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'Simon Susen provides a balanced update on sociology's theoretical, methodological, and institutional resources as well as challenges in today's complicated local and global social worlds. Fortunately, he has innovative and practical recommendations for ensuring the cutting-edge relevance of sociological thinking. This book is an excellent choice for undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as for the general reader.'  
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'A comprehensive and judicious account of the intellectual and material state of sociology, based on omnivorous reading and incisive analysis. The writing is beautifully clear, and the book is a major contribution to the self-understanding of the discipline.'  
—**William Outhwaite**, *Newcastle University, UK*

This book examines key trends, debates, and challenges in twenty-first-century sociology. To this end, it focuses on significant issues surrounding the nature of sociology, the history of sociology, and the study of sociology. These issues have been, and will continue to be, essential to the creation of conceptually informed, methodologically rigorous, and empirically substantiated research programmes in the discipline. Over the past years, however, there have been numerous disputes and controversies concerning the future of sociology. Particularly important in this respect are recent and ongoing discussions on the possibilities of developing new – and, arguably, post-classical – forms of sociology. The central assumption underlying most of these projects is the contention that a comprehensive analysis of the principal challenges faced by global society requires the construction of a sociology capable of accounting for the interconnectedness of social actors and social structures across time and space.

This book provides a cutting-edge overview of crucial past, present, and possible future trends, debates, and challenges shaping the pursuit of sociological inquiry.

**Simon Susen** is Professor of Sociology at City, University of London. He is Associate Member of the Bauman Institute and Co-Editor of the *Journal of Classical Sociology*.

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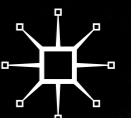
Sociology in the Twenty-First Century Simon Susen



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## Key Trends, Debates, and Challenges

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ISBN 978-3-030-38423-4 ISBN 978-3-030-38424-1 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38424-1>

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## Foreword

News of the demise of sociology comes regularly across my desk, and if not of its death, then at least reports of life-threatening epidemics.<sup>1</sup> In the social sciences, sociology is peculiarly afflicted by the instability of its paradigms, conflicts over methods, and disagreements about the most basic issues. What is the social? Are we to study individuals or whole societies? The problem is not that sociology is a relatively new discipline. We can trace its origins to at least the 1820s. One can identify various causes that underpin its dilemmas. Sociology is more driven by fashions in theory than other academic disciplines. In the 1970s the fashions came from Germany—notably with Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Arnold Gehlen, among others. Later we had a ‘French period’—with Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu, and Luc Boltanski. Perhaps one peculiarity of contemporary British sociology is the absence of commanding figures, with the exception of Anthony Giddens. By contrast, we can readily count the many foreign academics who have brought intellectual brilliance to our shores—Zygmunt Bauman, Norbert Elias, Ernest Gellner, Hermínio Martins, John Rex, and more. Simon Susen draws attention to this peculiarity of British sociology in his discussion of ‘canonicity’, illustrating how British universities were able to recruit a generation of displaced academics, especially (albeit not exclusively) those who were fleeing from fascism in continental Europe.

These fashions are, to some extent, fuelled by the demands of publishers for new ideas, titles, and authors. In this regard, there is arguably at least one more positive reason that may explain these fashion-driven episodes of instability. Over time, there are—unsurprisingly—major changes to society; sociologists have to re-tool to make sense of wholly new phenomena. Technological

changes—such as the role of social media, the use of drones in warfare and domestic surveillance, or cloning—have demanded new concepts, theories, and methods. Susen correctly draws attention to aspects of such changes—for instance, in his analysis of ‘metric power’ and the transformations brought about by the ‘digital age’. The sociological understanding of new forms of communication and their consequences required radical changes in sociological theories. Susen considers both problems and possibilities in his discussion of advanced digital technologies, which are powerful research tools employed largely outside the academic world by corporations to gather and to process data sets for commercial and strategic reasons. Such research technologies make traditional sociological methods look insignificant by comparison.

