



# Sociocultural Context, Reference Scholars and Contradictions in the Origin and Development of Sociology in Italy

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## Abstract

The beginnings of sociology in Italy correspond more or less to those of the birth of sociology as an autonomous science in France by Durkheim (considered the founding father of the discipline except for the term that, as is well known, was coined by Comte). Its origins, therefore, can be traced back to the second half of the 19th century and its development substantially follows the socio-political development of Italy, which can be substantially divided into three historical phases (the Savoy monarchy between 1861 and 1922; the authoritarian fascist regime with totalitarian characteristics between 1922 and 1943, and the period of the democratic republic from 1946 onwards can be considered as the “rebirth” not only of Italy but also of sociology). This article aims to outline these phases through an in-depth examination of some of the Italian sociologists who, in the different phases (up to our contemporary times), have had greater relevance and influence, even outside the Italian context.

**Keywords** Italian Sociology · Pareto · Gini · Germani · Italy · Development of Sociology

Sociology started to develop at the end of the 19th century with the goal of grasping the socio-cultural changes that were taking place at that time in the forms of association of people and institutions, those same changes that later characterised the so-called “modern states”. But, if we want to make a concrete explanatory discourse about

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sociology, we need to look more closely at its origins: in fact, even if it is customary to date the birth of sociology to the year in which Comte in his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–1842) attributed the term “sociology” to those studies that until then had been defined as “social physics”, sociology, even if not as a science, has in fact existed for many more centuries than are attributed to it. This is especially true if we consider the innumerable studies of a philosophical nature - in which we can claim the first “sociological thought” was contained - that have dealt over the centuries with the transformations of social organisations and the relations between social structures and individuals (among the many examples we can point to Aristotle’s study of the birth of Greek cities). If these are the minimum and general elements to be considered regarding the birth of sociology as an autonomous discipline, there are others that characterise the birth of this discipline in specific geographical areas or countries. And in this contribution we will analyse the dynamics and aspects (socio-cultural context, reference scholars and contradictions) that have been recorded regarding the origin and development of sociology in Italy. In presenting the reflections necessary to achieve this objective, we agree with what Direnzo asserts when he states that: “Any current discussion of sociology in Italy is apt to be distorted severely unless placed in its proper historical context. It important to recall the crucial, and somewhat unique episodes which marked the emergence, development, demise, and eventual re-birth of sociology” (1972, p. 33). For this reason, there is no lack of continuous references to the historical and socio-cultural context of Italy, bearing in mind that some of these have marked the development of the discipline (i.e. fascism) and/or given rise to effervescent moments in it. In 1897, the same year as the publication of Durkheim’s classic study on suicide (2005), the first sociology journal was born<sup>1</sup>, *Quaderni di Sociologia* with important contributors (among the many we can mention Pareto) which, however, did not overcome the crisis of the social sciences and between the two world wars was not published (Acquaviva, 1966) only to resume its regular publication in 1951 at the instigation of Franco Ferrarotti. These are just some of the events that the reader will find in the following pages in which an attempt will be made to present the origins of Italian sociology, which are to be sought in the second half of the 19th century with a development that substantially follows the socio-cultural and political development of Italy, which can be substantially divided into three historical phases as sustained by Martinelli (2001): the period of the Savoy monarchy, 1861–1922; the authoritarian fascist regime, 1922–1943; the period of the democratic republic starting from 1946.

<sup>1</sup> All other journals were founded in later years: *Sociologia* (1956), *Sociologia religiosa* (1957), *Bollettino de sociologia* (1959), *Rassegna di sociologia* (1960), *Archivio di sociologia*, and *Quaderni di scienze sociali* (1962).

## The Dawn of Sociology in Italy Between Moral Statistics and the Positive School

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, demography, statistics, economics, and sociology represented a special way of collecting data and observing a new and complex reality (society) that was beginning to emerge from the great transformations that had invested the western world since the 18th century. A vast repertoire of behaviours that fell within the sphere of action of the politician or under the magisterium of some moral authority, or imputed to individuals, came to take on forms of autonomy that were not yet fully conscious and that broke free from previous subordination. Society and above all the behaviour of individuals tended to break the strong constraints of tradition, and the analysis and study of social phenomena was brought back to experience: man became *Homo Sociologicus* or *Homo Socius* – as Sorokin would later say (1962) – and as such is studied as an acting subject at the centre of a dense network of interactions. And this is the period in which the first studies of a sociological nature are developed as the assumptions of the Enlightenment prove insufficient to take into account a social reality in continual change that brings out the need for scientific analyses for the study of social phenomena based on empirical grounds (the new positivist philosophy was asserting itself). It is not by chance that we find, among the first studies, that on suicide by Durkheim (2005). These studies, in fact, which were born within the criminological theories that were gaining ground in the Enlightenment environment and which had a strong legal characterisation, were progressively “socialized” with positivism.

This period, which in Italy can historically be recognised with the Savoy monarchy of the years between 1861 and 1922, in relation to this new way of studying social phenomena, saw, on the one hand, the development of positivist theories with a great diffusion of works of a sociological nature especially by moral statisticians such as Enrico Morselli, Alfredo Niceforo and Enrico Ferri, on the other hand, the limited development and unattained institutionalisation of sociology as a recognised academic discipline. Towards the middle of the 19th century, in fact, the first statistical studies for the analysis of social events appeared with the aim of explaining the deeper reasons for these phenomena, and for the first time they called into question the social environment within which the individual acts. Moral statistics thus came into being when the need to know social facts and their deeper reasons was also posed by the governments of the territories; however, such a cultural revolution was opposed for a long time, but in the end the concept first expressed by Quételet (1869) in Belgium and by Guerry (1864) in France managed to find a precise place in the scientific and cultural circles of the time. For the first time, social phenomena were studied in relation to a series of variables such as gender, age, profession and other characteristics of the social actor: over time, research was refined to such an extent that a certain uniformity and consistency of data was identified in relation to their distribution in the different classes of the population. The data began to show the presence of elements within society that were reflected in the behaviour of individuals. Moral statistics seeks out and collects the extrinsic manifestations of individuals, and suicide is one of the voluntary acts on which, with a particular preference, statistical studies turned especially in the period of the early development of this discipline.

One such study, published even before Durkheim's study, was carried out by the Italian Morselli (1879), who, having lived in the second half of the 19th century, a period in which sociology was in its infancy, could only adopt the statistical method (the closest to the mathematical methods of the natural sciences) to satisfy the need to know the causes of certain social behaviours, including suicide, which as a phenomenon was emerging ever more strongly.

Morselli represents one of the main exponents of moral statistics, so much so that it led him to state that, "analysing severely the results obtained by us, it seems to us by their homogeneity and wonderful regularity, that they alone will suffice to persuade sceptics of the possibility of moral statistics" (Morselli, 1879, p. 6). By thoroughly analysing the results obtained and reconstructing a certain homogeneity and regularity in them, he was able to collect social facts and present them under a common denominator. The starting point is the principle according to which every phenomenon is the consequence of transformations that occurred at a previous time, and this is also the case for suicide, which is a phenomenon that may respond to certain laws and specific influences coming from society: suicide, as a subject, appeared from a different perspective from the religious or traditional one linked to superstitious rites and practices to counter primitive terrors, and from this moment onwards, an attempt was made to study it, not only from a psychological point of view, but also in its relations with the social life of individuals. Given these considerations, the need to define what one wants to study is perceived as primary. This causes Morselli to begin his work with an attempt to define suicide from which emerges, however, a cautious position regarding the use of statistical methods that obviously do not allow one to go beyond the simple recording of the gesture, although they do allow the detection of basic variables (sex, age, marital status, etc.) that serve the scholar to try to formulate hypotheses for the explanation of suicide. As the author himself points out, the work is a study of comparative moral statistics, therefore, it does not leave much room for theoretical-philosophical debates on why men in particular circumstances commit suicide. From this it follows that all those who set out to study suicide cannot simply rely on the metaphysical hypothesis of free will, let alone the semi-positivistic hypothesis of a so-called relative freedom: the demonstration that men do not act outside the logic of society is clearly shown by the detailed study and sociological interpretations of all the socio-individual, moral and physical causes that lead men to suicide. In its entirety, Morselli's conception of suicide is to be framed within the theory of Darwinian evolutionism and social evolution and, in fact, in addition to suicide he also studies murder as another act that is part of the struggle for existence. The fundamental difference between the two behaviours lies in the environment in which the action is perpetrated; in primitive societies, the struggle for existence was expressed in the identification and elimination of the weakest element through the criminal act, whereas in modern civilisation, the same result is achieved more directly and easily through the suicide of the weakest individuals in the community.

