

HOW ROBERT M. MACIVER WAS FORGOTTEN: COLUMBIA AND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY IN A NEW LIGHT, 1929–1950

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It is necessary to reevaluate the role of the Department of Sociology at Columbia University in the years 1929–1950. The impact of Robert M. MacIver, who played a significant role in the exchange between European and American thinkers, is examined, as well as his marginalization. It is argued that in the 1930s it was characteristic that the sociologists in the centers in Chicago and Columbia exchanged their disciplinary functions. It was MacIver's Columbia that took on the role of advocate of humanistic sociology and Mead's and Cooley's heritage. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

THE FORGOTTEN CHAPTER OF THE INTERWAR SOCIOLOGY

The time has come for a reevaluation of the role of the Department of Sociology at Columbia University in the development of sociology and the social sciences in the years 1929–1950. With that reevaluation and an examination of the impact of Robert Morrison MacIver (1882–1970),¹ a new configuration in the history of sociological thinking during those two decades emerges.

It is commonly believed that American sociology was being shaped until the 1930s by the Chicago School, and after 1940 by functionalism, represented at Columbia by Robert K. Merton and at Harvard by Talcott Parsons (Gans, 1992, pp. 701–710; Wiley, 1979, pp. 47, 50). Indeed, it is customary now to suggest that during the interwar period, the discipline lay relatively dormant (Alexander, 1982, p. XV) or that it was merely a prologue to the era of Parsons (Turner & Turner, 1990, p. 73).

Neither of these portraits, however, is well grounded in historical fact. Indeed, it is often argued that the bases for sociology were laid before World War I and that Parsons “was the only true peer of the classical tradition” (Alexander, 1982, p. XV). The 1930s are depicted as a period of “disarray” in which only Parsons's works directed sociology along the classical path (Shils, 1961, p. 146). Because such flawed accounts have been extensively quoted (Reynolds, 1970, pp. 287–290), it is difficult to change the conventional picture of non-theoretical American sociology (Tiryakian, 1971, p. 228) in the 1930s.

While it is not my major focus to search for the reason for the neglect of the Columbia

1. Robert M. MacIver was born in Stornoway, Scotland. His education was in classics at the University of Edinburgh and at Oxford University. He lectured in political science and sociology at Aberdeen University (1907–1915). At the University of Toronto (1915–1927) he was professor and head of the Department of Political Science. After heading the department of economics and sociology at Barnard College (1927–1929), he was professor of political philosophy and sociology at Columbia University (1929–1950).

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Department of Sociology, it is not inappropriate to suggest some factors that may have distorted the history of interwar sociology to this point. One may be an expression of the bias in an intellectual orientation toward intellectual priority (Kuklick, 1980, p. 9). It is imminent in the development of functionalism as well as in the attempts of adversaries of functionalism, that is, symbolic interactionism, to recognize functionalism as the exclusive successor to the Chicago School. Another factor may be ideas about American exceptionalism in the social sciences, which led to neglect of European influences. Parsons declared in 1950, “Yet I like to think of sociology as in some sense peculiarly an American discipline, or at least an American opportunity. There is no doubt that we have the leadership now” (Parsons, 1950, p. 15). The studies devoted to refugee scholars in the United States from the beginning of the 1930s until the end of the war do not correct this distorted history of ideas (Coser, 1984) in which European contributions to American social science and culture were marginalized.

The marginalization affected especially three scholars “foreign born, who did much of their distinguished work in the United States” (Nisbet, 1970, p. 40) — MacIver, Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958), and Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968). All three in their day gained formal recognition and institutional influence as presidents of the American Sociological Society (MacIver in 1940, Znaniecki in 1954, and Sorokin in 1964) (Rhodes, 1981, p. 79). It is obviously a simplification to say that these outstanding sociologists of the interwar period were isolated individuals, with a small number of students, and that therefore they could not exert a more decisive influence (Mullins, 1973, p. 45). The work of MacIver, the leader of one of the most important sociological faculties in the United States² and the chairman of commissions on economic and political affairs of the highest importance,³ remains today largely without recognition. This also applies to Znaniecki and Sorokin. Indeed, in 1981, Robert Bierstedt, following Ellsworth Faris, complained that Parsons kept silent about MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin (Bierstedt, 1981, p. 294; Faris, 1953, pp. 103–106).

MacIver, who authored the once-widely-read textbook, *Society* (1931a), as well as an authoritative entry on sociology in the first encyclopedia of the social sciences (MacIver, 1934), played a significant role in nurturing the contacts among various sociological communities and in developing international collaboration and exchange between European and American thinkers. It is therefore altogether appropriate to assess anew the influence of the second generation of classical modern sociologists of whom MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin were at the forefront.

MacIver was in fact the main representative of theory in American sociology (Eisenstadt & Curlelau, 1976, p. 146). This theory was different from functionalism, which was developed later, and was decisively antiscientistic. MacIver published much. He wrote well and was an original thinker. After 1950, however, he was rarely quoted. Few studies (Alpert, 1954; Bierstedt, 1980, pp. 81–92; 1981, pp. 243–297; Bramson, 1970; Timasheff, 1967, pp. 252–256) stress his “linking role” (Nisbet, 1970, p. 41) between European and American sociology, his original version of meaningful sociology (Becker & Barnes, 1952, pp. 975ff; Boskoff, 1957, p. 17), his talent to classify and systematize, his criticism of neopositivist methodology, and his study on the principles of democratic institutions (Alpert, 1968, pp. 513–515). Inattention to his intellectual heritage therefore deserves closer examination.