There are less obvious reasons for the constant fluctuations within sociology. At least some of its problems appear to be associated with its connection to social reform movements; hence, its concepts and theories seem to be as much embedded in advocacy as they are in science. Through their engagement with social movements and their commitment to critical and public research and debate, sociologists have embraced working-class socialism, the women’s movement, racial equality, decolonization, and—more recently still—animal rights movements. These engagements brought on to the scientific agenda a more or less endless cycle of commitments to good causes that have the unintended consequences of critiques that reformulate and disrupt existing paradigms. For example, the central concern for class, status, and power—as basic ingredients of social structure—has been displaced by attention to gender, sexuality, and identity in contemporary sociology. One result is a new discourse of intersectionality and positionality that displaced more conventional approaches.

Against this background, it is perhaps only to be expected that the sociology curriculum is constantly challenged and changed. From my own experience of teaching in North America, there was some agreement of what constituted the foundations—Karl Marx, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel—but almost no agreement about what was accepted as ‘modern sociology’. Was the lecture course to be made up, for instance, of the work of Robert N. Bellah, C. Wright Mills, Robert K. Merton, Talcott Parsons, and Charles Tilly? Or was it constituted around European social theorists such as Habermas, Foucault, Giddens, and Boltanski? What about W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and E. Franklin Frazier to question the ‘whiteness’ of the sociological canon? What about recruiting women to challenge this array of elderly men? My department never came up with a satisfactory solution to these questions. There was little comfort in the realization that adjacent disciplines (in particular, anthropology) were confronted with similar problems.

The truth is that, in many respects, sociology is *not* a ‘normal science’. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2012 [1962]),<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn argued that normal science involves a way of doing research in terms of a shared paradigm by a more or less coherent scientific community. Scientists are engaged in work on a common problem, for which they undertake research to collect evidence (‘the facts’) to solve it. The advent of normality indicates the coming of age of a scientific field. All recognized sciences have passed through such a watershed to emerge around a more or less stable scientific community whose members share an established set of terminologies, theories, and methodologies. Around the middle of the last century, it looked as if ‘functionalism’ and ‘social systems theory’, particularly in the work of the North American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), were at the watershed of establishing a shared paradigm. Yet, in the 1960s—in the context of the political disruption of universities through radical student movements—functionalism began to fall apart. Various alternatives emerged to challenge existing terminologies, theories, and methodologies. Students were now exposed to conflict sociology, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and—more recently—poststructuralism and postmodernism. In Britain, there was also a revival of Marxist sociology, on the one hand, and the growth of cultural sociology, on the other. This trend challenged prevailing conventions about what might count as ‘sociology’. One might say that sociology was slowly hollowed out by the growth and popularity of cultural studies, gender studies, film studies, and (*mea culpa*) body studies. What was left for sociological investigation apart from researching the instability of personal identity in postmodern societies?

As sociology became attached to successive waves of fashionable theorists who briefly enjoyed celebrity status, its focus on research problems constantly shifted—with the result that sociology never entered the social sciences as a ‘normal science’. For university professors of sociology, one might suspect that the constant disruption of paradigms was invigorating and even exciting. Who wants normality? For the students of sociology, however, exposure to such systemic disagreements tends to result in debilitating confusion, leading eventually to dismay and withdrawal. Unsurprisingly, there have been many attempts to address the problems facing sociology. Somewhat obviously, the various national and international professional associations attempt to exercise some oversight of the discipline and impose norms of ‘scholarship’ and ‘good behaviour’. There is equally a wealth of journals that seek to maintain excellence in scholarship. Here it may be relevant to refer to the *Journal of Classical Sociology*, which Simon Susen and I have been co-editing for almost two decades.<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, these academic institutions are—both in intention and in effect—conservative; they struggle to keep up with sociological

publications taking place in e-journals and on social media. As a result, what has been called ‘the war of paradigms’ continues and adds more evidence (if such was ever required) that nothing has replaced the hegemony briefly enjoyed in North America by Parsons and his followers (around functionalism and systems theory) in the 1950s. Again, as Susen points out in his account of counterhegemonic scholarship, North American scientific hegemony has been displaced by alternative centres in Latin America and, more generally, in the Southern hemisphere. One such development is the emergence of ‘Southern theory’.<sup>4</sup>

