plurality of voices and perspectives involved in the analysis of society and social relations.

Our focus here will be on the androcentrism of the canonical texts, a dimension whose critique seems to centre around five main approaches, distinguishable only in analytic terms. The first can be associated with the development of a feminist epistemology that constitutes the basis for a 'deconstruction' of classical texts that highlights how masculinity operates as a hidden but fundamental category in the understanding of domination (for example, Smith, 1974, 2007; Stanley; Wise, 1993; Collins, 1990). The second entails a type of immanent critique of canonical texts to identify the more or less implicit conceptions of women, femininity

and gender relations (Sydie, 1994; Felski, 1995; Marshall; Witz, 2004; Chaboud-Rychter *et al.*, 2014). The third set of approaches are linked to the sociology of knowledge, or an intellectual history, and emphasize the biographical and social dimensions of constructing theory, including the personal relationships of the canonical male theorists with women and other gender-related experiences (Gane, 1993; Ketler; Meja, 1993; Deegan, 1991; Cross, 2020; Harding, 2021). A fourth approach involves the dissemination and analysis of the thought of women authors who have been rendered invisible or erased from the history of sociological thought, with an emphasis on those who published between the 1830s and 1930s, such as Flora Tristán, Harriet Martineau, Jane Addams, Anna Julia Cooper, Beatrix Potter Webb, Marianne Weber, among others (for example, Lengermann; Niebrugge, 2007; Deegan, 1988b; Mata, 2014; Daflon; Sorj, 2021; Alcantara, 2021; Campos, 2021; Santana *et al.*, 2021; Zanon *et al.*, 2022). Finally, the fifth tendency identified by us calls into question the construction of the canon itself, emphasizing mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of particular authors and themes (e.g., Stacey; Thorne, 1985; Platt, 1994; Sprague, 1997; Connell, 1997, 2020a; Deegan, 1988a; Outhwaite, 2009; Evans, 2009; Baehr, 2016).

Our discussion here will be based on this fifth approach. We aim to contribute to the construction of a less exclusionary and less biased sociology, but without imploding the disciplinary boundaries that constitute our identity as sociologists. To this end, we propose to make the sociological canon more 'polyphonic' by including a number of women's voices that have been erased from the history of the discipline. In this sense, investigating how the relationship between Social Theory and the classical sociological canon was established is important to point out some general mechanisms of women's exclusion in this process. It also allows us to propose the metaphor of the musical canon as a form of polyphony to suggest how different voices can be combined in a common tradition that ensures the possibility of dialogue between them.

Sociology's founding moment and the presence of women

Even though the so-called 'founding fathers' of sociology were European, pointing to a European intellectual hegemony, from an institutional point of view the history of sociology is rather more complex.[2] First coined by Auguste Comte, the term sociology spread to several countries from the 1850s on and the world's first departments and chairs of sociology emerged from the 1880s. Sociological practice and teaching during this period were not yet professionalized, however. In the United States, for example, the courses that made up sociological curricula were generally taught by people with no training in the field and included topics alien to our contemporary sensibilities such as 'anthropological geography,' 'history of English cities and towns,' 'modern socialism,' 'organized philanthropy' and 'private property rights' (Abbott, 1999). By the same token, when Albion Small, founder and first professor of Chicago's Department of Sociology, named the journal he edited between 1895 and 1926 the *American Journal of Sociology*, what he meant by the term sociology was 'neither an academic discipline nor a subject matter', but something rather more vague denoting that 'formal theories about society were relevant to practical social reform, a claim that went beyond cognitive assertion to invoke specific moral and religious values' (Abbott, 1999, p. 85). Sociological theories, for their part, only began to be classified and organized from the 1930s, when the process leading to the global hegemony of American sociology began, driven by the influx of intellectuals escaping the spread of fascism in Europe between 1930 and 1945, who helped build a philosophically sophisticated sociology that was less parochial in its interests (Steinmetz, 2007).

[2] It is worth noting that, from the perspective of national university systems, several countries in the Americas and Asia already had sociology departments or chairs by this period. The Sociology Department at the Imperial University of Tokyo dates from the early 1880s (although undergraduate sociology courses were only established in the mid-twentieth century), and the first chairs of sociology in Latin America were founded in Peru (1896), Argentina (1898) and Bolivia (1902) (Dufoix, 1921) – that is, well before Durkheim managed to transform the chair of Science of Education in Paris into the chair of Education and Sociology in 1913. In the United States, the first sociology departments were created in Chicago (1892) and Columbia (1893).

Although the sociology produced in the United States between the 1890s and 1930s was considered provincial and not yet professionalized, the history of sociological production in Chicago during this period is especially instructive since it illustrates three related issues: the kind of sociology practiced in the period, the relatively arbitrary nature of the establishment of the classical canon, and the erasure of women's production from the history of sociology. The founding of the Chicago Department of Sociology comes at a time when 'the university was replacing the college as the dynamic center of American higher education, […] and becoming the chief institutional identification for the practitioners of the formal disciplines' (Cravens, 1971, p.7). As in other sciences, practitioners of sociology needed to engage in the construction of the discipline. In addition to the elaboration of a theoretical-methodological corpus, this required not only the establishment of associations and specialized publications, but also the legitimization of this knowledge as socially necessary. Understanding the place and subsequent erasure of women's voices in this process necessitates comprehending what was then practiced under the title of Sociology and, especially, how this differs from contemporary practices. This point needs to be emphasized because consideration of the Chicago School as a foundational moment of sociological research is still very much based on the idea that the work of men such as W. I. Thomas and Albion Small bears close comparison to our contemporary understanding of the meaning of sociological research.