2. “Dean of American sociologists” — as expressed by Robert K. Merton in his letter of 10 April 1953 to John G. Freedom, President of the Public Law and Government Club of Columbia University, honoring MacIver. From Robert K. Merton files rendered accessible to the author, for which she is indebted.

3. He was chairman of the Commission on the Economic Reconstruction. See *Economic Reconstruction. Report of the Columbia University Commission* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934). MacIver was also chairman of the American Academic Freedom Committee (1952); see Diamond, 1992, pp. 219ff.

After World War II, a considerable part of the tradition of sociological thought was ignored or suppressed. The combination of the structural and functional theories as well as the quantitative research proposed by Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld at MacIver's Columbia and by Parsons and Samuel A. Stouffer at Harvard "offered itself as the summing up of all that was valuable from the legacy of the classical European sociologists" (Joas, 1993, p. 14).

Yet the interwar period was in fact a time of systematization of sociological knowledge and, simultaneously, a time when the discipline was institutionalized (Eisenstadt & Curlelau, 1976, p. 137). Scholars of that period, through their effort of analysis and systematization, ensured the development of sociology from the seeds of the thoughts of the noted creators of the field: August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Ludwik Gumplowicz, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber. Earle Eubank's attempt to establish a consensus by traveling to all the important centers of sociological thought, summarized in *The Concepts of Sociology* (Eubank, 1932; Käsler, 1991), the history of sociological thought by Howard Becker and Harry E. Barnes (1938), and, above all, the first encyclopedia of the social sciences published by Edwin R. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (1930), together reflected the systematizing approach to sociology of members of this generation.⁴ This generation produced new classics, including not only those of MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin but also those of Georges Gurwitsch and Leopold von Wiese (1876–1920), all of whom emphasized a general, systematic sociology. They clearly manifested the original character of the assumptions of their respective theories, and yet aimed at a complete grasp of contemporary societies, not at doctrinal "isms" in partial competing paradigms.

This creative generation of the interwar and war period has, as I have suggested, been forgotten, as if the time of the great development of sociology started just when Parsons declared it (Parsons, 1950, pp. 3–16). Their oblivion resulted from many factors, among which one should emphasize the weakening of European sociology due to war and to the general Americanization of sociology. In the Cold War period and the era of Joseph R. McCarthy, the "closing of the American mind" to external influences and even the expunging of traces of foreign intellectual traditions began (Diamond, 1992).⁵ What was obscured was the impact of a generation of intellectual migration, which in the 1930s included hundreds of renowned scholars (Fleming & Bailyn, 1969; Neumann, 1953, p. 26). Lost were both the intellectual traditions and unusual mutual inspiration, especially in the peculiar *cosmopolis* of New York and the campuses of the East Coast: Harvard, Yale, Princeton. Moreover, even apart from the earlier exiles from Bolshevik Russia — like Sorokin — already before the wave of refugees from Nazi Germany, many social thinkers had voluntarily migrated to the United States. At Columbia University, for instance, there were the German Franz Boas, the Scot MacIver, and Theodore Abel, who arrived from Poland in 1923.

The aim of this paper is to uncover the contribution of the Columbia circle of sociologists and of MacIver in particular to the interpretive sociological theorizing.

First, the competition between Columbia and Chicago sociologists will be discussed. The argument will be presented that the importance of the Columbia Department of Sociology in the 1930s is related to the fact that Columbia scholars took on the role of the most vigorous advocates of interpretive sociology, played earlier by the Chicagoans.

Next, basic assumptions of MacIver's interpretive sociology, parallel to those of the Chicago interactionists from Mead to Blumer, will be expounded.

4. MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin were rightly presented by Nicholas Timasheff as the greatest contemporary authors of convergent theories of systematic sociology (Timasheff, 1967, pp. 230–263).

5. It is Arthur Vidich who turned my attention to this factor and to the role of scientific politics in the United States in the 1950s; see Diamond, 1992.

Finally, the methodological debate of advocates of positivist and antipositivist programs for sociology will be summarized. MacIver's program for meaningful sociology will be pinpointed along with the fact that MacIver with his polemics preceded Blumer in the debate from an interactional stance against excessive empiricism, handy variable analysis, and abstract functionalism.

COMPETITION BETWEEN THE CHICAGO SCHOOL AND COLUMBIA

Albion Small was the first to identify, in 1903, the special importance of the Chicago center for the development of sociology (Small, 1971, p. 16). But even Small could not deny the importance of Columbia. He noted that the Columbia School of Political Science had since 1880 occupied a leading position in the development of the social sciences, and the general sociology of Franklin H. Giddings played a prominent role. Columbia and Chicago were therefore not only dominant in American sociology (Shils, 1948, p. 7) but competed against each other (Becker & Barnes, 1952, p. 975; Small, 1916, pp. 721–864). The rivalry between Small and Giddings was further continued in the debate when William F. Ogburn was appointed at Chicago and MacIver become Giddings's successor at Columbia. Both Chicago's and Columbia's sociological centers were initially connected equally with the Progressive social reform movement — at Chicago around Hull House and the feminist Jane Addams, and at Columbia around The League for Political Education set up by the women's movement in 1894 under the leadership of Mary Putnam Jacobi. The League in 1925 set up a discussion center, the Town Hall Club.⁶ The first lecture sponsored by the League was given by Giddings on "Some Duties of the Citizen."⁷

In standard accounts, the role of Columbia in the interwar period is today either obscure or misrepresented, and the role of Chicago is oversimplified. Only Chicago is now known as a symbolic interactionist center where sociologists formulated a theory based on the voluntaristic conception of the individual and a situational approach to the emerging social organization. In fact the relations between Chicago and Columbia were more complex. The record shows that the criticism of operationalism and excessive quantification of research was not made exclusively in Chicago (Kuklick, 1973).

