FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory, Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Mariella Nocenzi
Università degli Studi di Roma "Sapienza"

Silvia Fornari
Università degli Studi di Perugia

Special Issue Intersectionality

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory, Tourism, Technology

Guest editors

Mariella Nocenzi
Università degli Studi di Roma "Sapienza"

Silvia Fornari
Università degli Studi di Perugia

Summary

3T SECTION - 3T READINGS

INTERVIEW

Articles

In evaluating the proposed works, the journal follows a peer review procedure. The articles are proposed for evaluation by two anonymous referees, once removed any element that could identify the author. Propose an article. The journal uses a submission system (open journal) to manage new proposals on the site. www.serena.unina.it/index.php/fuoriluogo

Rights and permissions. For each contribution accepted for publication on "Fuori Luogo", the authors must return to the editorial staff a letter of authorization, completed and signed. Failure to return the letter affects the publication of the article.

The policies on the reuse of articles can be consulted at www.serena.unina.it/index.php/fuoriluogo

Fuori Luogo is one of the open access journals published under the SHARE Interuniversity Convention. Fuori Luogo is included in the ANVUR list of scientific journals for Area 14, Political and Social Sciences (since 2016), in Area 8, Civil Engineering and Architecture (since 2019), Area 11, History, philosophy, pedagogy and psychology (since 2019). It is classified in Class A in 14/C1, Sociology (since 2019), 14/C2, Social Policy and Social Work (since 2019), 14/C3, General and Applied Sociology (since 2017), and 14/D1, Methodology of Social Research (since 2017).

Fuori Luogo is indexed in: DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals - ACNP Catalogue code n. PT03461557 - Index Copernicus International ID 67296.

The journal is part of CRIS Coordinamento Riviste Italiane di Sociologia.

Fuori Luogo is included in the LOCKSS (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) network of the Public Knowledge Project (PKP PLN)

INTERVIEW

Silvia Fornari, Mariella Nocenzi[1]
Interview with Patricia Hill Collins

Patricia Hill Collins is Distinguished University Professor of Sociology Emerita at the University of Maryland College Park. She is specializing in race, class, gender, and social inequality within the African American community. Her studies opened new questions about the reconceptualization of the ideas of race, class, gender, sexuality and nationalism as interlocking systems of oppression. Thanks to her publications with Sirma Bilge, she discusses the intertwined nature of these social categorizations, their complex web of discrimination and disadvantage in the global society, adopting intersectionality as a critical theory of society.

Can you describe your research path? Where does it start, how does it develop and how is it accepted by the academic community and the social movements for human rights and global social protest?

Learning how to read started me on my research path and learning how to read critically has kept me on it. Two public institutions in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were vital in shaping my intellectual journey. When I was about five years old, my mother took me to a small, local branch of the public library in Philadelphia and helped me sign up for a library card. To get a card of my own, I needed to know how to write my name. I remember signing my name, or more accurately, printing it, and hoping that I wouldn't make a mistake. She said, "with this card, you can go anywhere." My mother's advice that day has stayed with me since. What power I found in literacy -- reading opened up the world for me. Through books, I could have imaginary conversations with people long dead or who I could never expect to meet. My public school education, especially at the Philadelphia High School for Girls, also helped me develop the craft of literacy. My teachers were uninterested in cultivating neither my critical thinking skills (although they provided plenty of ideas that merited criticism), nor my imagination about a bigger world than the one that awaited me. But they did a great job of granting me access to the specialized langue and vocabulary hegemonic, Western knowledge. Together, these two public institutions of one of the oldest public library systems in the US and one of the oldest public high schools for girls started me on my research path. But I had to do the work.

What kept me on the path was the knowledge that there were so many people in the world, many of them in my own neighbourhood, who were stuck. They had no actual or symbolic library card that could serve as a key to the wider world. Many had left school because they had to work. Others left because it was not clear what good their education could serve. I was the one who got to go to school. And I vowed that I would never forget the ones who were denied the chances that were afforded to me. As an individual, my social mobility was inflected through economic class and geography. I had to leave home in order to get an education. But my individual experiences also signal a collective process, one where many people need to leave home for a variety of reasons. Such mobility is simultaneously literal and existential - the combination of specific sociological phenomena of leaving home and the philosophical meaning of having to create a new way of being from the memories of old and the challenges of new. Mobility is tangible - the legions of people who are running for their lives from poverty and violence, or the women who flee domestic violence, taking their children with them, or the LGBTQ teenagers who leave home because they see no future for their authentic selves if they stay. But arriving in a new place promises neither recognition nor acceptance. Early in my career, I wrote about these in-between spaces as being in "outsider within" locations, places where individuals ostensibly belong within two settings, but where they never fully belong to either. They see the world differently from a place is neither

