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On Max Weber and Ethnicity in Times of Intellectual Decolonization

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Abstract. The past few years have seen a rise in attempts to decolonize curricula, pedagogies, classrooms and knowledge production. In this paper, I provided a six-step argument for reading and teaching Weber – among other scholarly writings – in times of intellectual decolonization. I argue that (1) Weber's calls for scientific rigour and the prevalence of social causality over biological, culturalist or other essentialist interpretations, as well as (2) his uncovering of racist ideology embedded in social institutions are more relevant than ever. I then follow Weber in (3) theorizing the emergence of ethnic feelings of communalization as the outcome of unequal power relations tied to migration, conquest, and colonization. (4) This relationship of domination/subordination is conducive to a differential sense of self and dignity with members of majority and minority populations. (5) Based on Weber's epistemology, these diverse "standpoints" need to be included into the curriculum as they contribute valuable pieces to the overarching puzzle of human knowledge. (6) Weber's call for a strict separation of science and politics, however, prohibits political activism and "professorial prophecy" in the lecture hall or classroom. For Weber, the professor should not teach students what they should do, only what they may want to do.

Keywords: Max Weber, ethnicity, racism, decolonization, Black Lives Matter, migration, epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

The past few years have seen a rise in attempts to decolonize curricula, pedagogies, classrooms and knowledge production. Most importantly, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020 and in the wake of the subsequent season of protests against anti-black racism – not just in the United States – universities are seeking to affirm their commitments to racial justice at all levels. Administrators are drawing up institutional plans to address structural racism, and faculty are reorienting their courses to greater emphasize diversity and inclusion.

While this overdue reckoning is a desperately needed initiative to address longstanding inequities and injustices, it is also flanked by an ever-increasing polarization. On the one hand, proponents of intellectual decolonization wish to undo the legacies of imperialism and colonialism in universities of the Global North, to overcome the silencing of minority voices, and to dismantle "global Apartheid" and minority exclusion in higher education (Mbembe 2016, 38). On the other hand, skeptics of intellectual decolonization emphasize the values of academic freedom and free speech, they feel that academic excellence is undermined by affirmative action, and argue that critical perspectives of the new liberal mainstream at universities are unfairly labelled "racist".

It is within this climate of increasing polarization that I received an invitation to write a paper on Max Weber and ethnicity. While grateful for the invitation, the task at hand also gave me a headache: how and what could I possibly write about Max Weber and ethnicity past the aforementioned events of 2020? Was it not time to stop teaching the so-called founding fathers of sociology since most of them were white, bourgeois men (although some of Jewish origin)?[1] If there was still something that Weberian sociology could teach us about ethnic and racial strife, what would that be? What kind of reading would it require? And how should we teach this kind of "white" sociology in increasingly diverse classrooms? This paper is a modest attempt to offer some preliminary answers to these questions which, arguably, require a much wider and deeper reflection than what can be achieved here.

In keeping with the original request to write about Max Weber and ethnicity, the paper offers a six-step argument for reading and teaching Max Weber – among other scholarly writings – even in times of intellectual decolonization. First, examining Weber's confrontation with early biological, race-based reasoning, I highlight two of his contributions to sociology that, I believe, are still valid and desperately needed in today's world: (1) his calls for scientific rigour and the prevalence of social causality over biological, culturalist or other essentialist interpretations (2) without the denial that racism is indeed embedded in the core institutions of modern societies. The next section traces (3) how Weber situates the construction of ethnic groups within a general theory of social relations tied to migration, conquest, and colonization. (4) His analysis reveals how dominant and subordinate "ethnic" identities are constituted in and informed by unequal power relations. Finally, I argue that Weber's epistemology allows us to conceive of human knowledge as a multiculturally constituted mosaic. On the one hand, (5) this requires a plurality of perspectives to be generated, debated, and included into the curriculum, most notably those of minority groups, such as women, Indigenous Peoples, and people of colour who tend to be sidelined in the wider society. On the other hand, (6) Weber's call for a strict separation of science and politics prohibits political activism in the lecture hall or classroom. Precisely because our classrooms are more and more diverse in terms of ethnic, "racial," and religious backgrounds, as well as gender, sexual orientation, and class positioning, it is the professors' duty to be a mentor to all their students. While this may curtail minority activism in the classroom, it places an even bigger demand for self-awareness and restraint upon members of dominant groups.

