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Introduction to the Special Section. At the Margins: Challenges for Sociologists of Education in Southern Europe

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Introduction to the Special Section. At the Margins: Challenges for Sociologists of Education in Southern Europe

Mariagrazia Santagati, Rita Bertozzi, José Beltrán Llavador, Alicia Villar Aguilés

Introduction

The aim of this Special Issue of the Italian Journal of Sociology of Education, published at the same time of the n. 3/2019 of RASE (Revista de Sociología de la educación), is to reflect on Sociology of Education from a Southern European perspective. Undoubtedly, the starting point is the well-consolidated international debate on the so-called “Theories of the South” (Connell, 2007) or “Epistemologies of the South” (Santos, 2007), and the call for a “Global Sociology” (Burawoy, 2016) also in a postcolonial perspective (Bhambra, 2014). These approaches have made visible the need to seek new theoretical and empirical contributions to think about the social realities of the Global South outside the Euro-American area, which as arisen over the last 40 years in response to social movements and to the emergence of different sociological voices all around the world.

We believe it is time to consider whether a Southern analysis of educational problems should be suggested, both at the European level and in each country of the EU, considering the many ‘Souths’ within the ‘Norths’. We would not like to foster North-South divisions inside or outside the scientific community or social life. On the contrary, we propose to discover and widen the possibilities of international dialogue among Sociologists of Education, deconstructing and going beyond this presupposed divide.

Southern Europe, like all regions of the world, is affected by a rapid and intense process of globalization. Additionally, it is not immune to the global crisis and its various and serious implications such as increasing poverty, climate change, the migrants and refugees emergency, democratic deficien-

cy, resurgence of populism, civic and moral crisis. Surprisingly, the Mediterranean area has been represented as the most lethal border in the world (Massari, 2017), a contradictory space that seems very far from the idea of intercultural dialogue and pluralism, openness and solidarity, cultural mix and local development, that some sociologists built only ten years ago (Cassano, 2009; Canta, 2010).

It is worth considering that, during the last decade, Sociologists of Education, especially in Italy, have not paid explicit attention to the Southern or Mediterranean context (Landri, 2008; Mongelli et al., 2012; Argentin et al., 2016), although broader analysis in this direction was carried out in other countries. Many projects and scholars (Santos, 1998; Capucha et al., 2016; Borg & Mayo, 2006; Cueva, 2014; Teodoro, 2019) have looked at educational inequalities in Southern Europe, considering it as a territory amongst other Souths, a metaphor of disadvantaged and excluded groups from the benefits of neoliberal globalisation in Europe (Sultana, 2012). In this frame, perhaps, the focus on socio-educational problems in Southern Europe have been considered too specialistic or of minor importance. However, it proposes again in new terms the crucial dilemma between guaranteeing equal opportunities and recognising individual diversities through the educational system (Besozzi, 2017).

Facing old questions linked to the process of democratisation of the educational system and to the persistence of inequalities in education, this Special Issue aims at focusing both on the margins of Europe and on the groups at risk of marginalisation from education, posing these topics at the centre of Sociology of Education. For this reason, in the title of this Editorial we use the phrase “at the margins” (Beltrán Llavador, 2004), with an expression that evokes the spacial position (at the margins of Europe), the social condition of disadvantaged groups in the educational field, and the “peripheral” role of Sociologists of Education in this debate, underlying difficulties and challenges for our discipline (and social sciences in general) in Southern contexts.

From an experiential point of view, this cross-national Special Issue is made possible thanks to a growing scientific exchange among Southern European Sociologists of Education. Several meetings and discussions facilitated this international dialogue. Among all, we remember:

- In Europe, the importance of this debate is reflected in the Research Network (RN 27), *Southern European Societies*, of the European Sociological Association (ESA) which in turn takes the form of initiatives such as the Working Group (GT11) of the Spanish Sociology Federation (FES), which recently held its XIII Spanish Conference of Sociology (Valencia, July 2019).