The institutional development of sociology was marked by two important aspects related to industrial capital's interests in funding the US university system: first, the political environment that valued science demanded that sociology move away from Christian perspectives of reform and social work towards notions such as objectivity and scientism, which would also deter radical ideas and movements (Johnston, 2018). Second, it was important to strengthen an idea of 'public utility.' In this sense, sociology, like other social sciences, needed to strike the right balance in order to respond scientifically to the crises and problems caused by industrialization without abandoning 'American values' (Johnston, 2018, p. 98).

These processes unfolded over the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. The founding of Chicago's Department of Sociology in 1892 is seen through today's perspective as a scientific endeavour *par excellence*, but the truth is that the term 'sociology' was also fundamentally political and as much associated with the promotion of 'settlements' as it was with the university. The settlement movement emerged in England in 1884 with the founding of Toynbee Hall in London's East End, whose main idea was 'bridging class differences by having privileged class young men live among the working poor' (Lengermann; Niebrugge-Brantley, 2002, p. 6). Its best-known American experience was Hull-House in Chicago, founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889. The settlement house was a mixture of hall, home, university, research centre, clinic, café, apartment complex, gymnasium and catalyst for hope and social change. Although Hull-House and the myriad other social settlements modelled after it[3] were founded and run mostly by white, middle-class female sociologists, they followed their British counterparts in believing that people from different social classes could develop experiences of coexistence and find solutions to the problems afflicting the city, based on the observation of daily life and the application of scientific methods. In this way, the network of women formed by the first American sociologists conducted an empirically-oriented research, grounded in fieldwork and statistics and applied to minority and disadvantaged groups. Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (2002, p. 7) present six characteristics of these settlements:

> (1) It is a movement across class lines; (2) it requires […] that people from a relatively privileged class attempt to live with people who are from disempowered classes; (3) it asks that living be done in "a neighborly relation"; (4) it expects that the privileged class persons will learn from their experiences; (5) it suggests that that learning may be both informal and systematic; (6) it

[3] In 1910, there were some 413 organisations in 33 US states that identified themselves as settlements. The high female profile can be observed from the gender distribution of participation in these settlements during this period: 1007 women residents to 322 men; 5718 women volunteers to 1594 men (Lengermann; Niebrugge-Brantley, 2002, p. 6).

expects settlement residents to use what they learn to change society to effect a more just distribution of socially produced goods.

For Mary Jo Deegan (1988a), the gender division of American sociology was institutionally centred in Chicago: The Department of Sociology was the abode of male sociologists; Hull House, of women sociologists. In the construction of the American sociological canon, the work developed at Hull-House was erased. It is important to stress, however, that the separation between feminine and masculine spaces at the end of the nineteenth century did not imply the constitution of radically distinct sociologies, but rather the recognition of the place women could occupy in the nascent university system. Women were mostly employed by exclusively female schools or colleges where research was not emphasised. Just as the sociological work of women is misconstrued by its comparison with a contemporary model of research and professionalization, so too the work of men is overvalued by its description in terms of a theoretical logic that was in fact established much later.

In terms of the sociological aspect of the Hull-House women's work, it is interesting to note that many identified themselves as sociologists, participated as founding members of the ASA, presented papers at annual meetings, and held administrative positions (Deegan, 1988b, p. 142). In her survey, Deegan presents ten women authors who were active in sociological work at the time, publishing and participating in national and international networks: Jane Addams, Emily Balch, Charlotte Gilmann, Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, Mary McDowell, Mary E. B. R. Smith, Anna G. Spencer, Marion Talbot and Ida B. Wells. Despite authoring only ten per cent of the *American Journal of Sociology*'s publications from 1895 to 1940, women were a constant presence in the journal: in 45 years, only eight volumes had just one or no female author (Grant, Staple and Ward, 2002, p. 75). Even though research on the period highlights the difficulties women had in securing academic positions and the relative absence of theoretical publications, it is interesting to draw attention both to the continuity and consistency of female production and to the early use of a style that would

become valued and associated with men: the tendency towards empirical work and the use of statistics to understand social phenomena (Grant; Stalp; Ward, 2002, p. 77).

Nonetheless, this chapter of women's work in the history of American sociology has been replaced by the idea that women were closer to reform movements and the construction of welfare policies than they were to pursuing scientific goals. It is true that what Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge-Brantley (2002) have called 'settlement sociology' developed in a tension between projects for social change and research, the latter characterized by strong normative aspects. It should be noted, however, that men also linked sociological research to reformist ideals, as was the case of both W.I. Thomas, who was directly influenced by Jane Addams and Hull-House, and George Herbert Mead, who believed in the importance of science for the improvement of social life (Deegan; Burger, 1981).

The path towards a disinterested sociology, radically distanced from reformist notions, only started to be emphasized at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Andrew Johnston (2014, p. 171), 'as the state called increasingly upon social research to stand above partisan politics and to use these new frontiers of knowledge to provide a semblance of order to the national and international disruptions of the age, objectivity became an increasingly necessary fiction'. Amid the tensions surrounding the outbreak of the First World War, the political engagement and critique produced in the settlements began to be viewed in a bad light. With the entry of the United States into the war, these women and the idea of practices and experiments in promoting social change became targets of criticism from the public, colleagues and the government due to their alleged pacifist and feminist radicalism. Gradually, they were no longer identified as sociologists by their colleagues, but primarily as social workers. In a time and place when sociology as a whole was geared towards solving practical problems and had little inclination for theoretical reflection, their contributions were erased from the annals of Sociology. Across the period of the two world wars, the engagement of early female sociologists was replaced by a scientistic model, especially one involving quantification logics. According

to Johnston: 'The point was to protect the field from radicals who might undermine the institutional status of academic sociologists in the eyes of the American public, radicals who might also lead the social sciences toward statist experiments like Bolshevism or fascism.' (Johnston, 2018, p. 110).