REFUTING "RACE", ACKNOWLEDGING RACISM

Writing in an era when the division of humanity into biologically different "races" was widely accepted and social inequalities were interpreted as the result of the gaps between individuals' "natural dispositions," Max Weber made a considerable intellectual effort to deconstruct these doctrines and to limit their ideological effect upon sociological research (Winter 2004, 31–56, 139–153)[2]. To be sure, Weber was neither a saint nor a visionary. He made horrendously denigrating remarks about impoverished Polish seasonal workers in East Prussia (Weber 1958), his interpretation of the Indian caste system is factually flawed (Thapar 1980), and his depiction of Southern religions as

[1] Marx, Durkheim and Simmel were of Jewish origin. Specifically the latter two faced stark antisemitism (see, for example König 1971).

[2] Allow me a short caveat: due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I have not been able to access my office and my books since March 2020. Therefore, citations of Weber's writings refer to the German original, as well as to translations of his writings in English and French. As it stands, all translations are my own.

incompatible with capitalism is Eurocentric at best (Alatas 1963). These are just a few examples of how Weber may be found guilty of perpetuating a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, and where ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread (Weingart 1994). Furthermore, writing at the turn of the 20th century, Weber did not yet know what we know today, namely that genetic analysis suggests that humanity cannot be subdivided into clear-cut biological races (Graves 2015). Hence, he repeatedly insists upon the possibility to include biological "givens" should they be proven facts.

However, Weber also grows increasingly weary of race-based interpretations of the social. As early as 1896, merely a year after his notorious inaugural lecture in Freiburg, he rejects the thesis, defended by several historians at the time (notably Seeck 1897-1920), that the decline of classical antiquity had been brought about by an unfavorable biological selection due to extended warfare and the killing of Roman soldiers (Weber 1988b). Weber quips that the Roman army hardly wasted Italians (perceived by some of his contemporaries as members of the superior "race") on the battlefield, but rather drafted "barbarians" (quotation marks in the original) from the conquered territories. He maintains that the decline of the much-cherished "ancient Roman civilisation" can be sufficiently explained by social factors[3], to the point where it is not necessary to bring in a racial theory of "mystical character" that could never be fully proven or disproven (Weber in Winter 2004, 203).

His suspicion of unproven assumptions evolves into methodological rigour during his (fairly unsuccessful) "psychophysical" studies in a German textile factory around 1908. Despite his best intentions, Weber fails to achieve his objective, namely to determine the impact of workers' ethnic, cultural, professional and social background on economic profitability (Weber 1988c, 124). Throughout the study, he observes again and again that it is not possible to associate certain "basic qualities" definitively with one social group and not with any another (Weber 1988c, 72). Somewhat anticipating the ongoing debate that opposes "nature" and "nurture" in the field of psychology, he finds that it is impossible to distinguish, in a rigorous scientific way, the impact of innate factors from the influences of the social environment to which individuals adapt. In 1910, at the very First Conference of the German Society for Sociology, he asserts:

> I dispute with the greatest determination that there is today just one single fact relevant to sociology, just one exact and concrete fact which can be traced back to a certain kind of sociological process in a really clear and definitive exact way, and irrefutable to innate and hereditary qualities, which one race has and which another race does not have definitively – it must be underlined: definitively! – not, and I will continue to dispute it until this fact has been specifically pointed out to me (Winter 2004, 204). [4]

Sketching out the contours of what generations of students have come to appreciate as the paradigm of "methodological individualism," he concludes that if it is impossible to determine that one social group is more efficient "by nature" than any another, it is because productivity depended most strongly on context and individual motivation. Social scientists should therefore "give priority to the analysis of the influences of social and cultural origin, education and tradition" (Weber 1988c, 31, my translation) over any kind of naturalist explanations.[5] When there are sufficiently known social causes, for Weber "no trace of any theory of race is needed as a supplement." Indeed, it goes "against the scientific method, where we have known and sufficient reasons, to put these reasons aside in favor of a hypothesis today and forever unverifiable" (Weber in Winter 2004, 202). As a consequence, the now widely accepted insight – at least among sociologists – that individuals who share certain observable material or ideal common traits (*Gemeinsamkeiten*) – such as those related to descent/"race," culture,

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[3] According to Weber, the end of the warfare and conquests – which had produced a steady supply of slaves – undermined the slavery-based economy, and the Roman Empire's geographical vastness rendered its administration – such as the collection of taxes and the imposition of the rule of Roman law – increasingly futile.

[4] All translations provided in this paper are mine.