- The conferences and seminars promoted by AIS-Education Section (i.e. *Challenges of Education in the Mediterranean Area*, University of Bari, Oct 2011; *News from the South, Empowerment and Education in Southern Europe*, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Sept 2016, within the Mid-term Conference of ESA RN10 Sociology of Education);
- The participation of members of AIS-Education to the “Conferencia Ibérica de Sociología de la educación” (Cordoba, 2017), organized by the Education Section of the Spanish and Portuguese Association of Sociology;
- The presence of Spanish and Portuguese colleagues at the First International Conference of “Scuola Democratica. Learning for Democracy” (Cagliari, June 2019).

This scientific and cooperative pathway will lead us to another important event under construction: the next “Southern Conference of Sociology of Education” (Milan, 25-26th May, 2020) with the official participation of the sociological association of France (AFS-RT Sociologie de l'éducation et de la formation), Italy (AIS-Educazione), Portugal (APS-ST Sociologia da Educação), and Spain (FES-GT13 Sociología de la Educación).

During this fertile dialogue among sociologists of education, simple but important questions have emerged. *Can we identify common or different educational questions in Southern European contexts? Can we share any common interpretive frameworks for a better understanding of education in these societies? Can we imagine common or different solutions for the same educational problems?*

Perhaps this Issue shows too much ambition in the attempt to look for some shared answers, identifying socio-educational phenomena both studied or yet to be studied, theoretical or methodological options analyzed or to be further deepened and spread, some policy challenges to be delineated and faced. A consolidated field of analysis does not exist yet (at least in Italy) among Sociologists of Education, but the idea is to first step in this direction and to shed light on possible emerging trends, in order to identify new issues for the research agenda.

1. A plural Europe: new and old questions about education

Over the last decades, the European Union has focused its attention on education, considering the rise of qualifications a strategic lever to boost both economic development and social cohesion, as well as to consolidate the cultural basis of Europe. As a matter of fact, each member state has improved its performance in different educational areas. However, at the same time, different levels of educational inequality persist across many European countries (Barone & Ruggera, 2018). Furthermore, in the last decade, the economic recession has exacerbated these conditions and highlighted struc-

tural weaknesses. Southern countries have remained those with the greatest social inequalities and the poorest educational performance (Mari-Klose & Moreno-Fuentes, 2013). These aspects are affected especially by income inequality, parents' educational attainment and social origin (Barone, 2016). Moreover, the gap between native and immigrant students is particularly high in this area, and it is likely to enlarge in the future with the decline of public expenditure in education (Azzolini et al., 2012; Schnell & Azzolini, 2015).

It is known that Southern countries belong to a similar Mediterranean welfare regime, featured by a high degree of fragmentation of social security and high reliance on family (Ferrera, 1996) with a changing informal economy (Ribas-Mateos, 2004). The cuts in social spending and the increasing exposure of the most vulnerable (young) population to unemployment and poverty due to the financial crisis are particularly marked in these contexts (Landri, 2008). These Mediterranean countries also play a strategic role in the first reception of asylum seekers and refugees, facing the so-called "humanitarian crisis", and face the shortcomings of reception systems and tensions in national and local communities. Meanwhile, Southern European countries have reacted to this crisis in very different ways, based on their respective welfare and educational policies (Beblavý et al., 2011). Nevertheless, this cross-national analysis highlights the resilience of the Southern European countries and their educational systems. It also recognises the coexistence of inclusiveness and "fault lines" (Colombo & Santagati, 2016), glimpsing the chance for a new paradigm of development which is more inclusive, supportive, sustainable and socially generative (Magatti, 2017).

In this plural Europe, the meaning of South is particularly complex. In the recent book on "Global and Multiple Learning", Santos and Aguiló (2019, p. 62) argues that the South - constructed and imagined as "the other" - exists both inside and outside Europe. Outside, the South is represented by exploited, unequal, and poor countries, that export raw materials, are afflicted by natural and humanitarian disasters, have failed economically and encourage the emigration of their population towards Europe. Inside Europe, the South is made up of the travelling community (gypsies), immigrants and children of immigrants born in Europe for several generations who, despite having European passports, are not recognised as European citizens. There is also another South within Europe: it is a South that is not only peripheral geographically, but also peripheral from other points of view, represented by Southern countries like Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal. Evoking a socio-cultural change, Santos claims to recognising that there is a South, it is necessary to go towards the South and learning from the South and with the South.