It becomes clear, therefore, that the two main criticisms used to justify the exclusion of the work of Chicago women from the sociological canon were mutually inconsistent. With its reformist aspect, the work of the women of Hull-House was an effort to produce a secularized version of the ideas of social reform shared by men too. In present-day critique, the notion of reformism is used to refer to religious and conservative movements, but the 'reformist' foundation of settlement sociology was linked to a progressive debate about American democracy that involved both men and women and was shared by most of the pragmatist tradition. In turn, the critique of the political engagement of early women sociologists reveals how assumptions of neutrality are marked by logics of power. The exclusion of pacifism and feminism guaranteed sociology a place among the sciences useful to the US State. William F. Ogburn, elected president of the American Sociological Society in 1929, went as far as to claim that 'sociology as a science is not interested in making the world a better place to live,' and 'it will be desirable to taboo ethics and values (except in choosing problems)' (quoted in Clark, 2013, p. 217). Thirty years earlier, this statement would not only have sounded surprising, but it would have excluded most men from the field of sociology (Johnston, 2014; Clark, 2013).

Although the male production linked to the University of Chicago shared many characteristics with the production of the women of Hull-House, sociological processes of disciplinarization and professionalization gradually became associated with the development of Social Theory, partially concealing the power mechanisms in question. If, in Turner's words (2009, p. 551), social theory now began to find a 'disciplinary home' in Sociology, this demanded theoretical writing of a specific kind: systematised and grounded in the history of canonical texts. Thus, while this helps explain why sociologists connected to the University of Chicago did not come to acquire the status of classic authors, it also highlights some

of the reasons why they were not excluded from the history of sociology – and to some extent from the sociological canon – as happened with the women linked to Hull-House.

As we mentioned earlier, the classification and organisation of formal theories of society gained momentum in the 1930s, especially after Talcott Parsons, laying the foundations for a project of internationalization of sociology based on US hegemony. The point here is not to reduce the history of sociology to such processes, but to highlight that the construction of this hegemony depended on the silencing of those voices that did not lend themselves to the construction of a 'scientific' sociology that combined the impulse towards the organised and hierarchical construction of concepts (of the kind Parsons, for example, took from his neo-Kantian colleagues) with the systematic revision of past theories (Turner, 2009). This culminated in a conception of theory as a deductive and conceptually precise general scheme, capable of presenting logical relationships between its analytic elements and the empirical facts to which the theory refers, constructed from a synthesis of the different theoretical systems classified earlier (Parsons, 2010; Holmwood, 1996).

From the perspective of empirical research, the relatively loose character of the methods and techniques adopted in Chicago's research, or even those advocated by a Harriet Martineau or an Émile Durkheim, become more aggressively scientistic with the development of Paul Lazarsfeld's 'instrumental positivism'[4] between the 1930s and 1960s.

As is well known, the internationalization of sociology in the post-war period owed much not only to US sociology but to the US government, large

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[4] It 'is instrumental insofar as it confines social research to only such questions as the limitation of current research instruments allow, and it is positivist insofar as this self-imposed constraint is indicative of a determination on the part of sociologists to submit to rigours comparable to those they attribute to natural sciences (Bryant, 1985, p. 133). In this sense, unlike Auguste Comte's brand of positivism, fully compatible with theoretical and philosophical assumptions, Lazarsfeld's kind was closer to the logical empiricism of the Vienna Circle, making theoretical work especially innocuous for empirical research. Nevertheless, Parsons' conception of theory is not incompatible with the instrumental positivist principle in which a quantitative social science provides the instruments necessary for the application of a natural science model to Sociology (Hamlin, 2011).

foundations like Ford and Rockefeller, and international organisations such as UNESCO (Drouard, 1989). Motivated in part by the desire to provide an alternative to communism (Turner, 2009), these organisations made scholarships available to students and teachers and funded new or existing research and institutions worldwide, helping to spread a universalist-tinged conception of sociology that largely conceived sociological theory in Parsonian terms and empirical research in Lazasfeldian terms (Hamlin, 2011).[5]

What is at stake is not just the production of knowledge, but its circulation and reception, which cannot be dissociated from broader cultural processes. The project of internationalization of sociology that replaced the development of national sociologies after the Second World War was especially important because it helped reconfigure the very definition of the discipline and the debates considered relevant, now restricted to 'social theories, the development of a culture of professionalization and an affirmation of universalization of its perspectives and practices' (Patel, 2010, p. 3). This hegemony began to be questioned with the emergence of the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s across much of the world, reconfiguring post-war cultural assumptions. Among these, the most influential were the questioning of the canon (Wallerstein, 2007) and the universality of the US conception of sociology. The reconstitution of Marxist, feminist and environmentalist approaches, as well as new interventions in identity theories, led to a radical questioning of the relations between European and US social theory and the ruling elites. By the end of the 1980s, therefore, social theory had incorporated a multiplicity of perspectives with no consensus about the definition of social theory (Patel, 2010).

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[5] In Brazil, for instance, Florestan Fernandes and Roger Bastide were funded by UNESCO in the 1940s to develop their research on race relations. Organizations such as the Ford Foundation and USAID were also instrumental in the establishment of Brazil's postgraduate programs, such as the Master's Course in Anthropology at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro and the Integrated Postgraduate Program in Economics and Sociology (PIMES) in Pernambuco. As Heraldo Souto-Maior's research shows, the justification for PIMES's creation provided in the fundraising project submitted to the Northeast Development Office (SUDENE), USAID and the Ford Foundation was based around the creation of applied research laboratories. These would address the "insufficient attention given to concrete problems of Brazilian reality, the absence of systematic empirical studies of this reality, and the persistence of ideological-dogmatic orientations" (Souto-Maior, 2005, p. 28).