1   Mariella Nocenzi, University of Rome, mariella.nocenzi@uniroma.it, ORCID: 0000-0002-2256-4101; Silvia Fornari, University of Perugia, silvia.fornari@unipg.it, ORCID: 0000-0002-7823-4881.

the blindness of a bona fide insider nor the ignorance of what goes on in other groups because they stand outside. In one of my early articles, "Learning from Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," analyzed how this issue shaped my sociological work. Working within these outsider-within spaces provides a backstory of my intellectual journey to embrace the power of critical literacy developed within these outsider within spaces. There was no place for me - I had to create one. This core existential question of staying on a research path that navigates multiple outsider-within locations is fundamental to my work on intersectionality. And critical literacy is the navigational tool that I have used to stay on that path.

I cannot speak to how and why my work has been accepted within academic communities as well as how far it continues to travel in a broader social context. That's an empirical question where I can only guess at the answers. But my sense is that people find ways to connect their own experiences to the issues in my work. Many recognize themselves in the work. I published *Black Feminist Thought* over three decades ago, yet people from different racial, gender, class, sexual, ethnic, and religious backgrounds find ways to read their experiences into and through that text. My story is a story of social mobility, of leaving home in search of opportunities, of finding some doors open but others staunchly shut when I arrived. This is an increasingly common experience in our desegregating, decolonizing world. I remain compelled to do the kind of intellectual work that matters to people. I write both to people who are struggling for a pathway to a world that is bigger than the one they have inherited. I also write to broader audiences on behalf of all those who have been denied books, libraries, schools, and the gift of critical literacy. I'm happy that my work has been so well-received, at least for now. I do not control whether or not it will be appreciated in my lifetime, but I do control the ability to keep going. Reading critically is thinking critically, regardless of the actual text that you are reading. Who knew that one library card could take me so far?

Reading your works, we have always appreciated your analysis, in a global perspective, of topics such as critical education, human rights, violence, global social protest, identity politics, and women of colour feminism in the United States, but also in some relevant case studies such as the Brazilian one. In the same way, we have carefully read your scientific rigour in proposing a definition of intersectionality as a critical theory of society. How much has your attention - which someone would call "militant" - for inequalities and protest movements contributed to this original proposal? If you agree with this adjective, what contribution can this make to science?

I don't adhere to strict divisions between knowledge and politics. For me all knowledge is political in some sense because it is grounded in a social world that is characterized by social inequality. And all politics requires creating ideas and systems of thought that either sustain social hierarchy or challenge it. Within this binary framework, the notion that we can build an impermeable wall between politics and science is a story that sustains the illusion of separation. On the side of politics, stand "militant" radicals whose emotions and passions overtake their reason; and on the other, dispassionate scientists who follow the "truth" no matter what the consequences may be. We all have a stake in relinquishing the binary of politics and science that no longer serves us. I work in the space of the sociology of knowledge precisely because it sees the recursive relationship between knowledge and power that takes special form for science and politics. Examining the relationship between then offers valuable clues as to how both can be better than they currently are. This is where the framework of intersectionality comes into play. It is very much about the interplay of knowledge and power relations and aims to intervene in both spheres because it sees the relationality of science and politics, as well as its own relationship to science and to politics. How can intersectionality study the social world, which is one of politics, while being embedded in it?

Throughout my career, I have approached the study of social problems and politics through the lens of social scientist. With its rigour of proposing hypotheses, testing them empirically, and

being willing to let go of cherished beliefs if the evidence points in a different direction, Western science brings a powerful set of tools that can be put to many different purposes. Nuclear energy can be used to build weapons that destroy the earth, or to harness energy that is far less damaging to people that burning coal and other fossil fuels. Confirmation bias is my enemy. To me, the practice of continuing to gather evidence for a point of view that you already hold to be true is bad science. Scientific racism was bad science, and as my work on eugenics suggests, we certainly have more than enough of that. Because I am a *social* scientist, I bring the tools of scientific reasoning to the social world, all the while trying to recognize the limitations of the tools of social science. Good science requires innovation, self-reflexivity, and working collaboratively with others, a rejection of the one great mind of an individual who has all the answers. I believe in data - in gathering evidence for one's point of view, not just believing something or someone because it's advanced by more powerful groups. None of this means that there is no space for passion, or that expressing emotions signals the inability to be rational. Critical race theory, Black feminist thought, and intersectionality, my areas of investigation and expertise, all challenge legitimated knowledge, and rely on social science to do so.