This war of paradigms is, broadly speaking, the topic of Simon Susen’s excellent account of contemporary sociology and its possible futures. He is especially aware of the imperial and colonial context in which sociology emerged. Although this issue of colonialism has been well rehearsed in anthropology, it has not received sufficient attention in sociology. Susen takes this discussion to a new level, by driving home the fact that globalization has made many (perhaps all) of the principal assumptions underlying large parts of ‘Western’ sociology *questionable*. We inhabit a world that is both highly interconnected and deeply diverse. These facets of the global context have forced sociologists to re-think, among other topics, the meaning of modernity. The idea of ‘multiple modernities’ in the work of Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt<sup>5</sup> (2000) offers at least one route out of the widespread supposition that ‘modernity’ is all of a piece. Assumptions about the Western origins of sociology overlook such figures as Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), whose *Muqaddimah* developed the idea of ‘universal history’. The growth of sociology in China can be traced back, for example, to an early Department of Sociology, established by the National Central University in 1928, which evolved into the Nanjing University Department.<sup>6</sup> With the success of the Maoist Revolution, however, the truth of ‘Marxism-Leninism’ as the official ‘science’ raised questions about the actual need for sociology, which was defined—and largely rejected—as a ‘bourgeois science’.

If mainstream sociology has been narrowly focused on the Western world, it has also been too remote from historical research. Susen notes that this absence of a strong consciousness of the historical context of sociological work is ironic, given the importance of the work of Norbert Elias on the historical unfolding of civilization or indeed the research of Max Weber on ancient Judaism or the causes of the ultimate fall of Rome in his *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*<sup>7</sup> (1976 [1924/1909/1896]).

Perhaps more importantly (and referring to the first sentence of my Foreword), Susen does *not* propose a death-narrative of sociology. Indeed, in Chapter 12, he rejects the ‘rhetoric of despair’ that he perceives to have been prevalent in the second half of the twentieth century. He is deeply critical of



the foibles of sociology, while at the same time offering new possibilities of developing sociology in the context of global interconnectedness. He wants to treat the crises of the discipline of sociology as opportunities for development and growth. Postcolonial sociology and subaltern studies represent attempts to come to grips with global interconnectedness. National sociologies (especially British and Anglo-American sociology) fail adequately to reflect these fundamental changes to the modern worlds in which we live. Some of these concerns were articulated by Ulrich Beck, notably in his criticisms of ‘methodological nationalism’ and his notion of ‘world risk society’,<sup>8</sup> and developed in collaboration with the Korean sociologist Chang Kyung-Sup.<sup>9</sup>

Many attempts have been made to overcome the war of paradigms to stabilize sociology around an agreed set of theories, concepts, and concerns. Yet, at the end of the day, sociological scholarship revolves around ‘making social science matter’.<sup>10</sup> In the light of that goal, the quest for normality may be a false endeavour. It is crucial to illuminate the structure of human societies in a manner that engages us with issues that are significant and provides us with clarity of understanding to improve the way we live. Simon Susen’s kaleidoscopic overview of such sociological endeavours to describe important subjects offers a perspective that is both challenging and rewarding. Established scholars, as well as both undergraduate and postgraduate students, will find the clear development of his argument, the comprehensive coverage of issues, and the cornucopia of references an indispensable resource for further study.

ACU (Sydney, Australia) and CUNY (New York, USA)      Bryan S. Turner

## Notes

1. See Susen (2020).
2. Kuhn (2012 [1962]).
3. Cf. O’Neill and Turner (2001) as well as Susen and Turner (2011a).
4. See Connell (2007).
5. See, for example, Eisenstadt (2000). Cf. Susen and Turner (2011b) as well as Turner and Susen (2011).
6. See Skinner (1951).
7. Weber (1976 [1924/1909/1896]).
8. Beck (1999).
9. Kyung-Sup (2010).
10. Flyvbjerg (2001).