2. Interpreting the South within the North: a challenge for European sociology of education

Within this social scenario, this Issue of IJSE stresses the importance of an in-depth analysis of the Southern perspective in social sciences and education. Renowned scholars, in different parts of the world, have proposed to question the concepts and the categories normally used by social sciences, thanks to the contributions of Southern social scientists. The scholars underline how scientific knowledge needs to be explicitly located in a specific geo-political environment, in order to enlighten the implicit universalist claim and the political nature of our knowledge (Rosa, 2014).

First, many of these sociologists start with a conceptual definition. The South is considered “a geographical as well as temporal marker for the regions of the world that continue to live with the consequences of colonial legacy in culture, subjectivity, and knowledge” (Takayama et al., 2016, p. 5). Furthermore, South is a relational and political concept, that relies upon the artificial binary division of the world - because the North and the South are themselves social constructs -, referred to global power relations which perpetuate the existing inequalities in material, social and cultural resources and influences (p. 6).

Santos (2014) adds to the South the meaning of an “epistemic marker”, a source of unique and different knowledges situated on the margin, continued to be produced and practiced. “The South is rather a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering. It is, therefore, an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist South. It is a South that also exists in the geographic North (Europe and North America), in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, racism and islamophobia” (Santos, 2016, pp. 18-19). Other intellectual project of deconstructing and decolonizing knowledge production (on childhood: Silova et al., 2018) is carried out in socialist and post-socialist societies of Eastern and Central Europe that represents another kind of South.

Beyond the definition of the South, many sociologists have also proposed to re-think social sciences in a non-Eurocentric and postcolonial horizon, in a more democratic and inclusive way. This includes the possibility to question concepts and methods to interpret the new global social order, in which the educational issue is situated. According to Rosa (2014, p. 15), the Southern perspective appears as a sort of “project”, which forms part of a new spirit, in which contemporary social sciences develop a campaign for democracy

and social justice, carried out through new approaches applied to old social problems (Connell, 2014, p. 218).

Since the 1990s, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has been questioning whether the epistemological project of Western social sciences is, in fact, universal. In his book *Epistemologies of the South* (2014), he represents the West as the result of combined process of secularization and global capitalist expansion. On the other hand, the South is a symbolic representation of isolated, marginalized, silenced groups of world population, but able to bring other visions of the world and forms of knowledge, on which it is possible to build social, cultural, and political alternatives for the future (Santos, Aguiló, 2019, 61). Santos stresses the vision of a global social justice to be considered as global cognitive justice, that produces a creative, collective, innovative production of knowledge from the point of view of the subaltern groups living in a geographical or symbolic South.

Raewyn Connell, from the Australian continent, similarly claims with his *Southern Theory* (2007), the importance of engaging with scholars of the “Global South” to connect the different areas of knowledge developed in the peripheries of the world, to make visible new theoretical contributions for thinking about the social realities of the South of the world. For Connell, the Southern perspective means to emphasize relations - authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony, partnership, etc. - between intellectuals and institutions and between global cities and world peripheries. The impact of Southern Theory on educational studies are little, but there are some attempts to apply this approach to different topics (teacher training; higher education; curriculum studies; adult learning; etc: Hickling-Hudson, 2009; Hickling-Hudson & Mayo, 2012). This has identified mechanisms of academic knowledge production and deconstructing the epistemic indifference of the “Global North”, translating neglected intellectual work produced in the South and legitimating Southern experiences and knowledges (Takayama et al., 2016, p. 11).