[5] Admittedly, this kind of reasoning may be used for essentialist interpretations (e.g. in culture of poverty theorists' explanations of racial disparities). Making despicable remarks about poor Polish peasants, Weber also seems to essentialize their social condition into some kind of deterministic "culture." This reasoning, however, stands in stark contradiction to the epistemological and methodological foundations of his "comprehensive sociology."

religion, class, or special environment – do not automatically constitute a group can be found on the very first pages of *Economy and Society*:

> It is by no means true that the existence of common qualities, a common situation, or common modes of behaviour imply the existence of a communal social relationship. Thus, for instance, the possession of a common biological inheritance by virtue of which persons are classified as belonging to the same "race," naturally implies no sort of communal social relationship between them (Weber 1978, 42).

"Race" (identified by descent, phenotype and/or skin colour) does not constitute a social group and even less a "community." Psychosocial and moral qualities cannot be derived from racial signifiers. Today, these seemingly banal insights and rules of academic rigour are staples of any introductory sociology course. Historically, however, it took much intellectual effort to establish the "anti-racist" character of sociology (Schnapper 1998, 107). This should neither be forgotten nor taken for granted. Furthermore, many of these parameters of sociological thinking are still widely disputed in popular discourse. We are all aware of explicitly racist worldviews – which I do not want to repeat here – as well as of more subtle racist schemes pretending that members of minority groups are less reasonable and rational and more "driven" by their inner nature, whether the latter is interpreted in biological or culturalist terms. Much needs yet to be done to translate sociological knowledge into public knowledge.

If Weber rejects the idea that racial features determine social action, he does not preclude the pervasiveness of racism. This becomes even more evident when he addresses the social hierarchy in the United States and challenges the idea that an individual's place in society is "naturally" determined by his or her racial background. During a trip to the United States for the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, Weber met W.E.B. Du Bois (1868 – 1963) and found him to behave "like any other gentleman" (Weber in Winter 2004, 190). While I do not want to preclude the possibility that bourgeois Weber looked down on both working class African Americans and working class Native Americans (although his writings suggest neither), he is puzzled by the fact that African Americans face more discrimination by white Americans than Native Americans: "In the United States, the slightest drop of Black blood socially disqualifies an individual [in the eyes of the white majority], while an even greater quantity of [Native American] blood does not" (Weber 1971, 413). Struggling to understand the reasons for this differential attitude, Weber contemplates potential causes. To his eyes, there is no "objective" physical or phenotypical difference that would distinguish Blacks any more from whites than it would Native peoples. Therefore, the so-called racial revulsion – often evoked by his contemporaries – was not a plausible factor for social contempt (Weber 1971, 412). Nor does he find evidence for the subjective belief that Native American culture might be superior to African American culture. Ultimately, Weber settles for a reason offered to him by white Americans, namely that Native Americans "didn't submit to slavery" (Weber in Winter 2004, 205). Weber concludes that discrimination against African Americans was thus rooted in the remembrance that "they are a slave people [...] a socially [*ständisch*] disqualified group". While Weber thus accepts a racist argument – a collective character judgement of anyone born into/associated with that particular group – it is noteworthy that he further qualifies this racist argument as "feudal contempt for [dirty and unpaid] work" (Weber, 1971: 413). He concludes that "convincing evidence that demonstrates that the specific nature of race relations in North America is based on innate and inherited instincts has so far not been provided" (Weber in Winter 2004, 205). To him, the "racial antagonisms" between white and Black Americans are not caused by "anthropological differences". Rather, he highlights the social causes for feelings of superiority among whites, and sees racial disparities further "instilled by education, and especially, [the] differences in training" (Weber 1971, 413).

Furthermore, Weber unmasks both the so-called racial scent and the ban of interracial marriages as recent "inventions" (i.e. introduced after the end of slavery) by white Americans to socially distance themselves from upwardly mobile African Americans (Weber in Winter 2004, 205):

> The horror of any sexual relationship between the two races, which [...] was recently imposed on Blacks, is only the product of the claims of the latter – born out of the emancipation of slaves – to be treated as citizens with equal rights. This horror is therefore socially conditioned by tendencies to monopolize social power and honor [...] which, in this case, is connected with race (Weber 1971, 412).

Weber's analysis provides us with insights on two levels. First, he highlights the social construction of "race relations" and specifies that the social relation (of slavery) precedes stigmatization and the imprint of the visible "mark" onto the body (Guillaumin 1972). Put differently, Weber tells his turn-of-the-century audience that it is not because of their "race" that African Americans became slaves, but rather, the enslavement of individuals from Africa for more than 2.5 centuries led to an association of dark skin colour with social and human inferiority, fuelling ongoing discrimination long after the abolition of slavery.