Morselli's work certainly does not appear significant or of any interest today, if not for the description of the evolution that the study of the phenomenon of suicide has undergone since the 19th century, but also because it opens the door to the so-called Positivist School (whose major exponents in Italy will be Alfredo Niceforo

and Enrico Ferri), that is to say a new legal-criminological orientation based on biological determinism (innate individual factors as primary causes of criminal conduct) which is at the basis of Lombrosian theory. What distinguished them from Lombroso was that, in association with the individual's innate characteristics, they also considered the unfavourable conditions of the external environment. In other words, for the Positivist School, crime was the result not only of determining forces within the individual but also of factors intrinsic to society. For the members of this school, criminal interventions were to be oriented towards controlling antisocial tendencies, thus considering the nature of the criminal more primarily than the type of crime committed. In particular, Enrico Ferri (generally considered the father of criminal sociology) opposed Cesare Beccaria's (1872) concept of the "punishment-castigation" with the idea of punishment as a "social defence", a notion based on the view of prevention as a consequence of knowledge of the causes that lead to delinquency. According to Ferri, the consideration of social factors is decisive in understanding crime because, in a given social context characterised by specific individual and social conditions, a certain type and number of crimes are committed. Punishment, therefore, must not be considered as revenge or punishment, but its objective must be the defence of society and, in this sense, in consideration of the level of danger posed by the material author of the crime, the punishment must be commensurate with his individual characteristics. The effectiveness of punishment does not lie in its harshness, an element that does not favour a reduction in crime, as alternative preventive actions are appropriate for this purpose. The strong opposition to deprivation of liberty and prison isolation measures, considered by Ferri (2010) as one of the greatest aberrations of the time, found full expression towards the middle of the 20th century given the strong theoretical attention devoted to the need to create alternative mechanisms to balance the negative aspects of prison. The premise of Ferri's postulate of *substitutio penales* [penal substitutions] is undoubtedly the humanist aspect of punishment, and it also reflects the transformations taking place in that historical period on criminal justice and in particular on the objectives of punishment in view of social complexity. According to Ferri, penal *substitutio penales* are economic, political, educational measures - distinct from punishment - that states must implement to act on the causes of crime with the aim of reducing them. Ferri identifies the offender as a "social being" and his behaviour as a reflection of the social condition and, therefore, the concept of prevention must be based in the construction of mechanisms and programmes that allow for the improvement of the initial social condition. In this way, a more or less predictable and malleable future is designed, because intervention in the social condition through an improvement in social equality consequently allows the creation of useful strategies for human development and the community, i.e. public policies capable of generating greater security and stability. In sociological terms, the greatest legacy of the multifactorial study of crime proposed by Ferri undoubtedly concerns the possibility of reflecting and shaping public policies of a preventive nature.

A disciple of Lombroso and collaborator of Ferri, Alfredo Niceforo encapsulated in the six volumes that make up his work *Criminologia* [Criminology] (1941–1954) a profound study of the figure of the criminal and his physical and psychological characteristics, the typology of delinquents and the physical and social environment.

According to the author, the individualisation of physical and psychological characteristics favoured the creation of a diagnosis of the offender's level of dangerousness, of the crime and consequently the formulation of a treatment regime and social readjustment and integration. Criminal aetiology, i.e. the analysis of the causes of crime and the exogenous and endogenous factors that influence its determination, and clinical criminology, i.e. the specific characteristics of the different categories of delinquent, make it possible to observe the different forms in which the same anti-social reaction can manifest itself and thus to establish that there are delinquents, not crimes. On these premises, criminological therapy must focus, according to Niceforo, on analysing the crime prevention mechanisms applicable to each individual and the resources intended to modify the abnormal conditions of the environment in which crime occurs. In this way, a social prevention and rehabilitation plan can be created.

This period in Italy not only saw the development of moral statistics and the Positive School of Criminal Jurisprudence, but also a first phase of effervescence for the emergence of new study perspectives to read social phenomena - albeit in a reductive form as limited to quantitative data - and, very importantly, this period corresponds to the time when Pareto presented the plan for what was to become his main work, *Trattato di sociologia generale*, which in its first English version was to be entitled *The Mind and Society* (Pareto, 1935).

## The Fascist Regime and the Lack of Institutional Legitimation of Sociology

The Italian cultural and political scenario that characterised the regime prevented the institutional legitimisation of sociology as an autonomous discipline during the years of Fascism. The need to gain legitimacy through the creation of a culture to support the political status quo and a form of education of the administrative bureaucracy in the field of social studies influenced the content and reception of sociological analyses. In fact, the regime succeeded in subordinating academic (and other) sociological reflection to its cultural and educational policies and sought to construct the historical legitimisation of the fascist project using the instrument of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* [Italian Encyclopaedia]<sup>2</sup>. According to the general idea of Benedetto Croce, the development of a “fascist culture” based on the production of new content and the dissemination of themes and reflections functional to the regime's ideology folded culture in on itself and allowed it to develop “autonomously” only on the basis of a tacit agreement with power. Sociology was included as an optional discipline in the faculties of political science but, in fact, the curricula aligned with the formation of

<sup>2</sup> In 1925, Giovanni Treccani founded the *Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana* [Italian Encyclopaedia Institute], entrusting its direction to the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, the regime's culture coordinator and minister of public education during the twenty-year fascist period, with the aim of creating a national Encyclopaedia (along the lines of the example of many European countries). The work (updated and updated over the years) immediately imposed itself on the national scientific scene as a monument to Italian culture, thanks to the collaboration of illustrious scholars of the time, some of whom were opponents of the regime. The latter contributed to the prestige of the encyclopaedic project and opposed Gentile's initiative to impose the Fascist oath of allegiance on all university lecturers and professors in the same period.

the regime's ruling class by focusing on the analysis of demographic policies, rural sociology and state administrative organisation. This resulted in a "fascist sociology" characterised by a tendency to conceive of social reality as a structural-functional totality that converged with the propaganda interests of fascism. Fascist repression permeated the process of selection, acceptance, reinterpretation and rejection of sociological works of the time. Indeed, reading such works offers a wide range of value judgements that are important for understanding the implementation of the regime's cultural and educational purge process, but also the significant conceptual legacy left to future generations of social science scholars, despite the strong ideological potential of these writings - the inflexible resistance of Germani and Gramsci (the former exiled and the latter imprisoned), Mosca's liberal opposition and Pareto's conservative outlook - "accepted" but used in a restrained manner during the twenty-year fascist period, Michels' position always considered an ideologue of the regime. It was not until after the Second World War that a break with the cultural pattern of the twenty-year fascist period occurred thanks to the widespread dissemination of North American sociology and the writings of exiled anti-fascist authors.

### **Vilfredo Pareto and the *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* [The Mind and Society]**

Vilfredo Pareto's overall oeuvre strikes us by the heterogeneity of the topics addressed and the number of disciplines involved: his studies range from philosophy to sociology, from economics to politics, without disdaining mathematics. In dealing with his objects of study, he places himself within the positivist perspective while criticising the positions of Comte (1830–1842) and Spencer (1898) in relation to the conception of progress insofar as he considers that they overstepped the limits of empirical science in their conceptions. The historical phase in which Pareto lived (he was born in the year of the first uprisings for Italian independence in 1848 and died in 1923, the year following Mussolini's "March on Rome" and the advent of Fascism), is characterised by the implementation - in the western world - of actions aimed at resolving the crisis that is now evident between social rationality, which with modernisation is advancing more and more, and the desires and feelings of individuals. The thread running through all of Pareto's studies will therefore be the incompatibility between desire and reason that is substantiated in the management of social processes. Pareto's position, however, is difficult to define in relation to modernity except through a cross-cutting analysis of his entire oeuvre.

Pareto's (1935) insight is that the more the sense of modernity grows, the more the incompatibility between desire and reason increases: the individual is faced with highly frustrating situations, a condition that brings us back to the relevance of the Pareto theory based on the distinction between *logical and non-logical actions*.