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## About the Author

**Simon Susen** is Professor of Sociology at City, University of London. He is the author of *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology* (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2007), *The 'Postmodern Turn' in the Social Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *Pierre Bourdieu et la distinction sociale. Un essai philosophique* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), and *The Sociology of Intellectuals: After 'The Existentialist Moment'* (with Patrick Baert, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Along with Celia Basconzuelo and Teresita Morel, he edited *Ciudadanía territorial y movimientos sociales. Historia y nuevas problemáticas en el escenario latinoamericano y mundial* (Río Cuarto: Ediciones del ICALE, 2010). Together with Bryan S. Turner, he edited *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), *The Spirit of Luc Boltanski: Essays on the 'Pragmatic Sociology of Critique'* (London: Anthem Press, 2014), and a Special Issue on the work of *Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt*, which appeared in the *Journal of Classical Sociology* 11(3): 229–335, 2011. In addition, he edited a Special Issue on *Bourdieu and Language*, which was published in *Social Epistemology* 27(3–4): 195–393, 2013. He is Associate Member of the Bauman Institute and, together with Bryan S. Turner, Editor of the *Journal of Classical Sociology*.

# Introduction

The main purpose of this book is to examine key trends, debates, and challenges in twenty-first-century sociology. Interrogations regarding the nature of sociology ('What is sociology?'), the history of sociology ('How has sociology evolved?'), and the study of sociology ('How can or should we make sense of sociology?') have been, and will continue to be, essential to the creation of conceptually informed, methodologically rigorous, and empirically substantiated research programmes in the discipline. Over the past years, however, there have been numerous disputes and controversies concerning the future of sociology. Particularly important in this respect are recent and ongoing discussions on the possibilities of developing new—and, arguably, post-classical—forms of sociology. The central assumption underlying most of these projects is the contention that a comprehensive analysis of the principal challenges faced by global society requires the construction of a sociology capable of accounting for the interconnectedness of social actors and social structures across time and space. Exploring the significance and relevance of such an ambitious venture, this book aims to provide an overview of crucial past, present, and possible future trends, debates, and challenges shaping the pursuit of sociological inquiry. To this end, it is structured as follows:

## Part I: Intimations of Postcoloniality

Chapter 1—entitled 'Postcoloniality and Sociology'—highlights the wider significance of two major historical events: the *colonization* and, subsequently, the *decolonization* of large parts of the world by European powers. The birth of sociology coincides with the age of imperialism, characterized by extensive colonization processes across the globe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is far from clear, however, what both the objective and the

normative implications of this concurrence are, let alone how they should be conceptualized and problematized. As maintained in this chapter, the rise of postcolonial studies in the late twentieth century is indicative of the need to grapple with these implications. Postcolonial approaches are confronted with a twofold challenge: first, to provide a comprehensive *critique* of the multilayered impact of colonialism on world history; and, second, to take on the task of crafting viable *visions* of a genuinely postcolonial world. The chapter suggests that, faced with this twofold challenge, the field of postcolonial studies has made substantial—and, in several respects, indispensable—contributions to the development of contemporary sociology.

Chapter 2—entitled ‘Postcoloniality and Decoloniality’—gives a brief overview of prominent approaches associated with *postcolonial studies* and, more recently, *decolonial studies*. The former have been profoundly shaped by diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia. The latter have been developed, above all, by diasporic scholars from South America. Despite significant points of divergence, the numerous frameworks situated within these two currents of analysis are united by the ambition to take issue with Eurocentric conceptions of history in general and of modernity in particular. In order to demonstrate that valuable insights can be gained from these two traditions of thought, the chapter elucidates significant contributions made by the following thinkers: in relation to postcolonial studies, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Raewyn Connell, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos; and, in relation to decolonial studies, Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and María Lugones.