A more realistic picture of the Chicago center and one doing more justice to Columbia are both necessary to convey an accurate impression of the development of sociological thought in that period. A brief outline of the history of sociology at Columbia University — especially with the help of the autobiographic recollections of MacIver (1968) and his collaborator Charles H. Page (1982), along with Abel's diaries⁸ — demands that we depart from a one-sided view of Chicago sociology, which was actually characterized by a great variety of research styles, and not only by the social pragmatism of George H. Mead, which was presumed to be translated into the theory of symbolic interactionism (Bulmer, 1984, p. XIV). One may distinguish, up to 1950, as many as four stages in the development of the Chicago center: the first generation (1892–1918) with William I. Thomas at the lead; the second period in the 1920s, led by Robert E. Park; the third period in the 1930s, characterized by research

6. Town Hall Series IS, folder 9, Town Hall Archives, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

7. A letter (1895) of the League for Political Education to Prof. F. Giddings. Franklin Giddings File, Columbia Central Files.

8. T. Abel. *Journal of Thoughts and Events*. Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University.

with the use of statistical methods under Ogburn; and, finally, the postwar period, marked by Blumer's symbolic interactionism (Smith, 1988).

At Columbia, too, four periods can be discerned, parallel to those at the Chicago center: the first — with the appointment of Giddings, from 1892 until 1915 — the period of pioneer vitality; the second period of increasing crisis rooted in the conflict between Giddings and the scholars with a Jewish identity, Franz Boas and Seligman (Bulmer, 1984, p. 215); the third period, from 1929 till the outbreak of the World War II — the period of revitalization under MacIver; and, finally, the fourth period, from 1940 on, the period of rising paradigm crisis and MacIver's opposition to Robert Lynd's praxism and to Lazarsfeld's quantitative sociology, supported tacitly by Merton. The latter's functionalism was to be a codeterminant of the next period to come.

Comparing the Department of Sociology at Columbia with that at Chicago,⁹ in which, as is commonly thought, sociology took shape in America in a final, definitive form provides a much more nuanced history. In 1892 in Chicago a joint Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology was established in the newly opened university. In Columbia's School of Political Science, however, the earlier "Department of Sociology," composed of two professors, already existed. Small and Charles R. Henderson lectured in sociology at Chicago, and at Columbia Richmond Mayo-Smith did so beginning in 1880 and Giddings beginning in 1892. Two years later Giddings obtained the first title and chair of professor of sociology in the United States (Lipset, 1955, 285).¹⁰ After that inception of the teaching of sociology, Columbia was known as the seat of statistical sociology. From 1880 onward, Mayo-Smith taught statistics and sociology, and he published a handbook on these subjects (Mayo-Smith, 1895–1899). Giddings added to this approach with his book *Inductive Sociology* (1901), claiming later that the statistical method is constitutive for sociology, though it required a psychological interpretation of data. George Lundberg, Giddings's disciple, continued these traditions at Columbia in the period described by Abel (House, 1936, pp. 372–373). We have no convincing arguments that the staff at Columbia was exclusively in favor of statistical sociology and that at Chicago in favor of *case studies*, especially after William F. Ogburn moved from Columbia to Chicago in 1927.

In fact, the sociological tradition at Columbia University from the beginning had a much richer and more complex character. There was, above all, and in contrast to Chicago, a strong theoretical element in the sociological milieu at Columbia. It was Giddings who initiated it, inspiring doctoral dissertations on the works of the great European sociologists (Davis, 1909; Gehlke, 1915; Noyes & Silver, 1933). Giddings himself was interested in sociological theory and relied first of all on Adam Smith's conception of moral sentiments when explaining the relation between the individual and the social group. He took up research into the subjective aspects of social phenomena and may also be viewed as a precursor of symbolic interactionism as much as Chicago scholars (Boskoff, 1957, pp. 17f).

Abel's dissertation, *Systematic Sociology in Germany* (1929b), can serve as an example of the theoretical studies at Columbia.¹¹ It was devoted to German sociologists and gained substantial acclaim. As Giddings said, "It is a long while since any book on sociology has

9. This fame is being successfully supported and revitalized; see Fine, 1995.

10. F. H. Giddings file, Columbian Collection, Low Memorial Library, Columbia University; *Memorial on the Death of Prof. Giddings*, Columbia Central Files, New York, Columbia University Archives. Also see Lipset, 1955, p. 285.

11. Abel's M.A. thesis prepared at Columbia University bears the character of *case studies*, which were supposed to be characteristic of the Chicago research (Abel, 1929a, pp. 113–243).

come from the press so important, so explanatory and so pleasure-giving” (Noyes & Silver, 1933, p. 7). Yet, at least according to MacIver (1968, p. 105), as a result of poor management by the authoritarian Giddings, the Department of Sociology at Columbia lost its leading role, and its reputation was ruined. The weakening of the department toward the end of Giddings’s career was combined with difficulties brought about by the decade of economic depression. Accordingly, the number of students and doctorates decreased (Page, 1982, p. 16). When Giddings retired in 1928, the position of chair was taken by Samuel McCune Lindsay. It was a critical period when the further fate of sociology at Columbia trembled in the balance. Lindsay was convinced of the importance of Columbia for the further development of this discipline, as being “in [. . .] position of strategical importance.”¹² He invited MacIver, who was working at Barnard College, to come to Columbia proper. Before that, MacIver was recommended by Giddings to the president of Columbia, Nicholas Murray Butler. This recommendation stressed his research on peaceful cooperation and value studies as an inductive ethology in the spirit of John Stuart Mill.¹³ On 4 November 1929, MacIver was appointed Lieber Professor of Political Philosophy and Sociology. The faculty, however, was still endangered, but MacIver was supported by John Dewey and Wesley Mitchell.¹⁴ MacIver made an effort to revitalize the department, using the traditional reputation and the unique laboratory of New York City.¹⁵ He also exploited relations with anthropology, psychology, and research on education that had developed at Columbia. Therefore MacIver suggested employing Robert Lynd, the famous author of *Middletown*,¹⁶ counting on the continuation of this kind of interpretative, qualitative research on local communities.