When we turn to consider sociology's external boundaries, the issue becomes even more complex. Approaches such as cultural studies, postcolonial studies and gender studies have placed under suspicion a discipline whose main authors are members of a club largely restricted to dead white men from the Global North. By questioning sociology's eurocentrism and androcentrism, social theory itself has become the target of a reconfiguration that calls into question sociology's very relevance and identity. The search for a general theory based on a conception of the classics inspired by the ancient humanities is eschewed by the 'new humanities'[6] in favour of a 'decolonized' and 'post-theoretical' world.[7] Pushed to its limits, however, the implosion of disciplinary boundaries, the emphasis on the inclusion of marginalised or silenced voices and the refusal of grand historical narratives can generate a conception of social theory ample enough to include in the same register intellectuals as diverse

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[6] The concept of 'new humanities' has been used in reference 'not to a particular area of knowledge, but as the human dimension of all knowledge' (Miller; Spellmeyer, 2015, p. xxiii). It also corresponds to what Caillé and Vandenberghe (2021, p. 19) define, somewhat dismissively, as 'Studies': 'a heap of anti-disciplinary investigations, such as Cultural Studies, Media & Communication Studies, Governmentality, Women & Gender, Subaltern, Postcolonial, Critical Whiteness etc., which specialise in (a)systematic inquiry involving the power/discourse connection. [...] the *Studies* scrutinize and criticize discourses, texts, knowledges, representations, epistemes and ideologies, unveiling structures of political, patriarchal, and racial domination, among others, which are consciously or unconsciously sustained, reflected or reinforced by those discourses'.

[7] Although the decolonial project involves a rather heterogeneous array of methodological approaches, normative concerns and political projects, two main elements can be emphasised: it takes colonialism, empire and racism as its object; and it seeks to establish alternative ways of thinking about the world and political praxis, based on the ideas of plurality, positionality and the impact that the inclusion of 'difference' can have on knowledge (Bhambra *et al.*, 2018). But whereas the concept of decoloniality has been widely incorporated by sociology, the concept of post-theory seems to have been more generally used by the 'new humanities' in favour of eclecticism and in opposition to a conception of theory based on grand narratives and as an end in itself (Valente, 2021). The idea of post-theory, though it cannot be understood as a straightforward opposition to theory, emphasizes theorization as a process of 'mutual contamination between theory and empiria' (Laclau, 1999, p. xii), takes into account the philosophical critique of some of the main concepts of the modern philosophical canon (subject, identity, truth and so on), and assumes a more pragmatic orientation towards the problems and particularities of 'real life' (Turnbull, 2003).

as Nina Simone, Mia Couto and Raewyn Connell.[8] It is in this sense that discussions about the relevance of the sociological canon, including the classical canon, have acquired new contours.

Past and recent debates concerning the idea of the classic and its correlates

As the last of the social sciences to become institutionalized, sociology relied on a plethora of reflections on society produced by philosophers, economists, historians, psychologists, anthropologists and social reformers (Collins, 2009), along with the construction of metaphors and analogies related to the contents of other established sciences, especially biology. Faced with the absence of an exclusive class of phenomena, sociology's object and methods needed to be carefully constructed to justify its existence, often in opposition to the other social and human sciences. As we have seen, this construction involved a lengthy process of selection – that is, the erasure, forgetting, denial and emphasis – of what was already being produced by social thought and theory in the quest for a properly sociological theory. After all, 'social thought' and 'social theory' are broader than 'sociological theory.'[9] Social theory, both the term and its object, precedes sociology,

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[8] See, for example, the webpage devoted to the thinkers of 'Global Social Theory' in Gurminder Bhambra's project for decolonising the university: https://globalsocialtheory.org/category/thinkers/

[9] The difference between social thought and social theory concerns the degree of systematization and formalization of reflections on society. In broad terms, while social theory tends to be associated with science-driven forms of abstraction, social thought may include 'pre-scientific' reflections, common sense and, occasionally, be linked to social philosophy. This distinction is not absolute, however, and depends on the national tradition in question. Thus, while authors such as Julian Go (2016, p. 1) define social theory as "the abstract form of social science research" – a definition associated with British and US traditions – in Germany social theory is an activity routinely developed by philosophers (we can just think of the entire critical theory tradition, for example). In France, the idea of social theory as a special kind of activity in the social sciences makes little sense since theoretical activity is not conceived to be separate from empirical research. The conception of social theory as an interdisciplinary area of concern to the social sciences as a whole (including their philosophical assumptions) was popularised in the 1970s by Anthony Giddens (1971), who further established a distinction between social theory and sociological theory – the latter a particular type of social theory pertaining to modern, capitalist or industrial societies.

has been developed within and beyond the discipline, and only found a 'disciplinary home' in sociology in the early decades of the twentieth century (Turner, 2009, p. 551), along with processes of professionalisation, institutionalisation, internationalisation and canonisation. Much of what was produced as social thought and social theory never became part of sociology, only what could be incorporated as part of a political project of disciplinary institutionalization that occurred within national institutions of higher education, professional associations and national and international specialized journals (Heilbron, 2013).

What we today conceive as 'the classics of sociology,' particularly the works of the so-called 'founding fathers' (Marx, Durkheim and Weber), were only definitively established as such in the 1970s (Giddens, 1995). In this sense, this is a very recent foundation myth, which, as mentioned before, was gestated in the 1930s with the publication of *The Structure of Social Action* by Parsons, regarded by many as the 'inventor' of the sociological canon (Wallerstein, 2007; Calhoun, 2007; Connell, 1997; Giddens, 1995). But if the canon for Parsons was Durkheim, Weber, Pareto and Marshall, it was the introduction and dissemination of Marxist thought in the 1960s that helped replace the latter two authors with Marx himself.

The process of 'denaturalization' of the classics has direct implications for our disciplinary field, therefore, and should be considered against the backdrop of an old quarrel in Sociology that has acquired new contours in recent years. A review of the literature directly addressing this question allows us to identify five typical-ideal positions with numerous nuances that tend towards one or other pole of the debate: 1) the positivist rejection of the classics, 2) the structuralist rejection of the classics, 3) the political rejection of the classics and/or the canon, 4) the defence of the classics in a restricted canon, and 5) the defence of the classics in an expanded canon.