We all have partial perspectives, being in places that make some things patently clear and obscure others from our vision. Mine has been one of seeing and living inequalities as well as the ongoing protests, large and small, to contest those inequalities. To be politically committed to ethical ideals and deeply committed to science is not antithetical. What exactly is "militant" about work that aims for social justice? Or fairness? Or that aims to study social inequality? Or that diagnoses social problems with an eye toward solving them? What an impoverished social science we would have if we did not take the politics of the social world around us into account or if we failed to consider the ethical implications of our work.

In your opinion, how is sociology developing the theme of intersectionality at the international level?

I'm not sure how I would measure this either. Since 2015, the term "intersectionality" has been circulating rapidly within academia and has now spilled out into U.S. national politics in some forms that are unrecognizable to me, but in others that make me want to shout for joy. Beyond doing a keyword search with and across fields of study and the popular press, how would be know how people understand and use the idea of intersectionality? In the early 1990s, when the term intersectionality was gradually being taken up within academia, Margaret Andersen and I launched an undergraduate reader titled *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. Through updating the ten editions of anthology of readings every three years, we were able to trace the trajectory of how race, class, gender, sexuality ethnicity and nation as intellectual and political pillars of intersectionality were developing within academia. This process gave me a sense of how the field was developing in real time. Stated differently, editing an undergraduate reader was an excellent way of seeing how people applied the ideas of intersectionality to a variety of themes and social problems. By the tenth edition, published in 2016, we changed the title to *Race, Class and Gender: Intersections and Inequalities* to reflect the growing institutionalization of the term intersectionality itself.

By 2015, I realized that these informal measurements of intersectionality were inadequate to defining how intersectionality was developing. It was clear that intersectionality was gaining traction, but how and why? The growing authoritarianism in the US coupled with the growing popularity of the term intersectionality signaled the need to take this term seriously. During the period preceding the 2016 US Presidential election, ideas of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation were on full display. In 2015, I published an article titled "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas" and then began investing the definitional dilemmas that I analyzed in that article. With hindsight, I can see what a monumental task I set out for myself. It took me six years to write three different books that each emphasize varying aspects of intersectionality. These three books have different objectives, are written for distinctive audiences and use diverse methodologies. This trilogy of books constitute a three-legged stool for intersectionality as a form of

critical inquiry and praxis. *Intersectionality* surveys the history, main ideas and political uses of intersectionality (Collins and Bilge 2020 [2016]). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* examines intersectionality's intellectual architecture, specifically its epistemological and political dimensions (Collins 2019). *Lethal Intersections: Race, Gender and Violence* (Collins forthcoming 2023) investigates the methodological implications of how people do and might use intersectionality as a problem-solving tool. Collectively, this trilogy of books pivot on three core questions: first, what is intersectionality? Second, what kind of knowledge project is intersectionality? And third, how can we use intersectionality? Through these questions, the books focus on the content, theory and methodology of intersectionality respectively.

Through my research and travels, I am convinced that people in a global context are engaging intersectionality's questions, concerns, and dilemmas, even if they do not use the term intersectionality. While sociology has certainly informed my approach to intersectionality, I don't see the ideas of intersectionality as travelling internationally exclusively through the institutional structures of sociology. Just as intersectionality is interdisciplinary, its international footprint is similarly expansive. I can only speak to my personal efforts to engage international readers in the ideas of intersectionality. I am far more assertive in having my ideas translated into other languages. When I found myself travelling to Brazil and realized that I was the outlier because I did not speak Portuguese, I asked to have my books translated into Portuguese. In Brazil, I found a lively, creative, and substantive set of colleagues who were already engaged in the ideas of intersectionality. Since then, I have asked my publishers to have my books translated into other languages. I have come to see translation as far more important than a simple google translate program on my computer or on my cell phone (although those are powerful tools). The answer to this question lies less in how institutions can disseminate ideas and more in how easily people the ideas of intersectionality can be translated and shared. In this context, the internet is an immense public library.

In your 2009 American Sociology Association presidential address, you emphasized the community as a dynamic political construct, especially for the interconnections among race, sex, and gender. Do you think that community could be a pertinent description of the social life where no humans are increasingly active and independent of humans? What other social categorisations can be considered for an intersectional analysis of societies in the coming years?

In some ways, my 2009 article titled "The New Politics of Community" was a clarion call for sociology to claim and develop this crucial construct in the social world that was rapidly changing. We needed a language to analyze participatory democracy that did not valorize the individual to the detriment of the group. While I had no way knowing that, by 2016, there would be a precipitous turn to authoritarianism, with hindsight, I now see how the backlash against participatory democracy had been building throughout the Obama presidency. It became increasingly clear to everyone that racism had not disappeared and that a color-blind society was more imagined than real. I put the community project aside to concentrate on intersectionality, but the ideas of intersectionality, participatory democracy and community have long been intertwined in my thinking. A careful read of the intersectionality trilogy shows how I've continued to puzzle out the idea of community in those books, especially in chapter 5 of *IACST*, and more recently within *Lethal Intersections*. In that project, I examine forms of political organizing in response to violence, specifically, community organizing and coalition politics. I also survey how the "us versus them" beliefs of authoritarianism rest on conceptions of community.