MacIver was then a sociologist highly esteemed in Europe for his work *Community* (1917). He was also a political theorist, philosopher, and poet. His ambition was to participate in influencing the direction of the development of sociology, and indeed he had been doing it for half a century (Bramson, 1970, p. 1). In the Department of Sociology MacIver collaborated closely with Abel, Edmund de S. Brunner, Bernhard J. Stern, and Willard W. Waller (Page, 1982, p. 47). Lynd, who came in 1931, turned out to be an opponent of theory and soon took the lead in an opposition hostile to MacIver. The debate about the shape of sociology and shape of the department in 1940 took the form of a conflict whether to employ Lazarsfeld, supported by Lynd, or Merton, favored by MacIver. The conflict was settled by employing both of them in 1941, but MacIver resigned as head of department in 1944.¹⁷ Lazarsfeld and Merton were on friendly terms and collaborated closely. After MacIver had retired in 1950, they gave Columbia sociology a definite empiricist and functional bias (Vidich & Lyman, 1985, p. 297). A similar role was played by Parsons and Stouffer at Harvard, where all traces of Sorokin were wiped out.

To MacIver’s “camp” belonged Znaniecki, who visited Columbia University in the years 1931–1933 and 1939–1940. In 1936–1940, the department was also visited by Alexander von Schelting, a specialist in Weber’s theory, and George A. Lundberg (Bierstedt, 1980, p. 85), who belonged to the opposition. The faculty, thanks to the variety of perspectives and

12. S. McCune Lindsay, *Supplemental Memorandum on the Budget Proposal of the Department of Social Science 1929–1930*, February 1929, Dean’s Office Correspondence, Barnard Archives, Columbia University, p. 6.

13. Giddings, letter to Nicholas Murray Butler, 6 December 1928, Columbia Central Files.

14. Interview with MacIver, Columbia Oral History Collection, p. 11.

15. “Columbia University is in a peculiarly favored position for the development of the subject owing to the unique sociological laboratory in the midst of which it is placed — New York City.” R.M. MacIver’s letter to president Nicholas M. Butler, 29 October 1930, Columbia Central Files, p. 2.

16. MacIver’s Memorandum, 1930, Columbia Central Files.

17. When he won recognition for his achievements as the president of the American Sociological Society in 1940.

interests of the scholars who worked there, was in no way similar to that of the period when it had been dominated by Giddings. It became an arena of intense discussion, with a fierce contention between MacIver and Lynd as well as Lundberg and Lazarsfeld. The central issues that put MacIver in opposition to those scholars were issues of intellectual vocation, rather than merely practical application of sociology, and the humanistic program instead of the standardized form of sociology.

The humanistic milieu of sociologists gathered around MacIver had natural advocates in the Department of Anthropology, where, apart from Boas, Ruth Benedict, Ralph Linton, and Abram Kardiner worked (Moore, 1955, pp. 147–160). Abel's diary sheds light on the collaboration and exchange of opinion between sociologists and anthropologists. It describes interactions with Edward Sapir, Alfred Kroeber, Margaret Mead, and Bronisław Malinowski, with whom MacIver and Znaniecki were friends. Abel also shows the relationship between the Department of Sociology at Columbia University and the New School for Social Research, set up in 1919 in an act of protest against the control over the intellectual freedom by the administration of Columbia University.

In 1933, Johnson established within the framework of the New School the so-called University in Exile. Among its interdisciplinary Faculty of the Political and Social Sciences one could find the Weberian sociologists Hans Speier, Albert Salomon, and Carl Mayer. MacIver and his colleagues collaborated closely with the New School. He himself was later to become its president (1963–1966) (Rutkoff & Scott, 1986).

Similarly, Abel's diary reports on the development of contacts of MacIver's circle with another emigrant milieu, the so-called critical Frankfurt School to which Max Horkheimer, Leo Loewenthal, Franz Neumann, Friedrich Pollock, Karl Wittfogel, and Herbert Marcuse belonged. It was largely thanks to MacIver that members of the critical school found a seat for their Institute for Social Research within Columbia University, not far from the sociologists' Fayerweather Hall, in the internal conflicts of which this emigrant milieu did not want to involve themselves. The representatives of the Frankfurt School were politically close to the critic of the consumer society, Lynd. Scientifically, as theoreticians, however, they sided with MacIver and were not willing to come into contact with the empiricist Lazarsfeld (Jay, 1973, pp. 115ff, 219).¹⁸