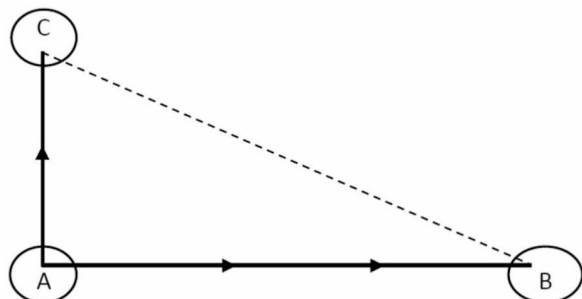
Starting from the assumption that "Every social phenomenon may be considered under two aspects: as it is in reality, and as it presents itself to the mind of this or that human being. The first aspect we shall call *objective*, the second *subjective*" (Pareto, 1935, I, § 148, p. 76): the *objective dimension* is to be understood as the results that are actually achieved, while the *subjective dimension* is to be understood as the results that social actors intend to achieve. Pareto bases his theory of social action on this assumption, distinguishing logical actions from non-logical actions, in the



former there is a coincidence between the objective dimension and the subjective dimension (means logically appropriate to ends), in the latter this coincidence does not exist. In the social dynamic, for Pareto, logical actions are present in a restricted number, since they really only comprise actions that are founded on scientifically-based logical knowledge, all other actions are non-logical. It should be noted that to a superficial analysis the opposite would appear to be the case, this error is induced by the fact that social actors always tend to attribute a logicity (as defined by Pareto) to all actions, i.e. they tend to make their actions appear as the logical result of a set of ideas. Operationally, in the Paretian system of actions, rationality (with the obvious exclusion of “logical actions”) does not constitute a substantive element of action, but intervenes to support the different ways in which individuals and groups clothe with an appearance of logic what in reality does not possess any. Reason in this case operates as a process of rationalisation that offers an apparently logical intellectual system of justifications (Maniscalco, 1994). Pareto, therefore, recognises the decisive importance of non-rational or irrational elements within social dynamics, even if he ends up bringing them, in line with his positivist approach, within the horizon of a systemic model.

From the subjective point of view, all actions present themselves as logical actions, in the sense that all actions respond to a logic of action determined according to a certain end; whereas from the objective point of view, only a small number of actions can be considered as such. The prevalence of the non-logical corresponds to a prevalence of desires and elements that could be described as instinctive: the belief, therefore, that social order and stability are founded on reason and that therefore desires and instincts are subordinate to rules seems to be undermined, in essence this is not the case since it is the state, according to Pareto, that must assume the function of intermediary between individual desires and collective interests. In short, non-logical actions come from a certain psychic state that does not only manifest itself in actions, but also through the expression of feelings. In other words, although there is an interrelationship (Fig. 1), there is no relationship between feelings and mental states (A), manifest acts (B), and theories and beliefs (C), but rather a direct relationship between the mental state (A), the manifest acts (B), and the theories that derive from and underlie the manifest acts (C). Non-logical actions and theories are directly observable, whereas psychic and mental states are only deducible, which is why Pareto’s attention is turned to the conduct that actually results from psychic

**Fig. 1** Relationship between psychic state, action, and theories  
Source: Elaboration of authors





states and in particular to the theories and belief systems through which non-logical action is rationalised and justified.

Pareto's theory seems to bring new life to his contemporary sociology through the possibility of interpreting social action through feelings. The obstinate search for the logical within the non-logical is at the basis of the originality of Pareto's work: he asks himself whether individuals govern society by basing their actions on the psychic state and above all on beliefs, and if this is the case then why not try to identify the processes that make such governance effective?

There exists, for Pareto, a logic of sentiments that differs from scientific reason, this conceptualisation is presented with ambivalent and contradictory characters that do not, however, make this description unclear or ineffective, on the contrary, these characters increase their significance with respect to actual behaviour: beyond modernity considered as a stabilising source of the social, yet harnessed within a rational model, that extra-rational part from which the values, norms and beliefs of individuals originate is re-evaluated, elements that enable the latter to balance the relationship between community interests and individual desires.

In his *Trattato di sociologia generale* [*The Mind and Society*] Pareto (1935) goes into great detail in describing a series of examples of studies of theories that enable him to arrive at the assertion that at the basis of many theories there are non-logical actions that present two groups of elements a little variable and rather residual part of the phenomena that represent the intermediaries between the feelings of individuals that we are not given to know directly and belief systems, and actions that can be known and analysed (*residuals*), on the other hand a very variable component that is represented by all those elements that individuals use to rationalise and thus, attribute that semblance of logicity, entirely illusory, to actions (*derivations*). Pareto's theory of *residuals* not only has value in itself, but for the scholar it represented the instrument through which to explain many social phenomena such as collective movements. Residuals, in fact, are the foundation of the equilibrium model through which he sought to represent the whole of social relations. What is also particularly significant in the path he adopts when dealing with derivations is the continuous search for the process dynamics of reality and situations that the individual experiences as real. *Derivations*, on the other hand, constitute the element of rationalisation of actions by the individuals who carry them out: they offer individuals a seemingly logical system of justifications while also facilitating intersubjective communication both in a positive sense (consensus) and in a negative sense (conflict). They do not only constitute the process of rationalising the system of actions, but are also and above all the expression of the imagination of men that is substantiated in the construction of representations of reality.

Derivations are, therefore, a kind of interaction between the logical and the non-logical, and their change, which depends mainly on socio-historical conditions, influences the dynamics of residues either by preventing their manifestation or by giving space to the expression of different forms. Derivations, through their function of giving logicity to what is in fact non-logical, on the one hand identify and justify the motives for action, and on the other give vent to man's need to reason; the latter aspect is thus not only borne by experimental logic, but also by pseudo-experimental arguments that present themselves in different forms.

The criticism that can be levelled at Pareto is undoubtedly that he overlooked all the cultural aspects that form a fundamental part of the experience of human beings. The emphasis placed on residuals, i.e. the constant component, as the foundation of actions does not seem to us to be justifiable, rather the reading we propose of derivations (the modifiable component) as social representations can be a way of re-evaluating those neglected cultural aspects that precisely because they are related to the socio-historical contextual situation are in fact the elements that promote actions and at the same time justify them. The conjugation of the objective dimension and the subjective dimension seems to be able to take place precisely through derivations - cultural manifestations such as representations - and not through residues, even when the two dimensions appear to be in contrast: derivations follow the same dynamics as representations, they are constructed and strengthened through their diffusion, which takes place through the work of men, going on to found what is common feeling.

Pareto must, therefore, be credited with being the first to state that in social reality the non-logical component (derivations) will always be present, even if he did not give it its proper place within his theory of social equilibrium: this proposal to reread the derivations as social representations, instead of basing the explanation on the ends of action shifts the focus to the meanings and meaning that is attributed to the action by those who copy it and by those who undergo it, a process that permeates the daily lives of human beings and that will be used by Weber (1968) in his theory of social action. Derivations can therefore, outline a guiding guideline for the analysis of social reality by placing the meaning attributed to actions and not utility at the centre.

### **Idealism's Opposition to Sociology and the "Gini Coefficient"**

If Pareto, considered Italian by Italy (his father was Italian) but disputed by the French, is to be credited with opening up new perspectives in the study of the action of the individual, it should not be forgotten that, at least for the latter part of his life, the Fascist totalitarianism that so influenced the development of the social sciences was taking hold. In fact, this period saw the strong opposition of the idealists (Croce and Gentile) to sociology, opposition that stemmed from their opposition to positivism and hence also the lack of legitimisation of the discipline at university level. Croce and Gentile's rejection of the scientific character of sociology was motivated by their belief in this discipline's use of principles and methods proper to positivism. Underlying this motivation is the two idealists' denial of the character of knowledge to the natural sciences because the abstractions and generalisations typical of these disciplines are for Croce instrumental pseudo-concepts, for Gentile they are imperfect theoretical expressions. For both, in any case, they are incompatible with the individualising empathy of judgement that is the only way to generate knowledge.

And knowledge cannot be reduced to the abstract schemes of sociological classifications and typologies. Concepts such as social organism or collective spirit are regarded as positivist abstractions that generalise consciousness and social facts as objective phenomena. The profound opposition to the consideration of sociology as a science lies in their particular conception of the social, from which the famous controversy between the two idealists also arose. Croce never recognised the collective

and the social as the founding essence of values, and indeed defined the concept of collectivity as a simple abstraction that arose from the positivist need for the Jacobin-derived category of the universal to legitimise the supremacy of quantity over quality. Croce's vehement opposition resulted in a total epistemological negation of sociology. Gentile also maintained a critical stance towards sociology, despite his profound argumentative divergences from Croce. Gentile, in fact, did not separate state and civil society, and denied any form of dependence and psychic influence of man on the social, affirming the full freedom of the creative act. According to Gentile, sociology had constructed its concept of sociality on the basis of the Hegelian view, but had then transformed it through the use of naturalistic concepts. The discipline's lack of valid methodologies and research objects strongly influenced its legitimacy.