I really appreciate this question because, now that I've finished intersectionality trilogy, I can revisit this construct of community. I'm returning the construct of community because I believe it is fundamental to politics. It's a fascinating sociological concept with immense political implications that remains theoretically neglected. Community is a powerful concept because it harnesses the power of emotion to political action. Community forms the basis of human social

organization - we all grow up in and live in communities of some sort - yet such communities are routinely treated as passive backdrops for social action rather than theaters of political action. The rise of authoritarian governments and their embrace of Far-Right ideologies shows the power of community for populism. The "us-them" thinking of ethnic nationalism, that takes form within white nationalist projects in the US, places the power of community as a political construct on full display. Authoritarian projects have realized the potential of harnessing the power of community for their own ideological ends, leaving a contentious individualized identity politics that is incapable of responding to this new threeat. But the same ideas of community can serve different ends. Intersectionality constitutes an analytical tool that ca be used for conceptualizing and building participatory democratic communities.

I see great potential within sociology to generate a useful analysis of connections between community that speak not just to intersectionality, but also to contemporary political challenges. I've been concerned with cultivating the ideas of intersectionality, of seeing how people are using the ideas, even if they are not using the term intersectionality at all. My sense is that intersectional sensibilities are far broader than meet the eye, mainly because we no longer live in self-contained communities with firm borders. Global warming and climate change is a stark reminder of the interconnectedness of the people on this one planet. The idea of one earth seemed fanciful then, the musings of "tree hugging" environmentalists or esoteric theoretical physicists. But now, as communications and travel have moved people and places in entirely new ways, we realize that there is nowhere to go in this interconnected world. A good deal of what used to be called science fiction, and that is now called speculative fiction deals with the dystopian future that faces us as we frantically build walls to keep the imagined terror at bay of seeing, talking to and loving one another.

Intersectionality is a language that emerges from and speaks back to decolonization and desegregation of the world. It is a language of contact among people who have spent their lives learning that race and gender and sexuality and class and ethnicity and citizenship categories and religion are reliable measures of an individual's talents, skills, motivations, and achievements. As the globe shrinks, we need a language that enables to people see and communicate with one another across such differences of power. Doing so may mean claiming the power of community and using it for different ends. Intersectionality's metaphor of a crossroads may be helpful here. A crossroads is a politically negotiated, coalitional space where we arrive at some sort of common ground because we are aiming for some sort of common cause. It's a space to stop, look around and engage people/ideas that are missing elsewhere. Intersectionality aligns with the idea of meeting others who are unfamiliar but who may be on similar paths as oneself. Participatory democracy can develop in such crossroads, places where people from different places commit to building political communities that work.

Finally, can you provide us with the references whose reading you consider fundamental to understanding your works?

Alexander, M. J., Mohanty, C. T. (2013). Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures. Routledge.

Anderson, B. (1983). Imagined Communities. New York: Verso.

Bambara, T. C. (edited by) (1970). The Black Woman. Washington Square Press.

Bauman, Z. (1991). Modernity and the Holocaust. United Kingdom: Polity.

Butler, O. E. (1993). Parable of the Sower.

Davis, A. Y. (1983). Women, race & class. Vintage.

William, E. B. Du Bois. (1899) The Philadelphia Negro.

Fanon, F. (1961). The Wretched of the Earth.

Freire, P. (1978). The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Routledge.

Hurston, Z. N. (1969). Their eyes are watching God.

Lorde, A. (2012). Sister outsider: Essays and speeches. Crossing Press.

de Jesus, C. (2003). Child of the Dark. New York: New American Library.

Jordan, J. (1992). Technical Difficulties. Pantheon Books.

Mannheim, K. (1966). Ideology and Utopia. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World.

Memmi, A. (1991). The Colonizer and the Colonized. Boston: Beacon Press.

Mills, C. W. (1961). The Sociological Imagination. New York: Grove Press Inc.

Said, E. W. (1993). Representations of the Intellectual. New York: Pantheon Book.

Scott, J. C. (1990). Domination and the Arts of Resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mandela, N. (1994). Long Walk to Freedom. Boston: Little Brown.

Morrison, T. (1987). Beloved. New York: Knopf.

Silko, L. M. (1991). Almanac of the Dead. New York: Penguin Book.

Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonizing Methodologies. New York: Zed Books

Wells, I. B. (1972). Crusade for Justice. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

X, M. (1964). The Autobiography of Malcolm X.

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). Gender and Nation. London: Sage Pubication.