In the period that is of interest here, the 1930s, it was characteristic of the centers in Chicago and Columbia to change their roles or functions. Mead died in 1931. Dewey, connected with the Progressive movement of the citizens' reform, no longer lectured at Chicago but at Columbia University since 1904. The Columbia graduate, Ogburn, had been working at Chicago since 1928, where in contrast with Thomas's and Park's earlier research tied to civic institutions, a pattern of expertise for the federal government was being shaped (Smith, 1988, p. 8). Znaniecki, who had been working at Poznań University in Poland after 1918, and who had collaborated in Chicago with Thomas on *The Polish Peasant*, was, as noted earlier, sometimes connected with Columbia in the 1930s as visiting professor at MacIver's Department of Sociology. Altogether, it was the Columbia of the 1930s that took on the role of advocate of humanistic sociology — in effect Mead's and Charles Cooley's heritage. The Columbia group sought to continue their relationship with European sociology and above all with the Chicago tradition of civic sociology that concentrated on community, on individual freedoms as opposed to the state's interests. Interactional theory (see below) was developed

18. The conflict gathered momentum especially after MacIver's critical review following the publication of R. Lynd's book (Marxist in character), *Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture* (Princeton: Grove Press, 1939); see R. M. MacIver, 1939b, pp. 496–497.

at Columbia. This theory, after Znaniecki had left Chicago, never matured to such a degree in Herbert Blumer's works as it did in MacIver's and Znaniecki's. It is not true that humanistic Chicago became overshadowed because the importance of Merton and Lazarsfeld at Columbia increased in the 1940s and 1950s (Bulmer, 1984, p. 210). One ought to bear in mind, however, that it was on the Social Science Research Building in Chicago that the following maxim was put in 1929: "When you cannot measure your knowledge is meager and unsatisfactory" (Bulmer, 1984, p. 213). This maxim was borrowed from Lord Kelvin. The Columbia of MacIver was then closer to the Chicago of Mead, Dewey, Veblen, Thomas, and Znaniecki, than to the Chicago of Ogburn and Stouffer. During the two decades of the intellectual history of the Department of Sociology at Columbia University under MacIver, then, two contradictory conceptions of sociology were revealed and set in opposition. The result of this opposition was still reflected in the state of the discipline at the end of the twentieth century.

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF MACIVER'S INTERPRETIVE SOCIOLOGY

The thesis that MacIver belonged to the founders of the symbolic interactionist orientation in particular deserves greater elaboration. Some basic assumptions of MacIver's theorizing show the important affinities.

MacIver's work *Community*,¹⁹ bears the significant subtitle *A Sociological Study Being an Attempt to Set Out the Nature and Fundamental Laws of Social Life*. This study bears the character of a programmatic manifesto. MacIver's social theory developed with further stages that were marked by the publication of *Society* (MacIver, 1937) and *Social Causation* (MacIver, 1964; first published in 1942). Yet his basic assumptions remained intact. They reverberated well with the theses of the Chicago School representatives. MacIver set out from the premise that community is prior to associations and to the state as a kind of association based on contract. This premise determines the specific character in which the object of sociology is defined. It was, according to MacIver, knowledge about everyday life in the community (MacIver, 1917, p. VII). He defined community as an inclusive area of social interactions within which people share the basic conditions of common life (MacIver, 1939a, p. 71). It is then not a community reduced to locality, but extends over the nation, too. Community creates all the other social facts; "it is their matrix, their seed-ground" (MacIver, 1921, p. 80).

MacIver's theory was consequently interactional. By means of interaction he understood the influence of mind upon mind through symbolism, communication by means of language, gestures, and the works of culture (MacIver, 1913, p. 150). Society "consists of beings related to one another" (MacIver, 1914, p. 59). Drawing on Mill and Wilhelm Dilthey, as well as Graham Wallas (1914, p. 235) and Alfred Fouillée (1896, p. 8), MacIver asserted that social relations can never be adequately grasped in terms of quantity. He was firmly convinced that the social sciences would never develop if they were not freed from their submission to the methods and formulas of the natural sciences. The key social phenomenon, as in symbolic interactionism, is the process of defining the situation for which MacIver used the term "dynamic assessment" (1964, pp. 291ff). However, he elaborated this concept much more precisely, showing many aspects of society as symbolic interactions. Converging assessment in which many people undertake separate but similar actions creates distributive social phenom-

19. Robert Park from Chicago wrote a very negative review of this work. Therefore its reception was markedly limited in America, whereas it won great acclaim in Europe. Park evaluated the book: ". . . the whole volume is vague, thin, plausible, and innocuous" (Park, 1917/1918, p. 544). On Park, see Matthews, 1977. Also see Bierstedt, 1980, p. 84.

ena, such as the delinquency rate or the main trend of opinion. The converging assessment of many people in common action creates collective social phenomena. Finally MacIver suggested various definitions and human actions that make up the so-called conjunctural phenomena, of unpredictable results (Larson, 1986, pp. 105–106).

MacIver's interactional theory also included institutionalism. He conceived institutions as relatively stable shared values and as the order of behaviors that resulted from these values. He took both the subjective and the institutional aspects of society as a result of consciously intended relations. Most significantly, he took into account the temporal dimension of events, processes, and duration of objects in social reality (Hałas, 1995, pp. 5–14). MacIver was particularly intrigued by different ways in which society and culture operate in the processes of time: "Society is . . . a becoming, not a being; a process, not a product" (MacIver, 1931a, p. 391). He sought the implications of G. H. Mead's work on time for analysis of activity as dynamic remaking of the present (MacIver, 1964, p. 32). In his study of temporality of social actions he elaborated further Weberian analysis of motives of human actions — "in-order" and "because" motives. MacIver's analysis did not lack any of these aspects.