## Part II: Intimations of Globality

Chapter 3—entitled ‘Globality and Sociology’—scrutinizes the implications of the fact that, in the early twenty-first century, societies across the world are increasingly interconnected at multiple levels. On this view, the plea for a *global sociology* is based on the premise that we live in a *global society*, implying that it is the task of the former to shed light on the complexities of the latter. A connectivist approach—epitomized in the pursuit of a ‘connected sociologies’ framework—draws attention to the ways in which connected societies are embedded in connected histories. Put differently, societal developments occur due to a variety of connections—such as economic, political, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and/or demographic ones. In addition to spelling out the core presuppositions underpinning the aforementioned connectivist outlook, the chapter considers three alternative explanatory paradigms, all of

which aim to make sense of key societal developments on a global scale: (1) the paradigm of *multiple modernities*, (2) the paradigm of *multiculturalism*, and (3) the paradigm of *cosmopolitanism*. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that these currents of thought fall short of acknowledging the role that connected histories have played, and continue to play, in shaping the constitution of modern societies. As illustrated in this chapter, the emergence of ‘postcolonial sociology’ and ‘subaltern studies’ reflects a serious effort to account for the global interconnectedness of social realities.

Chapter 4—entitled ‘Globality and Connectivity’—makes a case for a *connectivist sociology*, insisting that modernity can be regarded as a product of multiple interconnections across the world. To the extent that we recognize both the existence and the significance of ‘connected histories’, it becomes possible to take seriously those ‘other histories’ that are commonly ignored by, or relegated to the margins of, ‘Western’ collective memories. Such a connectivist approach requires us to face up to the fact that the numerous behavioural, ideological, and institutional patterns of functioning associated with the historical condition called ‘modernity’—far from possessing a monolithic origin in the cradle of European civilization—stem from a transcontinental confluence of human practices and social structures. A truly global sociology, while rejecting the assumption that civilizations constitute distinct and self-sufficient entities, subverts the mainstream historical narrative according to which, in the context of modernity, the European continent represents the principal driving force behind, and the crucial reference point for, civilizational developments across the world. A connectivist approach, in other words, takes issue with the *separation, isolation, and hierarchization* of civilizations as building blocks of human existence. Furthermore, it calls into question (1) the *historical* assumption that modernity has existed as ‘only one experience’ and (2) the *sociological* assumption that modernity, insofar as it is portrayed as a largely European affair, can make a legitimate claim to ‘uniqueness’ and ‘progressiveness’. Having exposed the fragile foundations of such an ethnocentric perspective, it becomes feasible, if not imperative, to pursue the methodological strategy of ‘provincializing’ Europe by deconstructing its epistemic claims to universality. Arguably, such an undertaking contributes to the creation of a ‘global social science community’.

### Part III: Intimations of Canonicity

Chapter 5—entitled ‘Canonicity and Sociology’—is concerned with dynamics of *canon formation in modern sociology*. The formation of an epistemic canon in sociology can be traced back all the way to the ground-breaking



works that have shaped its disciplinary identity from the beginning of its existence. Notwithstanding the question of whether or not Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber deserve to be regarded as the ‘founding figures’ of sociology, the far-reaching significance of their legacy is undeniable. It appears, however, that classical sociology is characterized, at best, by a deficient engagement with or, at worst, by the almost complete neglect of the wide-ranging impact of colonialism on historical developments across the world. This omission is especially problematic to the degree that Marx, Durkheim, and Weber have acquired the quasi-religious status of a ‘holy trinity’ in the history of sociology. A key question that arises in this context is why some scholars have been more successful than others in setting the agenda and shaping the canon of their discipline. One of the most remarkable features of canon formation in British sociology is that—to a large extent—it has been, and continues to be, based on the works of non-British scholars. More specifically, it is characterized by a curious paradox: *non-Anglocentric Anglocentrism*. While it has offered a domestic framework to an impressively large number of non-British scholars, it has greatly contributed to the hegemonic influence of Anglophone sociology—not only in Europe, but across the world. Canon formation in sociology is marked by an asymmetrical distribution of power, as is particularly evident in the field of social theory, which suffers from the ‘white-theory-boys syndrome’. In mainstream sociology, theoretical debates tend to be dominated by privileged, white/Western, male, middle- or old-aged, and highly educated experts. Irrespective of this socio-epistemic inequality, sociology still provides a safe home for scholars from adjacent disciplines.