This brings us to the second point, namely that Weber also exposes the existence of racism, even of systemic or institutional racism. In a society where social hierarchies are perceived to be dependent upon one's "race," Weber suggests that individuals' social status is almost inevitably influenced by their physical traits and appearance: "if we had for example today the possibility of dyeing human beings Black at birth, these people would always find themselves in a somewhat precarious and bizarre situation in a white society" (Weber in Winter 2004, 205). Yet again, he educates his readership that it is not "objective" physical features that determine an individual's place in society. Nor is racism based on the mistaken discriminatory attitudes of individuals, i.e. the proverbial "few bad apples." Rather, Weber identifies social institutions as constituting the "rules of the game" for members of different racial categories. As such, he shows that it is racist ideology not "race" which establishes a causal link between racial categorizations and individual "life chances" (Weber in Winter 2004, 46, for the United States, see Fields and Fields 2012).

Admittedly, from today's perspective, Weber's analysis of racism remains timid and underdeveloped. Nevertheless, relative to his contemporaries, Weber is far ahead in his analysis. In particular, he establishes two of the conditions that are necessary for the development of anti-racist decolonized scholarship: namely, that seemingly obvious "racial" belonging does not involve differential mental and moral capacities which irrefutably translate into a particular kind of social action, but that instead, racism can be observed as a causal force in modern societies. In fact, Weber observes that racism – the sorting of social groups by their phenotype and supposedly inherited and unchangeable physical, mental and moral attributes –is not merely a matter of individual behaviour but deeply engrained in modern social institutions. As such, he identifies systemic racism without calling it by its name.

Referring to phenotypes and supposedly unchangeable biological attributes, "race" can be identified as a subset of "ethnicity," which involves ascriptive distinctions among groups based on language, history, descent, traditions, and/or religion. While most of the "classical" grand theorists – such as Karl Marx or Emile Durkheim – either failed to acknowledge ethnicity and national belonging or attributed both to earlier types on the continuum of social evolution, Weber did not anticipate ethnic feelings of solidarity to be eliminated in the course of history, neither by proletarian internationalism nor by a post-patriotic *idéal humaine*. Rather, he devotes a short but insightful chapter of *Economy and Society* to the construction of what he calls "ethnic" communalizations.

SUBSTITUTING ETHNICITY BY RELATIONAL, POWER-INFORMED "ETHNIC" IDENTITIES

Weber famously defines ethnic groups as "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration" (Weber 1978, 389). He thereby dissociates ethnicity from kinship and other biological relations, while maintaining the myth of shared ancestry, which establishes ethnic groups as intergenerationally sustained groups. Weber further insists that for ethnic communalizations to emerge "this belief [of common descent] must be important for the propagation of group formation" (Weber 1978, 389). Finally, he situates the production of ethnic groups within the context of either (peaceful or warlike) migration or expansion such as colonisation or conquest (Weber 1978, 388). As such, ethnic groups are to be distinguished from other cultural communities.

Importantly, drawing upon a number of historical examples, Weber notes that the "seemingly uniform phenomenon [...] of 'ethnically' determined social action" (Weber 1978, 395) actually refers to such a wide range of factors that the "term 'ethnic' [is almost] unsuitable for rigorous [scientific] analysis." On one hand, ethnic, religious, or cultural homogeneity does not always translate into social cohesion. On the other hand, even stark cultural, religious, or "racial" differences do not necessarily produce conflict. Similarly, the degree of seemingly objective

"cultural distance" between groups has little impact on the nature of social relationships. In fact, so-called ethnic differences only become significant once they are attributed subjective meaning. This meaning is profoundly and indispensably relational.

Weber can be credited to have been the first to have used the term "ethnic boundaries" (Weber 1971, 417). The concept of boundary work, in turn, is closely related to the notion of social closure, which minimally implies the identification of insiders without the group being entirely closed to potential newcomers. This is how symbolic, and potentially, social boundaries are being drawn:

> Usually one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of (actual or potential) competitors – race, language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence, etc. – as a pretext for attempting their exclusion. It does not matter which characteristic is chosen in the individual case: whatever suggests itself most easily is seized upon. Such community action [*Gemeinschaftshandeln*] may provoke reaction on the part of those against whom it is directed (Weber 1978, 342).