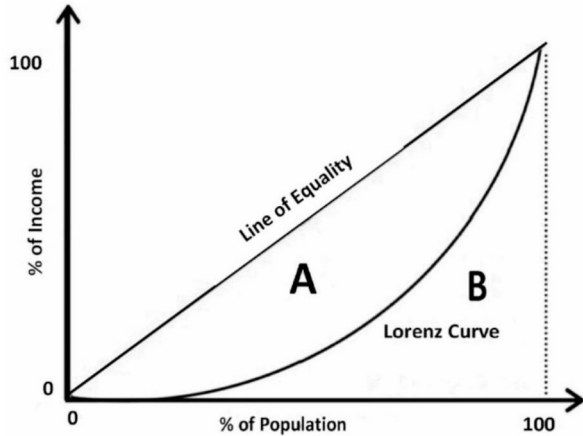
With the advent of fascism, the condition of the social sciences certainly did not improve. Some scholars such as Pareto and Gini enjoyed the favour of the regime, while others (see Gino Germani) who declared themselves anti-fascists had to leave Italy. Despite the favours enjoyed by Pareto and Gini, however, over the years they have undergone ups and downs, and Gini in particular is still considered a "fascist" today, and this despite his scientific merits relating to the construction of the measure of inequality of a distribution that will take the name "Gini Coefficient".

Corrado Gini was president of the *Consiglio Superiore di Statistica* [Superior Council of Statistics] and the *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica-Istat* [National Institute of Statistics] (1926–1931), founder of the *Istituto di Statistica* [Institute of Statistics] at the University of Padua (1913) and founder and dean of the Faculty of Statistical, Demographic and Actuarial Sciences at the University of Rome (1936). Recognised as the "jewel in the crown" of Italian statistics, however, one can hardly separate Gini's contribution to the development of statistical methods from his ideological adherence to Fascism. In fact, in his sociological/demographic and statistical studies a firm neo-organicist conception useful to support the regime's domestic and foreign policy is underlined.

Gini's (1930) analyses of the economic and sociological causes of the conflict are identified as the basis of the arguments in support of fascist colonialism (the so-called, cyclical theory of nations). Isolating his scientific contribution from his biographical and ideological events, Gini's theoretical originality and international prestige are undoubtedly linked to the theory of the statistical method and in particular to the statistical measurement of the distribution (in 1935 he also gave lectures at Harvard although contested by students as reported in *The Boston Globe* on 13 February). The "Gini Coefficient" remains the most widely used and accepted indicator in science to quantify levels of income and wealth inequality. The mathematical explanation of the coefficient is based on the Lorenz curve of the distribution (created in 1905 by Max Lorenz to represent income inequality) and is related to the area between the line of perfect equality and the Lorenz curve. Graphically (Fig. 2), the curve represents the cumulative percentage of population relative to the cumulative percentage of wealth.

Under hypothetical conditions of income equality,  $x\%$  of the population would have  $x\%$  of the wealth and thus the Lorenz curve would be a  $45^\circ$  straight line. If there is inequality, the Lorenz curve will pass below the  $45^\circ$  line, because in the presence of any inequality in income, in an order from poorest to richest, the poorest people will account for a smaller percentage of the total wealth than the population. The Gini

**Fig. 2** Graphic representation of the “Gini Coefficient”  
Source: Elaboration of authors



coefficient is defined as the ratio of the area between the line of perfect equality and the Lorenz curve to the total area below the line of perfect equality. Mathematically, the Gini coefficient is based on the distance between the Lorenz Curve and the 45° line that would represent a perfectly equal income distribution. The Lorenz Curve defines two areas (A and B) and, therefore, the greater inequality will correspond to an increase in area A and a decrease in area B; in the case of perfect equality, area A disappears while in the case of total inequality, area B disappears. In this sense, the Gini coefficient represents the ratio:  $A/(A+B)$ , i.e.  $2 \cdot A$  (since  $A+B=0.5$ ). Low values of the coefficient indicate a fairly homogeneous distribution, with the value 0 corresponding to the purely equal distribution, while high values of the coefficient indicate a more unequal distribution, with the value 1 corresponding to the highest concentration.

The reconstruction of Corrado Gini’s scientific activity, beyond the links between political ideology and socio-demographic theories, offers interesting insights into the importance of his studies at an international level and their usefulness in redefining the disciplinary boundaries between economics and statistics. Gini’s claim to the autonomy of statistics is based on the creation of a more abstract empirical method than Pareto’s income distribution curve. In fact, Gini’s concentration ratio also finds current proposals for applicability in fields outside the economic sciences, such as sociological studies on education. While from a statistical point of view, the contribution of this Italian scholar mainly concerns the variability and association between statistical variables, his teaching undoubtedly extends uniquely to current research topics in theoretical and applied economic statistics, sociology statistics, biology, demography, and new frontiers of the human and social sciences.

### **Gino Germani from Anti-Fascism in Italy to Anti-Populism in Latin America**

Gino Germani was born and died in Rome (1911–1979) after having lived political and intellectual experiences around the world (Europe, Latin America and the United States) and remains to this day one of the best known Italian sociologists of the 20th century (Germani, 2004, 2015). Even as a teenager during his years in Italy,

he was a fervent anti-fascist, “These experiences deeply marked his life and became a permanent reference point for his concern about the nature and characteristics of authoritarianism, as well as its repercussions on the formation of the individual and collective personality. Very early on, as a university student, he joined the anti-fascist movement. In 1930, he was caught with other comrades distributing leaflets calling for demonstrations against unemployment and taxes. At the age of 19, he was imprisoned for more than a year - between 1930 and 1931 - on the island of Ponza or ‘Del Confine’” (Rawicz, 2012, p. 237). In 1934, after his father’s death, he was forced, due to his being an anti-fascist, to leave Italy and take refuge in Argentina, specifically Buenos Aires. Here, after not a few difficulties, he attended and completed a degree course in philosophy, having abandoned that of economics, and embarked on what would later become his brilliant academic career, assuming a fundamental and prominent role within the Argentine and Latin American social sciences landscape (Mangone, 2017, 2019a). His aversion to Fascism and all other forms of totalitarianism would continue to be displayed even after his exile in Latin America (Germani, 1978; Mangone, 2018): “The idea of ‘secularisation’ allows us to distinguish between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ authoritarianism. This distinction is relevant because it implies different forms of authoritarian ‘solutions’ to the crisis of democracy. In different areas of activity, or in subsystems where the ‘prescriptive’ type of action predominates, behaviour will follow internalised patterns for which alternative or different responses are unthinkable. Authoritarianism, therefore, is implicit in the culture and is not seen as such by the subjects, for whom the patterns of behaviour they follow in their actions are beyond doubt or discussion” (Germani, 2010, p. 666). In the years between the two coups d’état (1955–1966), he became one of the protagonists and advocates of the great effort made to implement university reform in Argentina in a climate of great uncertainty. During his lectures, Gino Germani never abandoned the idea that sociology could be a “cognitive tool” that went beyond common sense, free of prejudice and ideologies, and at the same time tried to warn against the Latin American academic tradition that considered students as “ignorant slaves” to the “creative work of the professor”. In the mid-1950s, the mere fact of proposing society as an object of investigation, in which the study of the past ceased to be an exclusively politico-military affair and became the history of society as a whole, constituted a revolutionary concept for Argentina at the time. In fact, the central role that sociology could take on as an instrument of democratisation and improvement of the quality of life of citizens was emphasised. This represented a threat in a highly ideologised culture with authoritarian and populist traditions. It does not appear accidental that one of the first scholars to try to define the concept of “populism” was Germani himself who, basing his analysis on the structural-functionalist approach (Barrera, 2011), tried to define it starting from the changes in the social structure that had taken place particularly in Argentina following the strong immigration from Europe (Germani, 1955) and the consequent process of modernisation (Germani, 1969). In summary, Germani’s idea of populism is as follows: populism tends to deny any identification or classification within the right/left dichotomy. Populism generally includes opposite components, such as the demand for equal political rights and the universal participation of ordinary people, but coupled with a form of authoritarianism often under charismatic leadership. It also includes socialist demands (or at least the demand for

social justice), a vigorous defence of small property, strong nationalist components and a denial of the importance of class. This is accompanied by the assertion of the rights of ordinary people as opposed to privileged interest groups, generally seen as enemies of the people and the nation (Germani, 1978). Each of these elements may be more or less pronounced depending on social and cultural conditions, but they are all present in most populist movements.