The first of these positions, the 'positivist rejection of the classics,' aims to bring sociology closer to the natural sciences, conceiving its development in terms of knowledge accumulation. Among the most notable exponents of this position are Robert Merton (1968), whose work engendered a

polemic concerning the importance of history for sociology, and Jonathan Turner, with his post-positivist proposal of an analytical sociology (1992). The construction of a 'structuralist rejection of the classics' (see How, 2016, p. 11) was based on authors diametrically opposed to positivism, like Roland Barthes (1977) and Michel Foucault (1969) who placed the idea of authorship under suspicion.

Still among those positions suggesting that sociology would be better off without reference to the classics, we recently find what can be called the 'political rejection of the classics' or, more precisely, a 'political rejection of the canon.' Although adherence to such a position may take diverse forms and justifications, its most exemplary formulation came from the pen of Raewyn Connell (1997, 2019), who not only undertook a critical and creative reading of canonized authors, revealing the connections between construction of the canon and the colonial enterprise (1997), but also argued that sociology would be better off without any canon (2019). While Connell's argument looks towards the construction of a more polyphonic sociology, which does not presuppose condemning the so-called classics to silence, she is often considered the spokesperson for various movements advocating the complete implosion of the canon, invalidating the reading and even the teaching of the texts of these 'dead white men.'

At the other end of the spectrum are those who extol the sociological relevance of authors from the past. Here we can identify at least two typical ideal positions. At one extreme, we encounter something like a 'defence of the classics in a restricted canon' – that is, the idea that the classics should be restricted to a small number of already established authors by virtue of their central role in conferring identity and disciplinary unity to sociology. Arguments of this kind are found exemplified among authors such as Talcott Parsons (1937), Jeffrey Alexander (1987) and Anthony Giddens (1971). Interestingly enough, many of the movements that challenge the Eurocentric and androcentric character of sociology also end up drawing on the centrality of the classics, the canon, or occasionally the founders in order to justify their confrontation of hegemonic theories and practices

in sociology. This position can be termed a 'defence of the classics in an expanded canon' (e.g., Adams; Sydie, 2001; Ritzer; Stepnisky, 2011; Outhwaite 2017).

Lastly, in discussions concerning the recuperation of texts and authors erased by the construction of an overly restrictive collective memory, the question of the past is posed in different terms. What is at stake here is not the refutation of concepts such as founder, classic or canon, but the questioning of who or what merits these titles. In this text we focus our attention on those works that denounce the overly restrictive character of this select group of authors and texts to which sociology usually attributes a privileged status. We start from the assumption that the existence of a group that enjoys these prerogatives continues to play an important role in sociology, but we also believe in the need for a critical review of the practices and theoretical horizons of the honorary members of this club.

So far, we have used expressions such as classic, canon, pioneer and founder somewhat loosely and interchangeably, reflecting how they are normally used in everyday academic life and in texts dedicated to the topic (see Baehr, 2016, p. 1; How, 2016, p. 232). However, any consideration of the place to be accorded to the forgotten contributions of early women sociologists requires us to specify the different meanings of these expressions.

This aim in mind, we can turn to the works of Alan How (2016) and Peter Baehr (2016), whose recent critical analyses of this topic constitute an interesting starting point for our argument. Although they pursue different paths, they share a preference for 'classic' over 'canon' and defend the existence and importance of 'classicality,' an inherent quality of certain works that makes them central to sociology. According to How (2016), one of the problems with conflating the idea of classic and the idea of canon is precisely the subsumption of the former into the latter. For the author, the term canon implies the intentional selection of a certain number of texts and authors, something that always supposes an ideological and institutional dimension, whereas the classics are invested with intrinsic characteristics that constitute their exceptionality. Mixing the two registers implies that the

notion of classicality is an arbitrary construction, thus depriving classical works of their inherent value. A purely internalist view of the classics, on the other hand, entails the equally mistaken view that they become canonical exclusively by their own virtues, removing the social and political dimensions implied in the very definition of a classic (How, 2016, p. 232-4). According to the author, these are distinct concepts that need to be treated as such: while a canon presupposes a collectivity and can be determined with precision – by institutional decree, by the proposition of authors in a collection, by the establishment of a curriculum, and so on – a classic is always assessed in terms of its singularity and has something indeterminate about it. Its value demands a much longer process of appreciation of the internal quality of the work by a community.

While How's argument helps us differentiate the terms in question and draw attention to the impossibility establishing a classic by decree, it fails to establish an important connection between canonicity and classicality. By defining classicality as something attributed in a rather indeterminate way, based on the critical reception of a community over many decades – about three generations, according to Collins (1997) – How fails to consider the conditions under which a work may be debated. In other words, he fails to consider that in order for its *internal* value to be recognised, it must first have a chance of being read and, secondly, it must find an audience capable of perceiving its virtues. The work must be understood. But even if there are no necessary relations between canonicity and classicality, a work can never become a classic if it is excluded from the canon.

While in How's work we find an already carefully nuanced discussion of the need to clarify the concepts in this debate, Peter Baehr's book, originally published in 2002 with a new edition in 2016, presents a discussion that is simultaneously broader and narrower. Broader because it adds the concept of 'founder' to those of 'classic' and 'canon.' Narrower because it performs a theoretical and etymological analysis that often lends a literal sense to a metaphorical jargon that is shared by a community and has little to do with its original meaning (Outhwaite, 2016). As a consequence, Baehr reasons,

only the notion of classic is worthy of serious consideration in sociology. While his reconstruction helps us render the terms and meanings of the debate more precise, we believe that a critical dialogue with his analyses can allow us to rehabilitate these concepts and reconfigure sociology's relations to its past as a precondition for establishing new parameters for its future, particularly regarding the presence of women in social theory.