In the quote above, Weber situates the process of attaching meaning to the various dimensions that are often summarized under the heading of ethnicity – "'race,' language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence" – in a social relation of conflict and marginalization. Second, he shows that the boundaries between "us" and "them" are chosen arbitrarily within those unequal power relations. Third, he notices that for the purpose of exclusion, ethnocultural, ethnoracial, and ethnoreligious signifiers are used indiscriminately. Fourth, in the quote above "being different" is attributed to those excluded or marginalized. Fifth, closure is not enacted by individuals but achieved through collective action ("community action") and may provoke a similarly collective reaction by those who are excluded/marginalized. Hence, a group that successfully effectuates social closure first establishes itself as the dominant group ("majority"). Categories that become "excluded" in this process are "minorities" (Wirth 1945, 347). While not constituted as "groups" through the process of exclusion as such, the targeted individuals may subsequently pursue their own group closure, developing a "reactive ethnicity" or even a purely oppositional identity (Çelik 2015).

Weber insists that social closure is most likely to occur when a social relation provides the participating individuals with opportunities for the satisfaction of a wide variety of motives, often a combination of material (such as employment opportunities, resources, etc.) and ideal (e.g. the monopolization of social honour or the protection of the "purity" of the "race") interests. The resulting stratification based on majority/minority relations differs from the vision of a "purely economically determined 'class situation'" (Weber 1978, 932) insofar as it involves social interaction between status groups (*Stände*). Status groups are defined by the attribution of "a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour" (Weber 1978, 932, emphasis in original), which is not monopolized merely by individuals, but rather operates collectively, that is, it generates unequal treatment not of individuals but of groups who are also characterized by sharing a certain lifestyle or "habitus." In the case of migration, colonization or conquest, this habitus is usually identified as the minority groups' "ethnicity" (which is seen as being "different" from the majority's values and civilization).

Weber notes that social status in society is often – though not necessarily – based upon the group's material situation (Weber 1978, 934). Thus, the superior social status of one (ethnic or racial) group can further foster this group's appropriation of economic advantages, as it produces a situation of unequal access to legal rights, economic power, and social resources. While stratification based on status is generally merely conventional, "the road to legal privilege, positive or negative, is easily traveled" (Weber 1978, 933). This brings us quickly to the concept of a racially and/or ethnically segregated society.

Based on his – presumably biased – studies of the Indian caste system (Thapar 1980), Weber (1978, 934) observes that the "sense of dignity" (read: identity) characterizing positively privileged status groups is "related to their 'being' which does not transcend itself, that is, it is related to their 'beauty and excellence.'" Members of the dominant group(s) in society "live for the present and by exploiting their great past" (Weber 1978, 934). As Weber observes, in the process of social closure the dominant group (majority) identifies others' "differences" and not its own "commonalities." Majority group members remain "individuals." Supposedly, they are neither determined by

their "nature" nor marked by "race," sex/gender, culture, ethnicity (Guillaumin 1972). At most, they are viewed as carriers of a particular "civilization." Indeed, the cultural specificity of the dominant group is masked, as it is conceived as incarnating the social norm. It is, therefore, represented in universal terms. Arguing along these very lines of reasoning, scholars have started to highlight the economic and bounded conditions of liberal attitudes (Hartmann 2020).

By contrast, Weber points out that the identity of the negatively privileged strata "must be nurtured by the belief in a providential mission and a belief in a specific honour before God" (Weber 1978, 934). Their hopes must concentrate on a better life after death. Since "difference" (from an unmarked referent) and the social "marks" that signify the boundary between "us" and "them" are imposed onto members of the minority, a negatively privileged or subordinate status therefore limits and circumscribes these individuals, "ethnic options" (Waters 1990) and the possible shapes that their collective identity may take. Indeed, members of minority categories tend to interiorize the essentialist view that the majority imputes to them, so that "the self-construction of ethnic and national groups as homogeneous and timeless entities results from the fact that they were originally perceived as static by others" (Juteau 1996, 57, a similar argument is expressed by Du Bois' notion of a double consciousness, cf. Du Bois 2018). Members of ethnoreligious and racialized categories tend to view it as "normal" not to be fully included in society. They interiorize essentialist "ethnic" self-conceptions. They use them for the purpose of identity politics and for imposing traditional, orthodox interpretations of culture and religion upon all members of the group. Ultimately, this fosters the perpetuation of social inequality, the intensification of rigid boundaries, and the rise of fundamentalism.