MacIver's approach to the relation of individual and society appears in summary in his criteria for the development of the individual and of society. He is close to Mead's point of view on the role-taking process of the significant other and the generalized other. The criteria of individual development are the following: the ability to understand the demands of other people in comparison with one's own, the ability to enter contacts with the ever wider community, the ability to enter into ever more complex relations, the autonomy of the individual in these relations, and the sense of responsibility towards others in these relations. The criteria that he set up for the development of society were regard or no regard for personality; presence or absence of arbitrary control (political, religious); variety or uniformity of the members in community; multitude of associations; extensiveness or boundedness of the largest community of which each is a member. These criteria allowed MacIver to distinguish two directions of social processes: retrogression and the development of communal character. The transitional state was stagnation, that is, nonreflexive perception of inherited customs and traditions.

MacIver, with civic concerns similar to those of Mead, Blumer, and other Chicagoans, referred fundamentally to democratic values. MacIver argued against the post-Hegelian idea of subordinating social life to political life. In his theory, community was sovereign. The first principle of democracy was the distinction between the state and community by means of constitutional guarantees and civil laws. The second fundamental principle of democracy was the free operation of conflicting opinions (1931a, p. 71). MacIver thought that only democracy could ensure peace. Sociology at the time of the Second World War faced the necessity of defining the vision of social order (1941, pp. 1–8). MacIver incessantly analyzed (1947, p. 204) a social order that consisted in the participation of all groups in the affairs of community.

THE METHODOLOGICAL DEBATE

Almost no one goes back today to the methodological debate of the 1930s. Those who notice the importance of the debate present it in only a selective way. Likewise the role of Columbia in this area has not been sufficiently examined. It is presented as developing, through Lazarsfeld's research, the use of statistics started at the time of Giddings (Bryant, 1985, p. 149). The controversy between humanist Charles Ellwood and scientist Ogburn stands out. It is not true, however, that the debate was initiated by Ellwood's book *Methods in Sociology* (1933) and ended with Lynd's book *Knowledge for What?* (1939) (Turner & Turner, 1990, p. 65). Instead, the conventional temporal limits could be marked by the pub-

lication of Cooley's book (1930), who distinguished social-dramatic knowledge based on the taking of the role of the other in the process of communication from material-spatial knowledge of the natural sciences, and the publication of Znaniecki's book *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge* (1940). One could also say that the beginning of the debate in the 1930s was the confrontation of the European interpretative sociological theory laid out in Abel's *Systematic Sociology in Germany* (1929b), with Lundberg's positivistic program in *Trends in American Sociology* (Lundberg, Bain, & Anderson, 1929). An unfavorable reviewer of Abel's book stressed the different character of the language of European sociology: "How strange many of them are to current American thinking . . ." (Lasker, 1929, p. 37). Abel presented the tradition of a cultural approach in the sociology developed by MacIver, in which human behavior depends on how agents interpret their situation.

Ogburn in 1929 took a contrary stance in his presidential address to the American Sociological Society. He said that all sociologists should be statisticians, verifying facts; there was no place for sociological theory in scientific sociology and no place for intellectualism (Bryant, 1985, p. 137). One should exclude ethics and values, he said. Ogburn's address evoked harsh criticism. The front rank of the adversaries of the advocates of measurement as the principal sociological method were MacIver, Znaniecki, and Ellwood — the teacher of Blumer.²⁰ The front rank of advocates of scientism in sociology were Ogburn, Lundberg, and Reed Bain, arguing the natural science character of sociology (Bernard & Bernard, 1943, p. 678). The heated debate included, on the one hand, the rhetoric of accusations of the dogma of uniformity of nature and culture (Ellwood, 1935, p. 72) and, on the other, objections of emotionalism, fundamentalism, mysticism, and supernaturalism or magic (Bernard, 1935, p. 65; Catton, 1966, p. XII). It is not justified, therefore, to state that only the disciples of Mead formulated in the 1930s an opposition to behaviorism, saying that meaning and interaction are irreducible to variables (Ross, 1991, p. 428). Before the debate between Blumer and Stouffer the arguments of MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin (Sorokin, 1937–1941, 1943) contained the best insight into the problem. Besides, Blumer in his criticism of *The Polish Peasant* (Blumer, 1939), the work that was marked as the most significant achievement of sociology to date by The Social Science Research Council, took an ambiguous stance towards the qualitative method. MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin clearly formulated the antinaturalistic standpoint that was echoed by Blumer's further polemics (Blumer, 1954, pp. 3–18; 1955, pp. 59–65; 1956, pp. 683–690).

In this debate Columbia, represented by MacIver and his allies,²¹ tended to take the intellectual lead in American sociology. Abel referred to this, writing in his diary that

There is evidence that the fetish of the statistical method is losing its claim — A new trend is in evidence. People are disgusted with the kind of papers presented at the meeting which give facts that are of no interest. They resent the superficiality of the so-called objective approach. Sorokin, once a defender of statistics, now says that it is a magical device and to be classed as such. But MacIver really is the leader of the movement against the present trend which is on the defensive, and there is hope that Columbia will inaugurate the new trend.²²

20. Ellwood is today all but forgotten as an exponent of symbolic interactionism and not belonging to the Chicago School. See Simpson, 1964, p. 56.

21. MacIver aquired W. Waller for the circle of sociologists at Columbia. We can say that the latter was also a symbolic interactionist much forgotten now, for he was not related to the Chicago School. Waller defending sociology against scientism and pointed out that the meaningful configuration of events (*Gestalt*) as the basic type of social phenomena was not reducible to elementary factors; see Waller, 1934, pp. 285–297.