Like How and several other authors (Susen; Turner, 2021; Alexander, 1987; O'Neill; Turner, 2001; Walby, 2021; Joas; Knöbl, 2017; Lukes, 2021), Baehr situates himself among those defending the existence of a 'classicality,' advocating that sociology continue to maintain an open dialogue with its classics. According to Baehr, one of the most important characteristics of the term 'classic' is that it refers to texts, not authors, insofar as it is this material legacy that can transform into something like the intellectual property of a community. Hence a classic must be a work whose reading is likely to inspire new works, not just because of the answers it provides, but also because of the questions it raises. Along the same lines, Baehr emphasizes that a classic text does not acquire this status simply by decree: it is a collective, open and long-term process.

Although he admits the importance of certain virtues intrinsic to the text, Baehr is highly attentive to the fact that the recognition of these characteristics always implies a work of hermeneutics. In order for a text to be taken as the focus of interpretative efforts, there must be a cultural resonance – that is, a cultural environment disposed to read it and be provoked by its words, which also guarantees the work's transmission to subsequent generations. It is through this process that texts acquiring the status of classics become part of the theoretical fabric of different generations across different territories, making the understanding of any subsequent work difficult without the reader sharing these references.

Some important points emerge from Baehr's argument concerning the classics. Although the discovery of the works of pioneering women is clearly insufficient by itself to turn them into classics, it is also evident that our tradition of social theory was developed in such a way that these works never

stood a chance of being included. The absence of a favourable environment – including within sociology itself – undermined the possibility of cultural resonance, preventing its transmission and critical reception. On the other hand, this concept of cultural resonance indicates that some of the works of pioneering women in sociology may acquire the status of classics given that their recovery has been mediated by a feminist engagement in academia that successfully works beyond the boundaries of areas such as gender studies.

This, however, is not an automatic process. Here we are faced with a complex issue concerning the justification of the importance of discovering the work of women who researched and wrote in sociology's early days. In other words, the pioneering character of a work is not enough to grant it the title of classic. Baehr presents a sophisticated discussion that allows us to see why the concept of founder – commonplace in our sociological vocabulary – is not useful for interpreting, defending or critiquing texts and authors belonging to the sociological tradition. Introductory courses and sociological textbooks often claim that Marx, Durkheim and Weber are the founding fathers of sociology and, for this reason, need to be studied. This same argument may be used to *not* study them: if they are only founders, their interest is merely historical. At the same time, if we discover women who were instrumental in founding sociology, why not study them?

One of the ways in which Baehr deals with this problem is to present two senses in which the concept of founder can be used: founder of a discourse and founder of an institution. The latter is easy to verify historically and can be attributed to specific people or institutions. Such is the case of the people mentioned above, when we referred to the establishment of the Chicago School, people like Albion Small. Still, Baehr argues, why should we deem it important for their work to be known by the entire sociological community? What can we learn from it? The former sense of 'founder' is, however, more problematic because a 'discourse' cannot be considered the product of an action but of an interaction. Hence, it cannot be founded. In this sense, Baehr also disallows any rapprochement between a classic and a 'discourse founder.'

Baehr also argues that the idea of founder has been widely mobilized in the field of the social sciences due to the supposed authority it confers: this, however, is the remnant of a religious logic in which the legitimacy of foundation comes from the existence of a powerful or exemplary ancestor who inaugurates a particular lineage. We could extend Baehr's argument by noting a conflation often made between founding a discipline (inaugurating, initiating) and establishing the fundaments of a theory or a practice (establishing its bases).

For this reason, Baehr is critical of attempts made by authors such as Deegan, who justifies her defence of the work of pioneering women (often called 'founding sisters' or 'founding mothers') on ideological grounds rather than on the explanatory value of their production. What his critique seems to miss is the ethical dimension implied in political processes that lead to epistemic injustice[10] and its many consequences, such as women's lack of access to positions that would allow more substantive theoretical developments or, more generally, their work's right to critical success. Although we follow Baehr in his diagnosis of the limited and even problematic nature of the idea of founder, we diverge by arguing for the importance of a critical historicization of the discipline.

Highlighting the idea of pioneering female figures can invite a deeper sociologically inquiry into the collective/social founding processes, bringing the historical perspective to the centre of the debate. Likewise, mobilising a historical perspective within the theoretical discussion allows us to think about the contingencies and biases that ended up causing certain authors to be read, and therefore appreciated, and others not. By refusing the heuristic value of the category of founder, Baehr ends up downplaying the importance of the historical dimension in the creation of sociology and the process of establishing the classic authors.

Something similar happens with the idea of the canon. Baehr approaches it in a narrow sense, as analogous to the theological and, by extension, the

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[10] For a discussion of how the concept of epistemic injustice has been used to justify the inclusion of more women in social theory, see Hamlin and Weiss (2021).

literary canon: a set of 'blessed' and sacralised texts that have the power to fix who should, can, or deserves to be read. By denying the importance of the notion of a canon, the author ends up attributing a minor importance to the definition of curricula, a factor that, in our view, plays a central role in the socialization of both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and has important consequences for research also. In other words, denouncing the religious character of the analogy sweeps the problem under the carpet rather than solving it since it fails to account for the relationships between the establishment of the canon and the institution of a classic. This point is particularly important when it comes to addressing the question that concerns us here, namely the non-existent or precarious participation of women in the sociological canon and its implications for the field of social theory. By refusing the pertinence of such a category, Baehr closes the door to the political and epistemic potential of such questioning, decreeing instead that, as "part of a wider dispute over the academic curriculum," the idea of the canon "has immersed itself in a polemic from which it can hardly be rescued" (Baehr, 2016, p. 2).