Yet again, compared to today's scholarship, Weber's theorization of ethnic identities may be wanting in terms of explicitness and confidence. There is no point in turning him into a scholar of decolonization. Nevertheless, he clearly and explicitly situates the production of "ethnic" identities within unequal power relations and correctly elaborates ideal-types of the collective identities of dominant and subordinate groups which resonate more than ever in today's world. More than a century after Weber's chapter on "ethnic communalizations," the relational constructedness of social and "ethnic" identification seems to slowly but surely find its way from "ethnic studies" into mainstream sociology, and – at some point – hopefully into societal common sense as well.

While, as we will see in the next section, Weber's faith in the individual – as an independent, rational actor and master of his/her fate – remains unshaken, his theorization of tendential majority/minority positioning – "standpoints" (Hill Collins 1989), so to speak – is a necessary (but still insufficient) condition for intellectual decolonization.

INVITING A PLURALITY OF ONE-SIDED PERSPECTIVES, BUT WARNING AGAINST ACTIVISM IN RESEARCH AND IN THE CLASSROOM

Famously, for Max Weber, "there is no absolutely 'objective' scientific analysis of cultural life or [...] of 'social phenomena' independent of [the researcher's] special and 'one-sided' standpoints" (Weber 1988a, 211). Rather, "all thinking knowledge of infinite reality through the finite human spirit is [...] based on the tacit assumption that only a finite part of it is the object of scientific understanding, that only it should be 'essential' in the sense of 'worth knowing'" (Weber 1988a, 212). Scientific knowledge is thus partial knowledge. Among an abundance of potential impressions, merely a tiny part of reality attracts the researcher's curiosity and interest, solely it is selected for causal interpretation and explanation. In Weber's words, "all knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from a specific, special point of view" (Weber 1988a, 224). Knowledge in the social sciences resembles thus a "multicultural" mosaic where bits and pieces of reality are "colored" – and colored differently by means of scientific investigation.

The fact that "we are cultured people, gifted with the ability and the will to consciously take a position on the world and give it a meaning" (Weber 1988a, 223) entails that it falls upon the individual to identify which phenomena are significant. Hence, whenever scientists decide for an object of investigation, they are guided by

their very own value ideas. Only in this way he/she can arrange the infinite complexity of reality according to his/her own criteria. For Weber, knowledge-guiding interest (*Erkenntnisinteresse*) is required in order to shed light on social and historical reality and to give it significance and meaning. All knowledge-guiding interest is a partial interest. Since every person has different value ideas, knowledge in the social sciences is necessarily "subjective" in so far as there are no God given universal guidelines as to which dimensions of social life are "worthy" of scientific investigation. For Weber, it is actually "this personal aspect of a scientific work [...] what makes it valuable" (Weber 1988a, 224), as it adds yet another piece to the colourful mosaic of human knowledge.

Furthermore, for Weber it is by no means true that research in the social sciences "can only have results that are 'subjective' in the sense that they are to apply to one person and not to the other. What changes is rather the degree to which [these results] interest one person and not the other" (Weber 1988a, 226-227). This is precisely why inviting a plurality of standpoints is crucial when striving for intellectual decolonization. For Weber, on the one hand, the value ideas of a researcher are the product of their epoch and its prevailing values. On the other hand, they determine his/her work and thus possibly the "conception of an entire epoch" (Weber 1988a, 225). In his methodological considerations, Weber does not envision the production of "minority knowledge" through the subaltern (Spivak 2010). If he invited an article by Du Bois (1906) to be published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, a journal he directed at the time, it was not out of consideration for intellectual decolonization, but rather because he found Du Bois' scholarship to be equally valid and worthy of dissemination as that of his white contemporaries. Weber would thus likely have objected a narrow Western-centric curriculum. In fact, an editorial note to the aforementioned article stipulates that the *Archiv* anticipates publishing more contributions by African Americans in subsequent issues. Furthermore, drawing on Weber's theory of interethnic relations, as well as on his theory of differential identities in positively and negatively privileged "ethnic" castes allows us to see how excluding minority scholarship from the curriculum curtails human knowledge. In contrast, including the latter by way of diversification and comparison furthers human knowledge and impacts the outlook and empowerment of future cohorts of students.

While this process may seem entirely "subjective," Weber assures us that it is far from arbitrary: what becomes included in the curriculum, what resonates with different publics, and what will be translated into the next round of research questions being asked is and remains a socio-historical process subject to dissent, debate, and intersubjective control – neither of which is devoid of power relations (Weber 1988a, 227).