Gurminder Bhambra from the UK focuses on *Connected sociologies* (2014), proposing a historical review of the social processes and sociological narratives that led to the contemporary world social order. The author proposes the recognition of broader, interconnected and alternative stories, a revision of social sciences that includes the historical processes of colonialism, slavery, dispossession and appropriation, previously excluded by mainstream sociology. From these processes, for example, the inequalities experienced by contemporary migrants in their movement from the (symbolic and deprived) South to the (rich) North are generated. In a recent article (2017), Bhambra affirms:

“Taking this history seriously, and transforming its associated concepts of citizenship and rights, would provide the opportunity to develop a more

inclusive and just, postcolonial cosmopolitan project in Europe, one that dealt with asylum seekers and refugees on the basis of fulfilling its human rights commitments and extending them. On this basis, Europe might become the Europe of humanism, the champion of human rights, democracy and freedom that the Pope attributed to it. In doing so, it would need to discover that it had not always been so and that it was perilously close in the present to making that future unrealisable not just for those wishing to be part of it, but for its own self-acknowledged citizens” (p. 405).

Furthermore, Bhambra (2009; with Santos, 2017) hopes sociology will become a more globally oriented discipline and trace multiple paths promoted by several authors culminated from a common call for “global sociology”. Also for Burawoy (2016), echoing from the USA the reflection of Southern sociologies, the global sociology has to be constructed from below, recognizing plural sociologies and new knowledge coming from different places, allowing sociological voices from the periphery to enter in the debate with the centre, in order to face common challenges in defending society. These challenges call for an ambitious project of international dialogue and cooperation among sociologists, bypassing geographical, socio-political and cultural divides. Following Connell encouragement, “we ask Northern intellectuals to start learning in new ways, and in new relationships, exploring creative learning possibilities between North and South divisions” (2014, p. 219). Although these perspectives are in the very beginning in Southern Europe (and especially in Italy) among Sociologists of Education, we are aware that this project is essentially an educational (and didactic) project. This is because it offers possibilities of re-conceptualizing, re-analyzing and revising the crucial issues of education and educational phenomena integrating the traditional Northern theories and concepts and going beyond the Northern epistemologies (Takayama et al., 2016, p. 2).

3. An overview of the papers

Moving from these introductory remarks, the articles collected in this Special Issue take on the challenge of reflecting on Southern analysis of educational problems, with its theoretical and methodological implications.

Obviously, the papers presented do not cover the wide range of issues connected to the adoption of a Southern approach in educational sciences. Rather, they are intended to be a starting point of a common possible reflection among Southern sociologists of Education.

The overall picture of the papers highlights some considerations:

- a. the themes addressed in the various articles reflect the many definitions that can be given of South: although the well-known scholars mentioned above are not often explicitly recalled, it is possible to find a reference to

- a geographical, political and relational South, or as a metaphor of disadvantage, poverty and exclusion as well as resistance or source of different knowledge;
- b. only a few contributions openly question the Northern-based paradigms and reflect on the need to renegotiate the relations of hegemony regarding the nature of knowledge, learning traditions and wisdom. Even in these cases, however, the reference to the international debate is rather limited;
 - c. most of the papers focus on the analysis of one emblematic problem or educational challenge, common in Southern countries: the authors present comparative studies and in-depth analyses that highlight alternative interpretative models, innovative methodologies or possible interventions. The essays collected pay specific attention to Italy, Spain and Portugal, but also to the borders of the “European fortress”.

The first paper which title – *Another University is possible: towards an idea of Meridian University* – proposes a critic of competitiveness, homogenization and rankings in academic institutions, for the enhancement of universities based more on slowness, cooperation, “multi-versity” and “decolonization”.

Taking for granted the primacy of the global Northern model of university and the neoliberal market agenda as a guide in setting university priorities, the authors debate the possibility of promoting another university.

In contrast with a Northern, white, gendered, middle class monopoly of academic knowledge, they advocate the importance to connect the different knowledge developed in the peripheries of the world and to reach new theoretical contributions. Following the perspectives of the “Southern theory” (Connell, 2007) and looking to the South as an authentically Mediterranean centre with rich and multiple identities, they defend the multi-versities and the idea of an intrinsically plural and non-competitive university.

The second paper of *Alves, Dionisio and Lima* gives an insight on what is and what is not unique in the process of affirmation and consolidation of the Sociology of education in Portugal and gives a contribution to the renewal of the critical space of the Sociology of Education in Southern Europe.