Chapter 6—entitled ‘Canonicity and Exclusivity’—contends that intellectual canons in mainstream sociology have systematically excluded, and effectively silenced, non-white scholars. A salient example of *academic marginalization processes based on ethnicity* is the sidelining of ‘African American Pioneers of Sociology’—notably W. E. B. Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, and Oliver Cromwell Cox. Through processes of canon formation, it is decided who is, and who is not, allowed to set the (implicit or explicit) rules underlying social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at work in the academic field. As posited in this chapter, the *broadening* of a canon may require its *deconstruction*, thereby exposing the relatively arbitrary criteria by means of which scholars and research traditions are included in, or excluded from, hegemonic processes and structures of knowledge production. It is, to say the least, an irony that Western discourses of emancipation gained intellectual currency in the ‘Old World’ at the same time as slavery was being instituted in the ‘New World’. The serious implications of this matter are hardly ever explored, let alone problematized, by mainstream Western sociologists. The

nexus between the rise of colonialism, epitomized in the age of imperialism, and the emergence of social-scientific disciplines, such as sociology, is—at best—insufficiently understood or—at worst—largely ignored by modern researchers. The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that govern the development of academic fields cannot be abstracted from those that operate in the societies in which they are embedded, as illustrated in the stratified—and, arguably, discriminatory—constitution of Western models of citizenship.

## Part IV: Intimations of Historicity

Chapter 7—entitled ‘Historicity and Sociology’—identifies important reasons why the *sociological study of history* deserves to be taken seriously. Such an endeavour is inconceivable without combining and cross-fertilizing two academic disciplines: *history* and *sociology*. A transdisciplinary project of this kind poses a number of challenges, which need to be tackled when drawing on distinct, but potentially complementary, analytical frameworks. It appears, however, that historical approaches have been substantially marginalized in contemporary sociology, especially in the UK. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence supporting the view that, in recent decades, British sociology has gone through a major identity crisis. Arguably, this crisis manifests itself in the paradigmatic preponderance of ‘presentist lenses’, implying that large parts of sociology’s disciplinary agenda fail to contribute to a genuinely *historical* understanding of social reality. This epistemic limitation is ironic, given that the founding figures of sociology—notably Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber—as well as subsequent ‘classics’—such as Georg Simmel, Norbert Elias, Hannah Arendt, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jürgen Habermas—share a deep concern with the historicity of social reality. In the early twenty-first century, however, historical sociology tends to be considered a highly specialist sub-field in, rather than a core area of, sociology. This significant conceptual and methodological limitation is reinforced by the widespread use of simplistic periodizing labels (such as ‘premodern’, ‘modern’, and ‘late modern’/‘postmodern’). Thus, we are confronted with a curious paradox: in mainstream sociological circles, ‘the will to periodize’ remains strong, just as the analytical focus on the present, rather than the in-depth engagement with the past, remains popular. Yet, both ‘stagism’ and ‘presentism’ undermine the historicist spirit permeating the project of sociology.