In a related but different line of argument, Max Weber posits that normative statements cannot be derived from analytical findings: "World views can never be the product of progressive empirical knowledge, and that therefore the highest ideals, which move us most powerfully, only have an effect for all time in the struggle with other ideals that are as sacred to others as ours to us".

There is thus a categorical gap between analysis and normative appraisal or, in Weber's terms, "a fundamental separation of the knowledge of 'being' and 'ought to be'" (Weber 1988a, 186). Science can provide information about the best means to achieve certain goals or purposes. It can reveal chances of realization and likely consequences including unintended side effects under given conditions. It can also draw attention to the incompatibility of certain goals with specific value orientations (Weber 1988a, 188). This requires that the implication of values and political objectives be disclosed. The researcher's knowledge-guiding interest must therefore be revealed, and it must be possible to make them the object of scientific critique.

This critique, however, can only "be a test of the ideals against the postulate of inner non-contradiction" (Weber 1988a, 189) as science cannot produce value orientations. For Weber, "an empirical science cannot teach anyone what he [or she] should do, only what he [or she] can do and – under certain circumstances – what he [or she] wants to do" (Weber 1988a, 190). What ought to be is solely a matter of the willing person: "He [or she] weighs and chooses according to his[/her] own conscience and his[/her] personal worldview" (Weber 1988a, 189).

By emphasizing the disjunction between scientific analysis and normative appraisal or value judgements, Weber separates science from politics and thereby protects the former from the "pseudo-objectifying access of the administrators of science and expertise." In this way he creates space for a sphere of legitimate discussion of different

viewpoints and value orientations. If the "right" political program were to win the "right" political decision as a result of scientific analysis, then there would be no legitimate space for dissent and opposition, for competition and struggle, for conflict and compromise.

Put differently, expert knowledge does not turn scientists into better politicians. On the contrary, for Weber, it is deeply problematic when scientists (mis)use the authority of their research to pretend that their one-sided point of view is "the only" or "the best" political solution. Such a claim to absoluteness cannot be derived from scientific examination (Weber 1988a, 209). Rather, there are always several different and competing opportunities for change and progress. Which of these possible developments will ultimately be favoured depends on the value-related and self-determined choice of acting people. While Weber does not foreclose a researcher's political activism, he demands that the latter clarifies at all times "when and where the thinking researcher stops and the willing person begins to speak, where the arguments turn to the understanding and where they turn to the feeling" (Weber 1988a, 197).

Weber is specifically outraged about the "professorial prophecy" of his time. While he does not univocally denounce the pronunciation of value judgments from the lectern – on the condition that are clearly marked as such –, he condemns his colleagues' "boundless overconfidence", "complacency" and the "fashionable personality cult" (Weber 1988a, 208). This argument holds regardless of the content of any indoctrination from the lectern, be it the moral defence of imperialism and colonization or some so-called socialist reorganization of society. For Weber, it is unethical if professors abuse their position of power to inculcate their own value ideas in their students.

In the quest for intellectual decolonization, Weber's argument applies in two ways. On the one hand, it should be part and parcel of the professorial ethic to offer students a wide variety of approaches, research findings and theoretical viewpoints in order to best approximate the infinite reality and its complexity. On the other hand, it should be made clear – to paraphrase Weber – when and where the investigating researcher stops and the political person, the activist citizen begins to speak. In either case, academic evaluation can only be based upon formal-logical (non-)contradiction, theoretical sophistication, conceptual clarity, and methodological rigor.

CONCLUSION

Having been tasked to write about Max Weber and ethnicity, in this paper, I provided a six-step argument for reading and teaching Weber – among other scholarly writings – even in times of intellectual decolonization. Weberian sociology allows us to understand and explain ethnic and racial strife in ways that are more needed than ever. This is not to say that there are no scholars from minority groups who offer similarly valuable clues. W.E.B Du Bois and Frantz Fanon come immediately to mind. In fact, having come to the end of my paper, I wonder if I could have given it a different spin: I could have asked how Weber, Du Bois, and Fanon differ and compare in their intellectual struggle against biological and race-based conceptions of the social world, and how their scholarship may be influenced by their social positioning and the surrounding linguistic and intellectual traditions. By way of example, these are the kind of questions that we may want to pursue in future social theory courses.

As regards to Weber, here is a white, bourgeois, male writer whose intellectual efforts and academic rigour compel him to define sociology as a science defined by the prevalence of social causality over biological, culturalist or other essentialist interpretations. Until all social influences upon human behaviour have been identified and examined, Weber considers it anti-scientific for the sociologist to resort to explanations invoking an individual's culturally or racially defined "nature." The French sociologist Dominique Schnapper (1998) calls this the "anti-racist" character of sociology.