From this attempt at a definition, it can be very well understood how a myriad of characteristics and political and social aspects are inherent in this concept that certainly do not make an exhaustive definition possible - as Germani himself argues - leaving this concept with a basic polysemy that often makes it ambiguous and at times paradoxical, as well as lacking in its attributive function, as argued by Laclau (2005). In Latin America, in particular, the so-called populist movements have been characterised in a multifaceted manner and above all by the fact of having as their objective the organisation of large social aggregations in favour of the construction of great projects, led in most cases by charismatic leaders - for example, Perón in Argentina, Cárdenas in Mexico, Vargas in Brazil, and Chávez in Venezuela (the latter preceded at the beginning of the 20th century by Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez) - who played a central role in the construction of these projects. If these are the characteristics common to all the forms of populism that have developed in Latin America, all that remains is to address the question of political participation that is inevitably associated with the concept of democracy (Mény & Surel, 2000). In this regard, one agrees with Taguieff (2002) when he states that, if populism embodies an ideological corruption of democracy, it expresses at the same time a need for participatory democracy or active citizenship that the well-tempered functional system of representative democracy is unable to satisfy. Emblematic in this direction is Gino Germani's (1962) analysis of the strong flows of foreign immigration in Argentina after the 1929 crisis, which gave rise to the "*nuevo tipo cultural*" [new cultural type]. This large group of immigrants, which Argentina's culture was unable to integrate, and the movements within the country that mainly involved the movement of part of the population from agrarian areas to the cities. These, taken together, gave rise to a new social actor, which, however, lacked political socialisation (Germani, 1955). This new social actor inserted too quickly into industrial processes had been strongly marked by the repressive policies of previous governments and was a victim of the limits of the functioning of democracy, all of which gave rise to a new actor that, not finding institutional channels to express its demands (new, because the subject was new), was "available" to be manipulated by an emerging political leader.

Despite Germani's efforts, the longed-for renewal of the social sciences had not taken hold. Germani's manner unaccustomed to diplomacy, as the anti-fascist he was, was accused by right-wing academics of being "communist", hence subversive, and the same applied to his "scientific sociology", which was considered revolutionary. What worried the rulers in fact was Germani's own research and in particular the *Estructura social de la Argentina* [Argentina's social structure] (Germani, 1955) which was the first detailed study on social groups and classes in Argentina, demonstrating the concrete application of the empirical method for the analysis of contemporary Argentine society, which was still dominated by philosophical and ideological interpretations. Following the coup d'état of 1966, after ten years of incessant sci-

entific work and negotiation, he was forced - along with many other protagonists of the renewal of the social sciences - to leave Argentina. Thus vanished the dream of a sociology of use to the Argentine people. A few years later his critics (González, 2000) would claim that he had “founded a discipline within a cultural vacuum”, Latin American sociology had to wait until the 21st Congress of the *Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología-ALAS* [Latin American Sociological Association] held in 1997 at the Universidad de São Paulo in Brazil to realise that the discipline had to be at the service of humanity. This legacy of Gino Germani, is still today the challenge that Latin American sociologists continue to pursue by exercising their free and autonomous discipline, acquiring symbolic power to describe and interpret social facts, the world, and explain history in order to contribute to the change of Latin American solidarities and utopias that create quite a few conflicts even in today’s society.

### **The Post-War Period Between “Economic Miracle”, Workers’ Struggles and Radical Changes**

Starting in the 1930s, the development of the social sciences in the United States experienced a strong push towards development that led to the emergence of a kind of supremacy of North American thought in sociology. This “Americanisation” of the social sciences (Manicas, 1987), although it saw its first expression in the “Chicago School”, undoubtedly has as its absolute protagonist the functionalism of Parsons, which had a great influence in Europe, especially after the Second World War (Gerhardt, 1996). This “Americanisation” of the social sciences was not, however, intended to be a reduction of social problems in exclusively “scientific” terms, but its interests tended to develop in different fields, giving rise both to a tradition of field research that developed in urban and ecological studies with the “Chicago School”, and to Parsons’ functionalism. And if the former, starting from the transformations of urban systems and the spatial dimension as a result of the processes of industrialisation and modernisation, seeks, through the evolutionist conception of society, to address the relationship between environment and society, or between nature and culture, with functionalism, on the other hand, the whole explains the parts. Parsons (1937), for example, was one of the researchers who devoted all his studies to the development of a model of analysis suitable for all kinds of collectivities, arguing that the actions of individuals are carried out on the basis of demands from society (a social system that determines both individual and collective actions). Individuals therefore act according to rules learnt and internalised through the process of primary and secondary socialisation. The higher the individual’s degree of integration into the social system, the more he or she contributes to its maintenance. In this sense, the individual’s action is functionally positive; otherwise, the action will be dysfunctional. The American sociologist solves the classical problem of order by means of a categorical scheme valid for every social system: the role played by the individual assumes the function of mediating between the personality structure and the institutional structure. American influence, of course, has not been lacking in Italy; indeed, it has perhaps been one of the countries that has most embraced Parsonsian func-



tionalism “without hesitation”, forgetting other theories and other equally important American sociologists such as, for example, Sorokin (Mangone, 2023) or not applying at all the idea of interdisciplinarity that was also strongly present in the Department of Social Relation directed by Parsons at Harvard (Nichols, 1998) by focusing on the search for scientific and institutional legitimacy after the negative climate of Fascism and the immediate post-war period. In this part of this contribution, an attempt will be made to highlight how and in which direction Italian sociology evolved after the end of the Second World War (Cossu & Bortolini, 2017).

Italian sociology has kept pace with the socio-cultural and political evolution of society, including its crises. And if the immediate post-war period can be considered the moment of the “rebirth” of sociology coinciding with the “economic miracle”, it cannot be said that the following years were all “rosy” considering the workers’ struggles and the years of terrorism (Mangone, 2001) starting from the second half of the 1970s. The political and cultural context in which sociology evolved is well described and summarised in Diana Pinto’s interesting reconstruction: “Postwar Italian sociology, by following closely the political and social vicissitudes of the Italian setting, also provides a running metaphor of changing western assumptions and hopes with respect to society and its industrial transformations. Indeed sociology’s very consolidation as a discipline, themes it treated, the intellectual stances it took, the models it espoused, merit closer analysis because they shed light on the following key issues vital concern for international social science as a whole: the perpetual dilemma between ‘ideology’ and ‘sociology’; the conflict between social action and critical intellectual engagement on the one hand and professionalism on other; the link between social analysis, the left in general and marxism particular; the ambiguous relationship to power as well as the problem ‘relevant’ analysis” (Pinto, 1981, p. 671). On the other hand, a few years ago, in one of the many periods of crisis in Italian sociology (honestly, we could say that Italian sociology is in a state of perennial crisis!), Pierpaolo Donati (Cavalli et al., 2010) argued that Italian sociology was subject to strong politicisation. In fact, the major political parties of the time shared in the rebirth of the discipline - there were three political orientations (one Marxist, one liberal-socialist and one Catholic) - which also marked its development, making it a rather weak discipline. Diana Pinto also maintains that post-war Italian sociology can best be analysed in terms of five major political-intellectual phases (Pinto, 1981), each with its own specific sociological approaches and themes, but all closely linked to the broader political and social context (*Sociology’s postwar origins*, 1950–1955; *Sociology’s cultural centrality*, 1956–1960; *Sociology’s professional consolidation*, 1960–1965; *Sociology’s crisis between reformism and radical change*, 1966–1972; and, finally, *Sociology’s national consolidation*, 1972–1980). Borrowing these phases, we will try to detail each of them not only by describing the simple evolution of the development of Italian sociology but also through studies and research carried out in those years.