22. Abel, T. *The Journal of Thoughts and Events*, Vol. 1, 30 December 1931.

The divergent epistemological and methodological standpoints in that period were personified by ardent debaters: MacIver (1936, pp. 38–54) and Lundberg (1933, pp. 298–322), who by his attacks made the following quotation from MacIver famous and illustrative of the debate

Fear does not “combine” with a gun to explain a case of manslaughter as wind combines with water to produce a storm at sea. The gun is an instrument of the fear in a sense in which the water is not an instrument of the wind. In social causation that is a *logical* order of relationship between the factors that we do not find in physical causation. There is an essential difference, from the standpoint of causation, between a paper flying before the wind and a man flying from a pursuing crowd. The paper knows no fear and the wind no hate, but without fear and hate the man would not fly nor the crowd pursue We can interpret experience only on the level of experience. Social changes are phenomena of human experience and in that sense *meaningful*. (MacIver, 1937, p. 476–477; Lundberg, 1939a, p. 12)

Opposing the one-sidedness of the statistical method of the analysis of variables, MacIver further pointed out that social situations cannot be reduced into elementary units (MacIver, 1931c, p. 479). The whole of the situation that contains social relations, he said, is the proper unit of analysis. Social relations, like all other objects of culture, depend — as MacIver put it — on “the creative imagination of social being” (1931d, p. 27). Social phenomena, he believed, consist of a non-mechanical, total, consciously upheld system of relationships (1937, p. 476). One should emphasize that MacIver approved of the unity of the scientific method, which develops relations and not isolated facts, and is constituted by the theory initiated by conceptions. He rejected, however, methodological monism, stating that there exist specific methods corresponding to the specific character of the objects of each science. The method of sociology differs from the methods of the natural sciences, for social situations are involved in adjusting, as MacIver wrote, the internal and external system of social reality, in which both are meaningful and, therefore, the interpretation of social phenomena may only be approximate (1931d, p. 34). This was the main point of contention because the positivists discarded “mental” and “inner” aspects of social phenomena, claiming that they could not be expressed in terms of objective data (Lundberg, 1939b, p. 46; Bridgman, 1927).

Lundberg’s polemic aimed against MacIver’s line of argument can be found particularly in his book *Foundations of Sociology* (Lundberg, 1939a, pp. 12–13), in which from the point of view of behavioral psychology he repeated the arguments against using the concept of “consciousness” as a mystical category (Lundberg, 1929, p. 399). Referring to the neopositivism of Vienna he took a stand against MacIver’s conception, postulating an operational definition of human behavior (Lundberg, 1936a, pp. 704–710). The dispute between advocates and opponents of the statistical method in sociology was reflected in Znaniecki’s work, *The Method of Sociology* (1934).²³ This work in turn became an object of attack on the part of Lundberg, who sought to prove that the epistemological problems of humanistic sociology were meaningless (Lundberg, 1936b, pp. 42–43; 1941, p. 357). Both MacIver and Znaniecki adopted views that referred to the non-statistical heritage of the American sociology of Mead and Cooley. Znaniecki’s book is the most perfect methodological study of that time, demonstrating the influence of the *humanistic coefficient* on sociological research (Hałas, 1991, pp. 213–218; 1994, pp. 165–183).

Ernest Nagel, the philosopher of science and an advocate of the neopositivistic school in America who worked at Columbia, joined the sociological debate. One can say that he

23. F. House (1936, pp. 384ff) agreed that it was the most perfect methodological study at that time.

legitimized and sanctioned the victory of the scientist paradigm in sociology in the 1950s, denying any validity to MacIver's argument that causality in social phenomena differs from physical causality due to the "internal" character of social processes (Nagel, 1956, pp. 369–375). For the sake of the unity of science, he rejected any data other than the open behaviors accessible to the senses (Nagel, 1964, pp. 159–175). Abel's paper on *Verstehen*, which gained fame, is also a testimony to and fruit of the dispute in question and of its problems. Abel, under the influence of the neopositivists' arguments, in later years distanced himself from MacIver and Abel's teacher, Znaniecki, allowing understanding only a limited, heuristic role as an application of knowledge validated by personal experience, which cannot serve as verification (Abel, 1948, pp. 211–218).²⁴

Another area of methodological dispute was the question of the theoretical vis-à-vis the practical character of sociology as science. This dispute was most sharply expressed in the conflict between MacIver and Robert Lynd. Under the influence of Marxism, Lynd advocated the unity of theory and praxis (Lynd, 1993, pp. 4–11). The conflict is paradoxical, inasmuch as Lynd obtained his doctor's degree in 1931 only because MacIver recognized the importance of Lynd's analysis of daily life in *Middletown*. This work singled out by MacIver can be treated as a proposed paradigmatic pattern of pursuing sociological research at Columbia. However, Lynd, coming to project an image of sociology as praxis, supported new standardized research methods, although not without stipulations (Lynd, 1939, p. 118). Social science in his view was first of all to serve the transformation of culture, for it was an instrument of coping with problematic areas in society. MacIver severely criticized this thesis, stating clearly that it is not the function of the social sciences to solve practical problems but to build "a body of knowledge, with its own order, its schematization" (MacIver, 1939b, p. 497). The dispute was crowned by Znaniecki's *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge* (1940), the fruit of his lectures at Columbia, which are a polemic against Lynd's lectures at Princeton concerning this matter. Znaniecki pointed out the various social roles of scholars and contrasted thinkers with ideologists who legitimized either conservative or revolutionary tendencies within society.