As we have already indicated, although both How and Baehr differentiate classic texts from canonical texts, we argue that there is a close connection between the two. Treating the discussion about the canon as something minor and subject to ethical and political contingencies ends up reifying the process by which a text attains a classical status – even if the two authors maintain otherwise. It also excises the ethical dimension from theoretical debates and renders the idea of situated knowledge meaningless. Ultimately, even if the presence of a text in the canon does not guarantee its classicality, its absence amounts to its erasure. While the canon is contingent and transient, it also operates as an invitation for other questions to be formulated, thus affecting the criteria used to determine classicality.

For the canon to attain this function, however, we need to move away from the theological-literary metaphor commonly used in sociology, whether by those who wish to see its implosion, or by those seeking to radically modify it, or by those keen to preserve its more or less traditional features.

Our final movement is not to propose a new canon with new texts. What we advocate here is to think about the canon[11] in terms of a musical metaphor that will allow us to consider how the introduction of new voices produces not a cacophony (Baehr, 2016, p. 143) but a polyphony.

Towards a more polyphonic canon

The concept of polyphony (or a plurality of voices) has been used as a metaphor in literature (Bakhtin), cultural studies (Edward Said) and postcolonial studies (Raewyn Connell). Connell (2021), in particular, seems to use this metaphor to contest the centrality of the canon in the social sciences. What she seems to forget, though, is that, in music, the canon is one of the main forms of polyphony, along with the fugue.

In Western music, polyphony refers to the simultaneous presence of two or more voices, sometimes called 'subject' and 'counter-subject,' which operate in contrasting fashion. Without contrast, which depends on the relative clarity of each voice and on their equilibrium, there is no polyphony. In fact, when two voices overlap, one tends to become dominant and the other becomes an accompaniment, causing an 'imbalance' to emerge between the two. The solution to this imbalance is to alternate the main theme or melody from one voice to the other, giving each an equal importance (Hamlin, 2016). The musical technique of combining two or more voices in contrasting ways is called counterpoint. In Said's (1993) 'translation' of this concept into more literary terms, counterpoint is the combination of an 'argument' and a 'counter-argument' by a subject and a countersubject.

The contrast that characterizes polyphony does not imply the complete independence of the voices participating in the counterpoint, therefore, neither is it a form of antagonism. The different voices need to be 'tuned' in the harmonic dimension, which relates to the possibilities for combining these voices according to certain rules (euphony and variety, consonance

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[11] In his etymological reconstruction of the word 'canon,' How (2016, p. 248) identifies nine distinct meanings, all of which allude to the idea of certainty or precision. There is, however, no mention of the canon in its musical sense.

and dissonance, et cetera) that apply to a specific musical tradition (Groot, 2010). But while polyphony is not a form of antagonism, neither is it equivalent to something 'harmonious': dissonance is an important element in music, creating a sense of strangeness, tension or conflict that requires some kind of subsequent 'resolution.'

Polyphonic music can vary in terms of its musical form or structure. If all voices use the same melodic profiles, the outcome is homogeneous polyphony; if each of the voices uses a different melodic profile, then the result is heterogeneous polyphony (Groot, 2009). The pinnacle of homogeneous polyphony is the musical canon, something that involves the overlapping and unfolding of the same melody by different voices. In this sense, the canon is a form of imitation, but imitation is not the same as the reproduction of the identical. Some canons may involve only the input of the different voices at different tempos (a well-known example is the children's song Frère Jacques). Variation still exists because the voices may begin from different notes, sing at different tempos, in different timbres, and so on, but this is a fairly simple form of imitation. Other types of canon are more complex, for example when one of the voices plays the melody in an inverted or mirrored way, with distinct intervals between the voices, distinct tempos and the like. The combinations are endless, but the point to be emphasized here is that they are neither arbitrary nor devoid of logic. On the contrary, they are governed by rules that, like a grammar, allow for creativity and inventiveness. These rules (of counterpoint and harmony) are what ensures that polyphony does not turn into mere cacophony, a mishmash of sounds that are not so much dissonant as discordant, inhibiting the clarity of the distinct voices and, in this sense, any contrast and dialogue.

The fugue is another important form of polyphony. Unlike the canon, where the main theme is accompanied by itself (in imitation), the fugue introduces distinct themes to accompany the main theme. To ensure equal importance among the voices, the main theme is presented by all voices at different times – the name 'fugue' (Latin *fuga*, flee) derives from the fact that the theme 'escapes' from one voice to another (or from a subject to a countersubject). Most of the

time, fugues also feature contrasting themes that recur throughout the work, the so-called counter-themes. Even though the fugue presents greater contrast between voices (greater thematic diversity) than the canon, it is also governed by a common language regarding the rules of counterpoint.

Edward Said was a master of the use of polyphonic metaphors in his works in literary criticism and cultural criticism. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), for instance, he proposes a contrapuntal reading of certain works pertaining to the Western literary canon in order to account for the complex and complementary relations between metropolis and colony. According to Said (1993, p. 78), we undertake a counterpoint reading when 'we read from an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for example, that a sugar cane plantation [in the Caribbean] is perceived as important for the maintenance of a particular way of life in England.' In more concrete terms, contrapuntal reading involves considering the simultaneity of themes, such as the lifestyle represented in the ritual of putting sugar in a cup of tea in England (the theme) and life on a sugar cane plantation in a Caribbean island (the counterpoint) in order to reveal what the canonical text both hides and presupposes.