The first important element of the “rebirth” of sociology in the very early post-war period - as mentioned in the introduction - is undoubtedly the resumption of the publication of the journal *Quaderni di Sociologia* by Franco Ferrarotti with co-founder Nicola Abbagnano who, in turn, had already founded (with Norberto Bobbio, and Ludovico Geymonat) the “multidisciplinary Centro di studi metodologici,

which soon gained a central position in the Italian epistemological debate” (Cossu & Bortolini, 2017, p. 16). This was the moment in which two very different environments intellectually (Milan and Turin) gave rise to the rebirth of the discipline given also the decline of Crocian idealism that had been so opposed to the development of sociology in Italy. This sort of axis between the two cities (the first with the Catholic University, the second with the public university) would later be recognised by all sociology scholars in Italy as that “componente”<sup>3</sup> [component] which took the name “MiTo” (from the initials of the two cities: Mi for Milan and To for Torino [Turin]) after the Roman sociologist Gianni Statera thus defined the supremacy of these two areas in the early 1980s. This was also the time when the name of Franco Ferrarotti (then very young, now the doyen of Italian sociology) began to emerge, and it was he - at the insistence of the publisher Einaudi - who translated Veblen’s work, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), receiving not a little criticism from Benedetto Croce. Ferrarotti, without a shadow of a doubt, can be considered the father of Italian sociology, and is the figure with whom the process of institutionalising the discipline began. Ferrarotti’s is a sociology applied to the world of industry; in fact, he will be the personal advisor to the entrepreneur Adriano Olivetti (Radogna, 1960; Fava, 2020) - an enlightened entrepreneur for his way of conceiving the factory as a community and founder of the Community Movement (Panizzi, 2017) - and will also be among the first to travel to the United States to study American methods and theories. He himself recounts in an essay how he met Sorokin in Boston and Chicago and with whom he had not so much in common but some fundamental things in common: “In my three meetings with Sorokin, relative heated discussions, there were two nodal points on which our agreement was almost total: (a) the nature of industrialised, technically advanced society; (b) the crisis and thus the inability of sociology to pose as the instrument of self-hearing of society and its questions due to what Sorokin called ‘quantophreny’” (Ferrarotti, 2022, p. 31). Ferrarotti considered it a difficult feat to establish sociology given the Italian cultural climate (between idealism and Marxism), which also bore the aftermath of fascism, so much so that he wrote many years later that the “prefascist sociology had been taught for years as course material but not officially by university chairs in faculties of jurisprudence and medicine, in the guise, somewhat reductively, of criminology... It is too easy to attribute the weakening and the subsequent fall and disappearance of the social sciences, especially sociology, to the “fascist dictatorship”. In prefascist sociology there were weakness of method and substance. These prevented effective resistance to Croce’s ‘clarification’, which was in many ways ignorant and unaware of modern scientific procedure. Certainly fascism, with its autarky in the cultural sphere as well, favored that critique” (Ferrarotti, 1994, pp. 484–485). Despite this, with his innovative ideas and a great desire to support and disseminate them, in 1961 he became the first sociology professor in Italy, winning the competition for a professorship the year before. These were the years of industrial development, which he (an advisor to Adriano Olivetti) also conceived as community development with an idea of progress that did not imply abrupt breaks in

<sup>3</sup> In Italy, the word “*componente*” is generally used to refer to groups of sociologists who identify themselves nationally, and it is preferred to use the English term “component” to translate it, although other scholars have used the term “camp” (Freschi & Santoro, 2010).

equilibrium - the *Movimento di Comunità* [Community Movement] (for which he also became a Member of Parliament of the Italian Republic in 1959–1963) was already interested in socio-systemic equilibrium. He dealt with sociology as a science but did not disdain to deal with the world of labour, so much so that he published the book, *Il dilemma dei sindacati americani* [The dilemma of American unions] (Ferrarotti, 1954), which was to see a second edition a few years later in an expanded version with the title *Sindacato e potere negli Stati Uniti d'America* [Union and power in the United States of America] (Ferrarotti, 1961), in which he examined and discussed the positions of the major American scholars who had dealt with this theme (i.e., Laski, Lindblom and Perlman). The interest in American trade unionism and industrial relations is justified by the belief that industrial environments have common structural characteristics in different geographical locations (America, the Soviet Union, or Europe) which, according to the Italian sociologists, should allow “to discover the working class behind the ‘proletariat’” (Pinto, 1981, p. 676). It is clear, therefore, that the first phase of Italian sociology is characterised by an almost exclusive interest in industrial sociology also because these had no connection with the university (as seen above, the first chair is assigned to Ferrarotti in 1961) and developed, therefore, in an industrial context in the wake of the experience of the “Olivetti” industrial complex in Ivrea in the North of Italy in the Piedmont region (Fava, 2020) with a focus on the analysis of the working class in real working contexts. We can undoubtedly state that the post-war origins of Italian sociology conditioned both its priorities and prospects not only for the 1950s but also for those to come, and drew the supremacy of the North in the affirmation of sociology also because this was perhaps the most industrialised territory in Italy. The “economic miracle” was beginning to take place and Italian society was undergoing many changes on several dimensions (social, cultural, and political) that needed to be studied.

Despite this need, the studies of the second half of the 1950s lacked application to the changing realities, it seemed as if the construction of conceptual frameworks were disconnected from the needs of field research: “This relative lack of connection between theory and research led to a double-edged situation: pluralism with regard to styles of enquiry, but also opposition between an idealized value-free sociology and the engagement of social scientists, a distinction which has re-emerged periodically in the trajectory of Italian sociology, sometimes as a way of denouncing its increasingly academic character [...], they were signs of increasing tension between an effort to achieve disciplinary legitimacy, which came from other sectors of intellectual production, and a desire to forge close links between sociological practice and aspirations to grassroots social reform” (Cossu & Bortolini, 2017, p. 18). These were the years in which the first field research began in both the agricultural South and the industrial North, both by Italians - among others, we recall Dolci (1956) with his studies in Sicily - and by American scholars. In the latter case we recall *The Moral Basis of a Background Society*<sup>4</sup> (Banfield, 1958), for decades considered a classic of sociological studies carried out in Italy but which has too often received distorted

<sup>4</sup> Banfield’s field research lasted nine months and covered the Chiaromonte area in the Basilicata region (in the book, the village is referred to by the invented name of “Montegrano”), which showed very marked traits of backwardness in economic and social terms (described in the book).

readings, especially with regard to the concept of “amoral familism”<sup>5</sup>. This does not shift the focus of research, which continues to be on industrialism and technological innovations, and poverty and the rural and peasant world are only considered because of the strong emigration from Southern Italy to the North without bothering to go and observe the effects of this process in the territories of the South. Italian sociology does not record the total “rebirth” even though, according to Renato Treves, there were three precise reasons for it. He himself had illustrated them at the 4th Congress of the International Sociological Association, held in Stresa (in the Piedmont region) in 1959, “The reasons for this renaissance of sociological studies are easy to see, in my opinion, and some of them can be briefly stated here. In the first place, with the collapse of Fascism and the return to democratic institutions, Italy recovered the freedom of choice and the privilege of criticism and discussion which are necessary to scientific work in any field, and especially so in sociology. [...] Apart from the return to constitutional freedom and the revival of interest in knowledge of concrete social problems and conditions, a renaissance of sociological studies in Italy was also favoured by the decline of Idealism [...] One last fact to point out among the factors responsible for the recent re-awakening of sociological studies in Italy, is the intensification and strengthening of the ties between Italy and the United States of America, ties that are not only scientific and cultural, but also economic and political, and the consequent general interest aroused in the theories and techniques of American sociology” (Treves, 1959, p. 87–88). Italian sociology, at the end of the 1950s, was still outside the academic context with a focus exclusively on the North (the only research concerning the South, as seen above, had been conducted by an American) with the mission to remain “neutral” by trying to break down the preconceptions of both left-wing and right-wing ideological categories through the provision of concrete knowledge.

The 1960s saw a strong push towards the institutionalisation of the discipline and its entry into the academic world, which coincided with the development of a new orientation based on the central role played by the Catholic Church in Italy and its active participation in the cultural mobilisation of the Cold War, giving rise to “religious sociology” of which one of the major exponents was Roberto Cipriani, a pupil of Franco Ferrarotti with whom he wrote *Sociologia del fenomeno religioso* [Sociology of the Religious Phenomenon] (Cipriani & Ferrarotti, 1974). The Istituto Luigi Sturzo was also born, which “provided a venue for Catholic social scientists, an intellectual space which favored the organizational and intellectual autonomy of Catholic sociologists very early on in the process and which in the long term resulted in the rise of a distinctly Catholic camp in Italian sociology” (Cossu & Bortolini, 2017, p. 21). This orientation will find its greatest expression at the Catholic University of Milan and at the University of Bologna around the figure of Achille Ardigò. Starting from the latter’s pioneering commitment, the “Gruppo SPE” (Sociologia per la Persona [Sociology for the person]) was founded in 1995 on the shared values of the

<sup>5</sup> Banfield understands this concept as the inability to act: “This inability to concert activity beyond the immediate family arises from an ethos – that of ‘amoral familism’ – which has been produced by three factors acting in combination: a high death rate, certain land tenure conditions, and the absence of the institution of the extended family” (1958, p. 10).

primacy of the person and his freedom in social life - to this day this group constitutes one of the political components of the Italian academy. In the first half of the 1960s, therefore, Italian sociology was consolidated in what can be described as an environment of the “golden years” as the political, intellectual and economic elites all reacted favourably to social science research, welcoming at least in theory its contributions to the modernisation of Italian society. The scientific vocation of sociology in the Italian context, however as Pinto (1981) states, will prove to be limited to a few reformist and modernist avant-gardes. The decade of the 1960s constitutes, however, the period in which sociology stabilises and institutionalises even if this will only happen in the academic world which becomes the cultural context of production for the first generation of sociologists and the preferred career path for second generation sociologists who were part of a school (often founded through loyalty and personal affiliation, around one of the elders of the discipline, rather than scientific knowledge and analytical skills). This process of institutionalisation at the beginning of the 1970s led to the professional crisis of Italian sociology, in fact, with the congress held in Turin in 1971 on the subject of “Ricerca sociologica e ruolo del sociologo” [Sociological research and the role of the sociologist] in which sociologists of the first and second generation (the third generation was still made up of students) confronted each other on the positioning of sociology in the Italian socio-cultural context and whether it had found a true professional content and valid methods of analysis and research.