The state-of-the-art research identifies the connection between the development of the discipline and the evolution of the national and the international political agenda for education and the national education system. The results stress the main trends on teaching and researching, as well as the transformation of the profession in terms of employability.

Through this comparative and longitudinal analysis, for example, the authors discuss the delayed institutional consolidation of Sociology of Education in Portugal and its complicity with the modernity of northern countries

(based on the idea of structural backwardness and on sociology of school), instead of recognising other sociologies of the “Global South”. In the reconfiguration of the Portuguese Sociology of Education, since the 1990s, the authors have indicated the openness to new research themes (other than school) and the importance of interdisciplinary education, both as a form of resistance to a certain propensity of “closure into rigid affiliations” and as a new form of institutional and academic culture.

Moving on to the aims of this Special Issue, the authors recognize that “the affinities between the countries of Southern Europe, such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, in terms of historical circumstances, educational modernisation processes and Welfare models, have not always been sufficient for a closer dialogue between the so-called sociologists of the Global South”. This consideration seems to us to be in line with the challenge of promoting ambitious, international projects of dialogue and cooperation between sociologists, with the aim to build a global sociology and recognize the plurality of sociologies and their respective social contexts.

The following papers deal with some emblematic questions for the Sociology of Education, such as the challenge to manage inclusion and exclusion and to combine equality and diversity. As already mentioned, the countries bordering the Mediterranean play a strategic role in the first reception of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as unaccompanied minors. Southern countries also remain those with the greatest social inequalities and the poorest educational performance, with a particularly strong gap between native and immigrant students. Finally, unemployment and poverty are particularly marked in these countries. The following articles address some of these issues and gives an insight on the different meaning of the concept of South.

With the interesting contribution of *Luca Queirolo Palmas*, the perspective is focused on those who are excluded from the fortress Europe because they live in a geographical and political South: Ceuta e Melilla, part of Europe and yet not, as “here Schengen agreements do not apply and free movement towards the peninsula are valid only for some categories of subjects”. The article focuses only indirectly on the great fence that separates Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco, rather it focus deeply on the porosity of this border and the paradoxical logics that govern the relations between the different Souths.

The research project is based on a visual ethnography carried out in November 2018 in these two contexts and the narrative is based on encounters with young migrants, activists, volunteers, workers involved in the protection of unaccompanied minors in transit, cross-border families and young immigrants in enclaves.

This contribution allows to observe the fortress Europe from its borders. The author shows, on one hand, the contradictions between the ability to move (actually not to move) of young migrants toward a global modernity from which they feel excluded, and that of Moroccan women who cross the border every day to work, mainly to meet the care needs of Spanish families. On the other hand, the local government policy that aims to strand street children in centers, in order to reduce their hyper-visibility in the urban space, and the youth choices to act by escaping and doing *rizki*.

It is a contribution that also allows to read the migrations of unaccompanied foreign minors and the interventions addressed to them (such as reception centres) from another point of view: that of those who are not admitted, who are excluded, “forced to re-live the same subaltern spatiality they thought they had escaped in their homeland”. The study is thought-provoking in how forms of resistance are manifested in South contexts of the world and which individual and collective actions are done to redistribute social assets and broaden the spaces of freedom and autonomy.

In the fourth paper, Arianna Cavaliere deals with an issue related to the balance between equality and diversity. The focus is on *Cultural Diversity among Primary School Teachers in Italy and Austria*. In several European schools there are classes with pupils of different cultural and linguistic origins, while teachers belong usually to the majority sociocultural group and are monolingual. This situation stresses an unbalanced power relation. The empirical study conducted sheds a light on two different models of teacher training programmes. Firstly, the author scrutinises the effects of opening up the teacher profession to a broader variety of subjects, such as teachers from minority groups. The difficulty of this hypothesis is given by the current strict entry requirements and the procedures for the recognition of foreign degrees. In the second part of the paper, she presents her comparative study aimed to analyse the existing internal range inside the category of primary school teachers in Austria and in Italy and the opportunity of an increased variety in the teacher workforce. Within the specific context of this Special Issue of IJSE, this paper highlights the richness of the dialogue between Central and Southern European contexts. As argued by the author, Italian and Austrian tertiary teacher education would profit from a compromise between the reflexive, theory-anchored and inclusive Italian approach and the pragmatic, performance-oriented style of the Austrian institution. It is not only a matter of programme comparison, but also the chance for current and future teachers to have mobility experiences and up-to-date professional education on multilingualism and intercultural competences. The conclusion outlines the advantages of diversity in teacher category, to make the teaching profession more inclusive and democratic, as well as to meet more effective strategies for minority pupils’ inclusion.