MacIver's negative review of Lynd's work initiated a crisis at the Department of Sociology at Columbia, and the department broke up (MacIver, 1968, p. 137). Lazarsfeld took on the task of reconstructing the department. His leadership, with the collaboration of Merton from 1945 onward, was no longer in doubt. The emotional character of the dispute over sociology with MacIver may be illustrated by Lazarsfeld's comment, "However, I strongly resent any one who looks at my kind of work as a kind of mechanical collection of questionnaire data."²⁵ He was opposed to MacIver's program of sociology, which favored field research of *community* and sociological theory. Lazarsfeld, in referring to MacIver's handbook of sociology, said, "I feel that the content of a typical textbook on sociology would contain only a small part of the relevant contributions available."²⁶ Beginning in 1945, The Bureau of Applied Social Research, run by Lazarsfeld, became an integral part of the Department of Sociology at Columbia. As Lazarsfeld wrote, from that time on, the conduct of research "under contracts with commercial or other organizations will not be considered inconsistent" (Lazarsfeld, 1969, p. 332), but on the contrary, would become a pattern for

24. Znaniecki firmly criticized Abel's text. Abel himself revised his point of view, returning to the arguments of humanistic sociology. See Abel, 1975, pp. 99–102.

25. Memorandum: Paul F. Lazarsfeld to Robert K. Merton. Re: Departmental Discussion, 6 September 1994, Department of Sociology Files, Columbia University.

26. Ibid.

empirical sociology, since the Department of Sociology at Columbia became a scientific establishment in which scientific forms of thinking and conduct of research gained hegemony (Elias, 1982, p. 54). In 1945, noting long-term methodological controversies, Znaniecki feared a radical break with the hitherto existing sociological tradition: “when a new generation of sociologists gradually takes the place of the present generation, new, as yet unpredictable, tendencies may develop” (Znaniecki, 1945, p. 514). In the same volume, Lundberg renewed the program of positivistic sociology as opiniology (Lundberg, 1945, pp. 504ff). After the war the final change of the paradigm took place (Platt, 1981). In 1950 the future of sociology was already clear, as summed up by Abel who was then also leaving Columbia, after MacIver’s retirement:

Undoubtedly, the influence and power of the Lazarsfeld-Merton team is a reflection of a historical trend. The foundations have been aroused by the current social crisis in favor of plans that will promote social research. The people who had methods to sell got an “in,” and they were tying their promises to the kite of the *American Soldier*. Training of research workers, teamwork on large projects, became a paramount issue. Money began to pose in the direction of those who pushed themselves into or were pushed by the trend.²⁷

CONCLUSIONS

The above attempt to free the history of sociology in the years 1929–1950 from confining it to within the chapters devoted to the Chicago School, to functionalism, and to the methodology of survey research, should be developed further, not only for the sake of faithfulness to history, but also for the sake of the further development of sociology, which can be enriched with a fuller reception of tradition. The 100th anniversary of Columbia School of Sociology passed unnoticed, contrary to the celebrated jubilee of Chicago, and Columbia still awaits an exhaustive monograph. The latter would show a complex heritage, founded on Giddings’s and above all MacIver’s achievements, and not only on the works of the Merton–Lazarsfeld team.

MacIver in line with his program took up the task of “Europeanization” of American sociology, the sociographic bias of which, when he took the strategic position at Columbia, was expressed by the work *Trends in American Sociology*. He stated that sociology is not a “natural science.” Criticizing the one-sided movement towards the quantitative methods and factography, he sought to oppose the tendency in American sociology to abandon theory (Lipset, 1955, p. 293). He brought to mind above all the theories of German sociologists: Ferdinand Toennies, Simmel, Alfred Vierkandt, Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim, Max Weber, as well as Alfred Weber and the philosophers of the cultural sciences — Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert and the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (MacIver, 1931b, pp. 62–91). MacIver brought to American sociology the ideas of the British scholars Leonard T. Hobhouse and Morris Ginsberg. He emphasized particularly the differences between European and American sociologies (MacIver, 1934, pp. 243ff). And yet, one should note the similarity between the conceptions of MacIver and those of Cooley, Thomas, Dewey, Blumer, and Znaniecki (Bramson, 1970, pp. 13–14). In the case of the latter one may speak about a mutual influence. Both MacIver and Znaniecki combined interpretive and normative aspects in conceptualizing social phenomena, as did Sorokin.

The fact that the sociological centers in Chicago and Columbia changed their roles

27. Abel, T. *Journal of Thoughts and Events*, Vol. XI, 17 May 1950.

regarding humanistic sociology at the time of MacIver calls for a more profound analysis. Such an analysis might permit us to salvage the theory of symbolic interactionism from its stagnation, self-imposed through a selective, isolated reading of its genesis. A creative revival of this theory is possible by recalling how the theory connected with the cultural and systematic theories of MacIver, Znaniecki, and Sorokin.

The complex and ambiguous relations of European and American sociologies should be further studied. We should also study the methodological debate of the 1930s that accompanied this change in paradigm. Eventually it must be recognized that the cultural message of the sociologists gathered around MacIver is still valid. They spoke against the threats of the sociotechnical orientation in sociology, well aware of the increasing manipulation of contemporary society. Science became a tool of this manipulation, too. MacIver would emphasize first of all the role of the scholar as an interpreter helping society to free itself from technological and ideological manipulation. During the celebrations of the Columbia Bicentennial he said, "The scholar as interpreter can save us, if we need him, from these dogmas and from the follies and blunders they beget. In this world of intricate technology and warring ideologies, in this world manipulated by ignorant men, he has a greater mission than ever to perform."²⁸

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