This debate, which is based on the search for the usefulness of sociology or sociological knowledge, is not typical of Italy, but from the 1970s onwards it developed mainly in the Anglo-American world - starting with Gouldner's text, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970) - and in France (Boudon, 1971). In Italy the discussion - from the writer's point of view - has never been tackled in an organic manner despite the Turin conference. This is because the debate has followed the development that the discipline itself has had in the country (Sgritta, 2013), furthermore, by its very nature, Italian sociology and in particular academic sociology has not been and is not transdisciplinary (Piaget, 1972) and above all it did not and does not have a holistic view of society. It certainly does not tend towards the valorisation of theoretical innovations, rather it tends towards the preservation of so-called traditional and mainstream approaches. It remains closed, even now, within the limits of the different areas into which the discipline is divided (for reasons of autonomy, or more banally for problems connected to the evaluation and careers of individuals) with the result of obtaining only self-referentiality and a partial or total absence of redefinition of paradigms, methodologies and methods. Beyond this still-present problem, Italian sociology was to consolidate intellectually in the 1970s by attempting to take into account not only the industrial and northern sectors but also all the other sectors and above all the other geographical areas of Italy that were considered equally important components of the overall structure of Italian society and not only from an economic point of view. The crisis of the 1970s undermined what had always been the position of “supremacy” of the North with respect to the rest of Italy, attempting to pave the way for a true national sociology - it should be noted that even today the “supremacy” of the North is still very present in some sectors and areas of Italian life and also in the academic world if we consider that the large universities in the North (almost always) receive more state funding than those in the South of

Italy. The Italian society of those years was also traversed by workers' struggles, who in fact (together with the peasants) were the class that had least benefited from the benefits of the "economic miracle" and were traversed by a general malaise that produced both student revolts and the most tragic terrorist attacks (right-wing and left-wing) culminating in May 1978 with the assassination of the then Prime Minister Aldo Moro. The latter's murder definitively marked the Italian society that was heading into the 1980s undergoing profound and radical changes.

## Neoliberalism and University Reforms Towards the Third Millennium

In sociology in Italy at the beginning of the 1980s, while Italian society was turning into the society of "yuppies"<sup>6</sup>, there continued to be fragmentation within the community of sociologists. Three groups emerged that would characterise the developments and crises of Italian sociology in the years to come: the group "MiTo" there continued to be fragmentation within the community of sociologists. Three groups emerged that were to characterise the developments and crises of Italian sociology in the years to come: the secular and northern "MiTo" group (Milan and Turin), the Catholic-oriented group with the "friends of Ardigò" group (Milan Catholic and Bologna) that later became the "Gruppo SPe" (as mentioned above), and the "Third" group (Third Component) that was to be built around the figure of Franco Ferrarotti and later Gianni Statera at the Faculty of Statistics in Rome. The fragmentary nature of Italian sociology is thus defined, and this definition is still valid today. Moreover, as can be seen, the presence of groups from the South of Italy is completely absent, confirming the supremacy of the North (and the centre with the constitution of the "Third Component"). The sociologists of southern Italy a, depending on their scientific interest but above all on their desire to make a faster career, have always attached themselves to one of these three groups which - as already mentioned - still exist today within the Italian academic world and manage its policies.

While this fragmentariness was taking place, two important things were happening: the reform of the university system in 1980 that cancelled the old professorships, to insert a "hierarchy" system that considered full and associate professors, as well as the figure of the *ricercatore* [lecturer] destined at first only for research activity and not for teaching. Access to the roles of Italian universities was therefore through an open competition and, the same reform had also instituted doctoral courses. This reform was the prelude to the "drift" towards the "false neoliberal meritocracy"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A term derived from the acronym "YUP" (Young Urban Professional) of US origin, describing the category of young recent graduates attracted by capitalism and success, perfectly recognisable by their elegant and fashionable style and lovers of wealth and the good life.

<sup>7</sup> Here, it is good to clarify the idea of "false neoliberal meritocracy", which is linked to the good-natured neoliberalism narrative of meritocracy or the "rhetoric of merit declined as a system" (Sorice, 2022, p. 113). As is well known, the term "meritocracy" was first used by Young (1958) in a satirical manner and with a strong negative connotation and constitutes the legitimisation of social differences. It originates with the (obviously false) promise of equal opportunities granted to individuals who start from different positions. On the other hand, the very measurement of merit takes place through indicators that are not always transparent and often constructed by individuals who have financial interests or are in situations of conflict of interest. And an obvious place where this is realised is the Italian university as it creates a



that was to be registered with the subsequent reforms of the 1990s and in particular that of 2010. In spite of this, the reform of 1980 had led to the possibility of a general renewal and the recomposition of fragmentations, so much so that in 1982 the Associazione Italiana di Sociologia (AIS) [Italian Sociological Association] was established, which in the following year voted Achille Ardigò as its first president. The 1980s were also prolific in studies and research but they were also “*the end of history for Italian sociology*” (Cossu & Bortolino 2017, p. 112). The reform, in fact, had produced as a perverse effect that of the routinisation of activities and Italian sociology did not appear and in fact was not a single coherent whole. There were, as mentioned, some interesting theoretical studies such as those by Alberoni (1984a, b) also translated into English on social movements and falling in love. Acquaviva’s (1983) and Gallino’s (1987) sociobiology studies often took them far from the general interests of Italian sociologists. These were also the years in which Ardigò (1980, 1983) rediscovered local and associative life-worlds as an alternative to Luhmann’s systemic logic, but the work of Crespi (1992) from which studies on everyday life, culture and cultural processes would later emerge was very important. For his part, Alberto Melucci (a pupil of Alain Touraine in France), was the first to try to create conceptual tools to analyse collective action on the basis of the three dimensions of solidarity, conflict and violation of the compatibility limits of the system of social relations (Melucci, 1996a, b). And, finally, we can mention Pierpaolo Donati (a pupil of Achille Ardigò) who defined the theoretical framework of “relational sociology” in which he seeks to overcome - reworking Parsons’ AGIL scheme<sup>8</sup>, by which he is particularly influenced - the dualism of action and systems theories through the idea that “society is relation” (Donati, 1983).

Although several elements of theoretical innovation are present, in the light of what has just been described, it cannot be said that there exists a social theory that can be recognised as being of “Italian origin” and this is undoubtedly one of the problems that Italian sociology has not been able to tackle in the course of its development.

The further reforms of the 1990s, apart from the establishment of a ministry specifically dedicated to university and scientific research, record the strengthening of the three “components” of Italian sociology (MiTo, SPe and Third component) since - in particular the 1998 reform - it introduces the local logic of competitions:

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“compulsory competition that is induced in others the moment a researcher begins to behave as an actor maximising his own interests and career chances, driven by incentives bestowed on a strictly meritocratic basis” (Borrelli, 2023, p. 41).