By dislocating the metaphor of polyphony from literature to the social sciences, both social theory and sociological theory can be said to involve a plurality of voices. The difference is that while social theory presents a greater variety of themes and counter-themes, suggesting a fugue-like structure, sociological theory has assumed a canonical form, in the sense of something more homogeneous and, to a large extent, imitative. The canonical classics in particular, by performing a number of disciplinary functions, have set the standards and limits of what counts as sociology, including the themes considered central to the emergence of (Western) modernity: industrialization (economic dimension), rationalization (epistemological dimension), ideologization (political dimension), bureaucratization (organizational dimension), individualization (cultural dimension), and emancipation (philosophical dimension) (Susen, 2020, p. 99). It seems to us that the problem is not necessarily the limited number of themes that

the different voices of the classical sociological canon emphasize – although they can and should be expanded by social theory – but their Eurocentric and androcentric horizon.

It is important to consider that the addition or subtraction of voices to the classical sociological canon can change its overall configuration: just as the introduction of Simmel to the trio of Marx-Weber-Durkheim 'radically reconfigures the place of culture' (Outhwaite, 2016, p. 241), so too the introduction of female authors concerned with the 'condition of women' can reconfigure many issues, especially, though not exclusively, those tied to the androcentric bias of classic works. In particular, the counterpoint between erased female voices and canonized male voices can reveal alternative and contrasting perspectives of the same phenomenon. Consider the inclusion of two female authors, chosen somewhat randomly from our classroom experiences: Flora Tristán and Marianne Weber.

The dialogue between Flora Tristán, on one hand, and Marx and Engels, on the other, not only helps bring into focus the history of socialist thought and the labour movement, it can also be used to question the very definitions of labour and the working class (Campos 2021). Likewise, it can help problematize the idea of human emancipation, which, even in works like *Capital*, is taken as the exclusive initiative and responsibility of working-class men (Rubel, 2005).

For her part, the introduction of Marianne Weber as a counterpoint to Durkheim, Max Weber or Simmel allows us to understand some of the theoretical effects of the relative gender blindness of these authors. We can begin with Durkheim. While he perceived the conjugal family as one of the primary moral centres of the modern world (along with professional institutions), Marianne Weber argued that insofar as it does not guarantee 'the coexistence of liberties in life as a couple' (Mata, 2021, p. 70), marriage is nothing but an effect of the distortion of human life by patriarchy. Despite his diagnosis in *Suicide* (Durkheim, 2000) that marriage negatively affects male suicide rates and positively affects female rates (especially in the absence of divorce), Durkheim does not hesitate to condemn divorce and

the 'moral individualism' that underlies its advocacy by Marianne Weber. On one hand, this suggests a fundamentally masculine conception of moral collectivism (and thus of the social domain itself); on the other, it reveals the extent to which Durkheim's normative positions are not supported by a strictly sociological or rational diagnosis, but instead echo values that should be taken as pathological in the context of any complex and plural society.

In counterpoint to Max Weber (1982), who considers love and eroticism to be one of the last bastions of resistance to the rationalization and disenchantment of the world, Marianne Weber introduces an important tension by demonstrating how religious puritanism also contributed to the rationalization of marriage, sexuality and eroticism, softening some traces of the "patriarchal arbitrariness that goes in the opposite direction to the ethical content" of the marital bond (Weber, 2011a, p. 117). In this sense, this puritanism also made these traces compatible with the rationality of modern capitalism (Isaakson, 2020).

Read in counterpoint to Simmel, Marianne Weber's work allows us to relativize his tragic and bleak view of culture based on two distinct but interconnected arguments. Firstly, as explained by Lengermann and Niebrugge (2007, p. 211), Simmel's philosophical despair, grounded in a conception of money as something purely alienating, is denounced by Marianne Weber as a luxury of those who need not worry about it. In her view, for those to whom financial independence is denied, money is both a practical matter and a prerequisite for free moral action. Secondly, instead of a metaphysics of the sexes that opposes men and women as distinct and incommensurable beings, Marianne Weber avoids the Simmelian aporias concerning the possibility of a common humanity. For her, 'the concept and the idea of woman already contain the synthesis between her specific determination and destiny and those universal-humanities' (Weber, 2011b, p. 164). Even though she did not provide a precise formulation for this problem, she anticipates a contemporary argument about the relations between equality and difference, while avoiding a metaphysics that ends up denying the social and cultural dimension of human beings (particularly of women).

Concluding remarks

In suggesting the canon as a musical metaphor, our aim is to mobilize a theoretical construct that allows the creation of a space and, above all, a more polyphonic way of doing sociology that, while reiterating the importance and specificity of sociological practice, enables a more plural and less biased sociology. By proposing an expansion of the voices that participate in the discipline's canon, the idea is to ensure the contrast between different voices through the construction of counterarguments or distinct perspectives on the same phenomenon. As we have tried to show through our examples, it is not a matter of succumbing to a collecting impulse aimed at the uncritical addition of forgotten or obscure authors, but rather of including those voices that allow us to achieve a historical and systematic reconstruction of sociological theory. From a historical viewpoint, this presupposes understanding the social context that enabled the emergence of specific theoretical paradigms, offering a properly sociological treatment to the production of theories. From a systematic viewpoint, it implies the establishment of a dialogue between contrasting voices in order to show the limits and possibilities of the various theories. However, for these dialogues to be fruitful, these voices need to be minimally in tune, whether in terms of the sociological canon, with the introduction of divergent interpretations of similar phenomena, or in terms of social theory, with the introduction of new themes, questions and perspectives into sociological debates.

Cynthia Lins Hamlin holds a PhD in Political and Social Thought (Sociology) from the University of Sussex (UK) and is a professor at the Federal University of Pernambuco.
✉ cynthiahamlin@hotmail.com

Raquel Andrade Weiss holds a PhD in Philosophy from USP-FAPESP and is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and in the Graduate Program in Sociology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.
✉ weiss.raquel@gmail.com

Simone Magalhães Brito holds a PhD in Sociology from Lancaster University (United Kingdom) and is an associate professor (III) in the Department of Social Sciences and Graduate Studies in Sociology at the Federal University of Paraíba.
✉ simonebritto@hotmail.com

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