Chapter 8—entitled ‘Historicity and Novelty’—grapples with the question of whether or not contemporary sociology, notably in the British context, has undergone a paradigmatic turn towards *epochalism*. The term ‘epochalism’ can

be defined as the belief that the current era constitutes a historical stage that is not only fundamentally different from previous ones, but also qualitatively unique and unprecedented, reflecting a radical break with prior forms of societal existence. The chapter draws attention to central issues arising in the face of epochalism, particularly with regard to its reductionist implications—such as the simplistic juxtaposition between ‘past’ and ‘present’, the proliferation of sweeping statements concerning allegedly ‘new’ developments, and the incongruity between theoretical and empirical accounts of temporality. The chapter defends the claim that, as critical sociologists, we need to distinguish between *objective*, *normative*, and *subjective* dimensions influencing both realities and narratives of *development* in general and of *change* in particular. Informed by the preceding reflections on the nature of historical analysis in sociological inquiry, the chapter goes on to give an overview of both the merits and the pitfalls of *Parsonian versions of evolutionism and neo-evolutionism*. Parsonian sociology has been largely sidelined in the contemporary social sciences. Given its influence on the development of sociology, this seems hardly justified, especially when considering the question of whether or not it is possible to provide a *non-Eurocentric understanding of modernity*. The chapter discusses the possibility of developing a ‘middle position’ between Eurocentric universalism and anti-Eurocentric relativism, focusing on the epistemic benefits gained from such a venture.

## Part V: Intimations of Disciplinarity

Chapter 9—entitled ‘Disciplinarity and Sociology’—starts from the assumption that sociology has a strong commitment to the empirical study of social phenomena. In recent decades, however, *empirical sociology* appears to have undergone a *crisis*. The rise of postindustrialism is inextricably linked to the consolidation of a knowledge economy. In the context of the *digital age*, this historical transition is intensified by the gathering, processing, and analysis of social and transactional data on an unprecedented scale. The growing influence of *metric power* is reflected in the ways in which ‘social data’ and ‘transactional data’ are systematically used to obtain valuable information about behavioural patterns in technologically advanced societies. Particularly important in this respect is the emergence of new modes of consumption, the identification and evaluation of which play a pivotal role in the development of market strategies in the private sector of the economy. This tendency has profound implications for the status of traditional research methods in sociology. Advanced digital technologies employed outside the academic sector provide

powerful ways of gathering, processing, and examining data, making traditional methods used in sociology appear, at best, limited or, at worst, obsolete. The chapter grapples with both the causes and the consequences of this shift, casting light on its ethical, epistemological, and methodological implications for the disciplinary position of sociology.

Chapter 10—entitled ‘Disciplinary and Interdisciplinarity’—asks why, in recent years, it has become increasingly common among sociologists to have strong reservations about the development of their discipline, notably in relation to the impact of *interdisciplinarity* and *audit culture* on both its intellectual autonomy and its institutional identity. As highlighted in this chapter, it remains to be seen to what degree sociology will be able not only to survive as a discipline, but also to protect its own intellectual autonomy and institutional identity, while continuing to play a fruitful role in contributing to the empowerment of individual and collective actors in society. Drawing on the preceding reflections, the chapter goes on to explore the extent to which the *growing demand for interdisciplinarity*, which one encounters both in the natural sciences and in the social sciences, has shaped sociological research agendas in recent years. Instead of endorsing a fatalistic account of interdisciplinarity, however, contemporary sociologists should seek to embrace the opportunities arising from its pursuit, especially if they want to avoid being relegated to the fringes of social-scientific research in the twenty-first century. With this task in mind, the chapter makes a case for a form of ‘epistemic realism’, which aims to account for both the empowering and the disempowering features of advanced knowledge economies. Finally, the chapter posits that sociology needs to expose the poisonous conditions created by the ideology of ‘impact’, drawing attention not only to its detrimental effects, but also to the ways in which it can, and should, be challenged and subverted.