<sup>8</sup> The AGIL scheme is part of Parsons’ general theory of action (1937, 1951; Parsons & Shils, 1951; Parsons, Bales & Shils, 1953) and is also known as the four functional imperatives scheme. Parsons, first formulated the AGIL scheme in 1953 (Parsons, Bales & Shils, 1953) based on the idea that all persistent social systems have certain needs that must be satisfied and he uses the scheme to explain these mechanisms; the AGIL scheme attempts to explain how that social system satisfies these needs and maintains order both with respect to internal social organisation and externally. The AGIL scheme takes its name from the acronym of the initial letters of the four functional imperatives - each of which corresponds to a subsystem of actions (economic, political, social, and cultural). They are the following: (1) the adaptive (A) function, which enables the adaptation of a system to its environment; (2) the goal-attainment (G) function, which indicates how a system defines and achieves its goals; (3) the integrative (I) function, which enables the regulation of the system; and, finally, (4) the latency (L) or “pattern maintenance” function, which enables the creation and development of motivation for action on the basis of the dimension of culture.



“The reform devised a new system of local selection procedures which decentralized recruitment processes and gave individual universities almost absolute power to select new personnel and promote lecturers and associate professors. The mechanism initially involved the proclamation of three winners per procedure: The local candidate would be granted the post, whereas two other scholars would wait for their home institutions to ‘call for’ a post or a promotion. For sociologists, the ‘iron law of three’ could then be applied to each local selection and ensure that each camp would be granted one winner of its own” (Cossu & Bortolino, 2017, p. 118). This perverse system did not favour the development of theoretical frameworks and innovative studies, since those who wanted to make a career had to adapt, in a certain way, to the mainstream idea of the component they belonged to, “flattening” themselves to it. This model in its reproduction meant that brilliant young sociologists (usually autonomous with respect to the political logics of the components) were marginalised in the academic world to the extent that they left Italy, preferring to emigrate in order to pursue their own reflections in a totally free manner and free from the logic of competitions.

In 2010 what is known in Italy as the “Gelmini Reform” from the name of the Minister (Mariastella Gelmini) who had proposed it, was passed off as the reform that was supposed to favour “merit” (in the neo-liberal sense) for entry into university roles. This reform introduces two major innovations compared to the previous ones: the *Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione dell’Università e della Ricerca* (ANVUR) [Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes] with the task of evaluating the performance of universities in terms of study courses but also research activities, and the much-criticised *Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale* (ASN) [National Scientific Qualification] to enter the competition for full and associate professors. Despite the strong criticism and debate before and after the approval of this latest reform (approved with the favourable opinion of the main representative bodies of the university world, the *Comitato Universitario Nazionale* (CUN) [National University Committee] and *Conferenza Rettori Università Italiane* (CRUI) [Conference of Italian University Rectors], the debate erupted bitterly at the end of 2012 with the first results of the *Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale* [National Scientific Qualification], as only 23% of those who had applied were qualified to participate in future local competitions for full and associate professor posts. This had happened because the main evaluation criteria used included intensity (the mass of scientific production) and internationalisation (publication in foreign journals, teaching and research activities abroad), thus paradoxically favouring those who had decided to leave Italian sociology by going abroad and penalising those who, remaining in Italy, had to struggle with the very scarce financial resources made available for research and, in the case of tenured researchers, to devote a lot of time to the many hours of teaching to make up for the lack of full and associate professors (incidentally, teaching is not an evaluation criterion for the acquisition of the *Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale*).

The effects of all this did not only reverberate on the careers of individual scholars, but perhaps the perverse effect, to quote Boudon (1982), was that it “overwhelmed” the Italian Association of Sociology - guilty perhaps of not having sufficiently protected the category of sociologists and contributing for this reason to both the “murder” and the “suicide” of academic sociologists in Italy - which saw two important

“pieces” lost: in 2015, all sociologists of economics (which includes sociologists of labour and organisation) left the national association, constituting the *Società italiana di sociologia economica* (SISEC) [Italian Society of Economic Sociology], while in 2017, the *Società Scientifica Italiana. Sociologia, Cultura, Comunicazione* (SISCC) [Italian Scientific Society. Sociology, Culture, Communication] was born, which brings together almost all full professors of sociology of culture and communication.

With the appearance on the global scene of the pandemic due to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the critical debate on the condition of sociologists and sociology in Italy seems to have died down. One thing is certain in post-pandemic society in Italy, sociologists continue to be fragmented and this condition reinforces the marginal role of the discipline and of sociologists themselves both in the academic world where other human and social disciplines have occupied the positions of analysis previously occupied by sociology and in the political sphere of planning and programming of interventions.

## Problems and Prospects of Italian Sociology

From the development of Italian sociology that has just been described emerges a discipline that has struggled to establish itself institutionally and in the academic world, presenting not a few problems of fragmentation within it (see the constitution of the various “components” that have managed the development of the discipline politically rather than scientifically).

Sociologist Acquaviva (1966) as early as the second half of the last century outlined a number of problems that gripped Italian sociology and which can be summarised as follows: the inability to concretely address the problems that were emerging from a society undergoing profound transformation and to rely on field research from which it was possible to draw scientifically valid and culturally significant conclusions; a general sterility due to the fact that it had falsely covered itself with the veil of “neutrality” in order to avoid what in other works has been defined with the terminology “getting one’s hands dirty” (Mangone, 2009a, 2019b) the difficulty of combining science and personal experience (or “personal equation”, as Ferrarotti calls) of the sociologist within Italian society; and, finally, the difficulty of dealing with a new range of problems that were emerging in Italian society, which also represented the crossroads between the two worlds of Europe (West and East). These problems have actually dragged on to the present day. Italian sociologists, it can be said, did not have the courage to address the contradictions inherent within them, with the result that there are not many names of Italian sociologists on the international scene of the discipline.

In Italy, there has basically never been sufficient reflection on two very important aspects that should become central to the debate on “sociology around sociology”. This has led to its “eclipsing” and/or slowing down in its affirmation even as a public response to the problems of Italian society: the conjugation between theory and empirics, and the object of study of sociology. With regard to these problems, which are not unique to Italy, a very critical position has been expressed by Goldthorpe (1997) who spoke of a “scandal of sociology” (which is often applied to Italian soci-

ology). This label is justified by the fact that sociology has lagged behind in reaching the standards that other disciplines such as psychology and economics have achieved in integrating theory and empirical research, with the aggravating circumstance that scholars have not even realised the gravity of this situation. In summary, his critique is expressed in these terms: contemporary sociologists are sharply divided regarding the relationship between their two main activities, empirical research and theory. Moreover, they are also divided as to what kind of academic or scientific enterprise sociology is or should be. Finally, there are major differences on how to interpret and respond to this situation of intellectual division or, rather, disciplinary fragmentation (Goldthorpe, 2000). There is no doubt that theory, empirics and operations must necessarily be integrated in a functional manner so that the researcher's activity can be projected in a direction of positive social change and not remain divided like watertight compartments: in fact, the first dimension represents the partial knowledge tool that provides the conceptual guidelines and the hypothesis to be verified empirically; the second represents the feedback of the research that provides, on the one hand, the general indications to the operational area (third dimension), which replicates through criteria of expendability and applicability, and, on the other hand, to the theoretical area, the problematic priorities to be answered. The future prospect for the development of Italian sociology must be oriented towards a position that no longer allows for the theory-empirical contraposition, but must realise a continuum of interdependencies that goes from theory to operativity and spendability through research-action. Research, therefore, becomes indispensable for the acquisition of a knowledge that must "get its hands dirty" to read individual and/or social phenomena in order to translate theoretical premises into concrete acts. In the reality of changes in Italian society, the sociologist's work must combine the system (objective dimension) with individuals (subjective dimension). This leads to a series of problems that can only be overcome if in the definition of the sociologist's work "knowledge is transferred and not ignored".

With regard to the second aspect (the object of study of sociology) it should be noted that, apart from the research method adopted, since the last decades of the 20th century some classical objects of study of sociology have been "abandoned": an emblematic example is suicide, which after the numerous analyses that followed one another until the beginning of the 1980s of the last century (Mangone, 2009b), starting with Durkheim's (2005) best-known one, there were no scholars who theorised on the phenomenon of suicide (in Italy in the post-pandemic phase there was an increase in suicides especially among young people, but there are no studies on the subject) or studies that developed in forms other than the simple "commentary" of official statistical data. Research by Italian sociologists has turned more towards phenomena of a macro-social nature (see globalisation processes) than towards phenomena of a micro- or meso-social nature. In this perspective, we agree with Gallino (2007) when he states that the emergence of a "world society" requires the development of a "world sociology" that does not, however, only deal with globalisation processes, but for this to be realised it is necessary for sociology to revise its theoretical foundations as well as its operational methods. And this is what Italian sociology should do in this third millennium to be able to (finally) overcome its fragmentation

and also to achieve a public position that can respond to the problems of Italian society, which is in constant flux.

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