**Belt, shovel, or bomb? The *Anti*sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois**

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As I wrestled with this book, vibrating with both its explicit arguments and unstated implications, my mind alighted on three different metaphors that political and historical sociologists often use to explain how we produce knowledge.

The first is Imre Lakatos’s metaphor of a protective belt. For Lakatos, scholars build knowledge by way of research programs that consist of “hard core” assumptions and a “protective belt” of auxiliary hypotheses. When someone brings up an anomaly that challenges our research program, Lakatos argues, we don’t capitulate and rewrite our hard core assumptions but rather modify our auxiliary hypotheses in a way that can metabolize the anomaly and thereby protect the overall research program. The fundamental intellectual dynamic here is one of inclusion.

The second metaphor is that of excavation. In their contemporary classic, *Remaking Modernity*, Adams, Clemens, and Orloff attempt to discern a progressive logic in the apparent diffuseness of political and historical sociology by arguing that each generation of scholars works to reveal a new sedimented layer of institutional power and inequality that underpins the modern world. For example, in a challenge to Marxism’s discovery of the economic underpinnings of modernity, Feminists used their shovels to unearth the ways in which gender organized our brave new world. The fundamental intellectual dynamic here is one of radicalization in the literal sense of the word “radical,” which is (continuing with the metaphor of the shovel) to dig deeper so as to grab hold of the root.

The third metaphor is Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions. Arguing against those who insist that scientific progress is accomplished by finding ever better answers to old questions over time, Kuhn held instead that progress proceeds by way of ruptures that throw out the old questions and replace them with entirely new ones. Practically speaking, this happens when a dominant theoretical paradigm confronts so many anomalies and objections that it quite simply explodes. To put it in Lakatosian terms, scientific revolutions replace the hard core of a paradigm. The dynamic here is one of succession.

Here then is my big question for Jose and Karida: Is Du Boisian sociology a belt, a shovel, or a bomb? I ask this question, because there is evidence of all three. Calls for inclusion appear alongside of pleas for radicalization, which in turn gesture towards demands for succession.

The theme of inclusion and exclusion is everywhere in this book, but especially in their references to Du Bois’s biography and in their own biographies. In the preface, Karida writes that Du Bois came into her life when she **quote** “needed him the most,” adding, “I needed to know that there was room for me and the world in which I lived in the discipline of sociology” **endquote** (xii). Similarly, Jose writes that the establishment of a Du Boisian collective at Brown University **quote** “broke my intellectual isolation” **endquote** (xvii). With respect to Du Bois himself, the authors make repeated reference to Aldon Morris’s *The Scholar Denied*, which recounts “how the gatekeepers of the discipline intentionally excluded Du Bois and his research from the mainstream” (13). Accordingly, in the Manifesto that concludes the book, Jose and Karida write, **quote** “We also want to address our fellow mainstream sociologists and talk with them about how the practice of sociology must change in order to be more inclusive” **endquote** (186). This means incorporating the work of other scholars denied, who are both the new generation of sociologists and Du Bois’s “fellow outcasts” like Wells, Cooper, James, and Fanon (192).

Throughout the book, Jose and Karida argue that Du Bois’s fundamental contribution to the discipline of sociology is his critique of “racialized modernity.” This is a crystal clear example of the ways in which sociologists “remake modernity” with each passing generation as Adams, Clemens, and Orloff argue. I will not dwell too much on this point, because it is literally in the title of the book, but let me quote chapter 2 to give those who have not read it a sense of the argument. On page 63, they write, **quote** “The global color line and colonialism were clearly central elements of Du Bois’s understanding of the modern world, and he put both racism and colonialism at the center of his critique of racialized modernity” **endquote** (63). Here, as for Feminism in Adams, Clemens, and Orloff, Jose and Karida conceive of Du Bois’s intervention as a direct engagement with Marx. On page 69, they sum up this discussion by arguing, “If for Marx capitalism emerges with the rise of wage workers in factories, for Du Bois it emerges with the rise of slavery in colonial plantations.”

Now, before we move onto Molotov cocktails, it bears mention that the belt and shovel metaphors keep Jose, Karida, and Du Bois firmly within the discipline of sociology. The bomb does not.

I would argue that the myriad quotes from Du Bois especially from *Black Reconstruction*, *The World and Africa*, and *Dusk of Dawn* (what Jose and Karida call the mature Du Bois), can be read as an irreparable break with sociology and its hard core assumptions. In this, Du Bois prefigures the afropessemist turn in Black Studies. Implicit and explicit in his later work is that all of the taken-for-granted categories of sociology – modernity, capitalism, class, society, and professional sociology itself – cohere and are made possible by antiblackness up to and including the commodification, fungibility, and systemic violence done upon Black flesh during and in the afterlife of slavery. On page 75, Jose and Karida quote Du Bois in *The World and Africa*, where he writes, “a new barter in human flesh did not die with the slave but persists and dominates the thought of Europe today and during the fatal era when Europe by force ruled mankind” (75; World and Africa, p. 23). Jose and Karida explain Du Bois’s devastating critique in this way: **quote** “The dominant ways of seeing and classifying human beings are a direct product of slavery and colonial capitalism and inform and structure how we think about and understand the world” **endquote** (75). If it is true that slavery and its afterlife have mystified and warped our ways of seeing, then I must ask, how can a Du Boisian critique of racialized modernity remain sociology?

Two moments in the book are telling in this vein. The first is Karida’s account of her “shadow PhD program” at Brown, which consisted in units outside of sociology like Africana studies, comparative literature, and Brown’s Center for the Humanities. The other is Du Bois’s own break with sociology. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois recalled that his empiricist interventions within sociology were fruitless, because white scholars refused to change their minds despite overwhelming data to the contrary.

Here I should add that an interpretation of Du Bois as antisociologist would break with my friend and colleague Moon-Kie Jung, who, in a recent and influential article, argued that Du Bois misrecognizes the enslaved and cannot come to terms with the antisocial condition of Black people in America. The category of the worker on Moon-Kie’s account is ontologically white, for the enslaved, unlike the worker, has no standing in civil society and is subject in afropessmist terms to social death, dishonor, and gratuitous violence. Reading this book made me question Moon-Kie, which is saying something since I normally just assume that he is right (don’t tell him I said that). Du Bois’s numerous criticisms of socialism and trade unionism, some of which Jose and Karida reference, suggest that Du Bois was well aware of the systematic exclusion of Black labor from the category of the worker, and the white Left’s complicity in the violence of colonialism for their own gain.

Be that as it may, *The Sociology of WEB DuBois*, like all great books, does not spoon feed us an answer to our most burning existential questions but instead presents us with a choice. As Jose and Karida rightly point out, we are here in this moment in part because of Du Bois’s own dizzying breadth, productivity, and evolution as a scholar activist. The fact that Jose and Karida have been able to write this synthetic account of Du Bois’s corpus is a monumental achievement. They perform an incalculable service to those of us who want and crave a deep engagement with Du Bois. This book is a flashlight and a guide. But the Du Boisian project has always been bigger than the book. We are a collective, in which Jose and Karida are leading figures, and we have not yet decided whether we want inclusion, radicalization, or a positive break with the discipline of sociology. The choice entails very different tactics and strategies for engaging the profession in terms of teaching, service, and research and have perhaps their greatest impact on junior scholars, many of whom are minoritized and marginalized. For them especially we must ask, “What is to be done?”

Thank you.