The aforementioned acknowledgement is the first necessary but insufficient condition on the long route to intellectual decolonization. Acknowledging the pervasiveness and persistence of privilege rooted in European imperialism and colonization is the second step. Some commentators refer to this second step as the acknowledgement of "white privilege," but this debate is beyond the scope of this paper. For Weber, it is obvious that, as such, phenotype and cultural belonging do not determine an individual's place in society. Rather, sociologists must examine social

institutions – and their embedded conventional and legal rules for social action – to identify which human "types" and habitussen are privileged within a given society. Following Weber, we may then realize that humans marked as "Black" may find themselves at odds within white society. In addition, this author famously demonstrated that any investigation of what constitutes a winning habitus in modern "Western" society must also scrutinize capitalism.

The third and fourth logical steps of my argument follow Weber in theorizing the emergence of ethnic feelings of communalization as the outcome of unequal power relations tied to migration, conquest, and colonization. Given the ubiquity of these phenomana in the modern world, it comes as no surprise that "ethnicity" – or its twin-sibling "nationality" (not discussed in this paper) – is part of every individuals' habitus, but not, as Weber reminds us, as an "objective," fixed measurable cause for social action, but always constituted relationally.

Ethnic difference, however, is usually imposed – by means of collective action for the sake of social closure on behalf of the dominant groups – upon negatively privileged individuals and groups within society. According to Weber, this relationship of domination/subordination is conducive to the emergence of a differential sense of self and "dignity" within members of majority and members of the minority. In short, and unsurprisingly, one's positioning within society impacts one's identity, belief system, and values. Surprising is, however, that the relational constitution of "ethnic difference" and "ethnic identity" are overlooked by so many.

The last two steps of my argument combine the aforementioned insights with Weber's ontology and epistemology: If the meaning of the world is not given univocally by some God or an "invisible hand" regulating the market, but to be created by individuals, it is easy to understand that social positionings – including membership in dominant and subordinate groups – will impact an individual's world view. For Weber, this admittedly one-sided knowledge-guiding interest is not only necessary to conduct social research, but it is explicitly "valuable" because it provides us with yet another sliver of knowledge and contributes thus to an ever-increasing understanding of the social world. On the one hand, it is thus only logical that institutions dedicated to the advancement of this knowledge must strive to offer a wide variety of views, including those from members of subordinate groups. On the other hand, as a proponent of value pluralism, Weber does not envision this inclusion to happen without conflict. Nor would he succumb to the illusion that this conflict is void of power hierarchies and differential types of academic prestige. In fact, for Weber, the value humans assign to cultural objects (such as academic scholarship) tends to be informed by power relations, and he finds this to be especially true if the latter involves connotations of being "ethnic" or "national" (Winter 2004, 112-115).[6]

This conflict is currently raging in full force in almost all Western democracies. It is, however, even worse than Weber anticipated: not only do we not agree on shared values, we seem to live in parallel universes, with some of us no longer believing in "facts" at all, or – as they frame it – believing in "alternative facts". The recent protests in the United States symbolize this conflict of world views most dramatically. In the summer of 2020, streets in many cities were filled with people protesting for Black Lives Matter. On January 6th, 2021 white nationalists stormed the Capitol in the city of Washington. In academia, calls for "intellectual decolonization" are met with outrage against "cancel culture" and vice versa, with aberrations and legitimate claims on both sides. While Weber does not offer us a solution of how to deal with these conflicts other than having and enduring them, he does advise us against taking them into the lecture hall or the university classroom.

Academics are not the better politicians or political activists. While not devoid of convictions, their knowledge is partial in both meanings of the word: particular and partisan. Science thrives on the competition between competing ideas and the openness with which it is carried out; it depends upon the curiosity and political independence of the researcher and his/her scientific credibility founded in dedication to detail, lack of formal-logical contradictions, a maximum conceptual and methodological clarity and enlightenment. Why should a professor be seen as scientifically trustworthy when it is clear that he/she is pursuing a political agenda? For Weber, the professor should not teach students what they should do, only what they may want to do. If this principle gets forgotten,

[6] It may be useful to recall that Weber's scholarship would likely have been condemned to the dust of history had it not been for his wife who published must of his work posthumously, and for Talcott Parsons (arguably a member of a powerful nation) who promoted Weberian sociology in opposition to Marxist ideas.

the line between the search for truth and ideology becomes increasingly narrow.

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