## Part VI: Intimations of Hegemony

Chapter 11—entitled ‘Hegemony and Sociology’—is built on the premise that, inevitably, academic disciplines are shaped by the hegemonic modes of cognitive and behavioural functioning that are prevalent in the societies in which they are embedded. Based on this supposition, the chapter starts by observing that the concern with the *future of sociology*—and, crucially, with its *modus operandi*—has been a central issue of discussion in recent decades. Two narratives of the future are particularly noteworthy: on the one hand, the *narrative of decline*, suggesting that, at best, we are faced with a global crisis of unprecedented scope or, at worst, we are witnessing an unstoppable

catastrophe of worldwide reach; on the other hand, the *narrative of improvement*, positing that, in the worst-case scenario, we are confronted with a bundle of serious global problems that can be resolved or, in the best-case scenario, we are gazing into a horizon of opportunities proving the validity of the Enlightenment story of progress. Both positions make reference to a number of key (social, economic, socioeconomic, cultural, political, ideological, scientific, medical, environmental, military, and educational) trends. An important question that arises in this context is to what degree sociology has the capacity to delineate both its intellectual and its institutional future path in a genuinely transformative and proactive, rather than merely corrective and reactive, manner. Seeking to respond to this question, four future options for sociology are considered, none of which can ignore the hegemonic role of the state and the market in neoliberal societies. The chapter concludes by defending the *idea of a critical and public sociology*, capable of defying, and offering viable alternatives to, both the state-induced managerialization and the market-driven commodification of vital aspects of social life.

Chapter 12—entitled ‘Hegemony and Counterhegemony’—rests on the assumption that, although they are shaped by *hegemonic* modes of cognitive and behavioural functioning prevalent in a given society, academic disciplines—notably those in the social sciences—provide powerful, and potentially *counterhegemonic*, tools for calling the legitimacy of the status quo into question. The chapter offers a brief, but critical, overview of the principal issues that pose a serious challenge to the discipline’s success in the twenty-first century. Upon close examination, it becomes clear that recent and current debates on the state of sociology are remarkably similar to those that took place in the second part of the twentieth century. Striking in this respect is the ‘rhetoric of despair’, which appears to be common among sociologists across different generations, expressing a deep concern with the ways in which the discipline’s intellectual autonomy and institutional identity can be preserved. The chapter aims to give a balanced account of the extent to which negative perceptions of sociology as a discipline, including the historical conditions by which it is surrounded, are justified. As pessimistic interpretations of the state of the discipline seem to suggest, sociology finds itself in a situation in which it is, at best, enduring a crisis or, at worst, on the wane. In the social sciences, it tends to be regarded as one of the most vulnerable academic disciplines. This is ironic, since sociology, owing to its general concern with the constitution of ‘the social’, may be considered *the* foundational discipline of the social sciences *par excellence*. Exploring the reasons behind sociology’s perpetual legitimacy crisis, the chapter examines key indicators permitting us to assess the ‘health’ of the discipline. Their critical analysis demonstrates that there are

both negative and positive trends affecting the discipline's development. The chapter concludes by proposing a tentative outline of the crucial issues upon which contemporary sociologists can, and should, focus when defending the value and importance of their discipline.

## **Part VII: Intimations of Reflexivity**

In the form of an epilogue, the final part of the book provides some critical reflections on the key trends, debates, and challenges covered in the preceding chapters. This epilogue does not aim to demonstrate that the aforementioned sociological approaches are doomed to failure. Rather, it seeks to shed light on their main weaknesses and limitations, which—while recognizing their respective strengths and contributions—need to be taken into consideration when examining central issues in twenty-first-century sociology. As illustrated throughout this study, the project of creating a sociology capable of accounting for the interconnectedness of social actors and social structures across time and space is far from straightforward. If anything, the construction of a cutting-edge twenty-first-century sociology—regardless of whether this objective is pursued in ‘postcolonial’ or ‘decolonial’, ‘globalist’ or ‘connectivist’, ‘canonical’ or ‘anti-canonical’, ‘historical’ or ‘post-historical’, ‘interdisciplinary’ or ‘transdisciplinary’, ‘hegemonic’ or ‘counterhegemonic’ terms—is fraught with difficulties. It is the task of this epilogue to draw attention to the complexities and contradictions inherent in, and to the major challenges arising from, such an ambitious endeavour.