The theme of educational achievement is also addressed in the paper *The Acquisition of Reading and Writing Skills in Italy and Spain. A Bibliographic Review*, where the authors reflect on common educational questions in Southern European contexts. The difficulties in acquisition of these skills is particularly large for students in these two countries, who usually placed at the lowest performance levels in OECD-PISA surveys. The authors discuss why the students encounter these difficulties and what can be proposed to overcome them. At the basis of the analysis, there is a bibliographic review of recent studies on this topic, that reveals the importance of motivational aspects and of the hybridization of the processes.

Moving on to the results of this review, the authors argue for the Sociology of Education to think about solutions shared between states and other disciplines, which respond to the same needs and allow effective interventions. Finally, they define a didactic intervention aimed at improving the reading and writing skills of Southern students.

The last two contributions focus on Italy. The issues addressed are symbolic of the many problems of the South: youth unemployment, social inequalities, poverty, educational disadvantages. The two studies therefore adopt different meanings of the category of South: geographical location, marginality, disadvantage and poverty, but also forms of resistance, source of knowledge and of emancipatory education (formal and non-formal).

The paper of *Cooper, Morciano, Scardigno and Ord* focuses on Transformative Evaluation (TE) as a method able to change the way we “think” and we “do” evaluation of educational policies. Looking to the peculiarities of youth work at the European level, the authors developed a participatory methodology that could generate evidence of the impact of youth work and redistribute the power within the evaluation process to practitioners and young people.

In contrast with a neo-liberal climate that demands particular forms of evidence, mostly quantitative data generated by quasi-experimental evaluation approaches, the authors emphasize the strength of TE as a flexible methodology that could be shaped by users and as a “model of evaluation that draws on practitioners’ own accounts rather than superimposing an abstract, ideal model, which merely tests for standardisation and conformity”.

The method is based on a collection of Stories of Change and on their collective analyses, in order to support the youth workers understanding of the impact of their work and of some of the causal mechanisms that enable change to happen. As part of a wider European research project funded by Erasmus+, the paper discusses the Italian case. In disadvantaged Southern Italian contexts, where difficult transition from education to employment has increased youth unemployment, youth centres help young people to go further in their professional paths (as shown by the stories selected). Fur-

thermore, the research shows how a participatory approach to evaluation could promote social justice and the inclusion of marginalised groups.

In the final contribution, *Licursi and Pascuzzi* suggest a specific perspective on educational processes within poor urban environments in Naples (South Italy). It focuses on the educational challenge of socialising and supporting children's schooling when their mothers are poor. The analysis is based on two theoretical frameworks: the parents' role in children socialisation and poverty and its multidimensional nature. After having stressed the relevance of growing up in a materially deprived family environment, the authors outline how mothers manage in contributing to reproduce and/or interrupt the cycle of poverty, in familistic welfare regime and with persisting social inequalities (common within Southern countries). The case study is based on the findings of two research projects, carried out in a poor neighborhood in the historic centre of Naples, with a mixed-method approach. The life stories collected allowed the researchers to see different reactions, responses and adaptations to poverty. Alongside the reproduction of poverty, especially in situations of greater deprivation and isolation, strategies to interrupt the cycle are captured. However, the study grasps the importance of mother external support, such as schools, local welfare and associations.

Once more, this contribution sheds light on the heterogeneity of the South, also within the South: as the authors argued, "looked from the inside, the neighborhood appeared as a non-homogeneous reality, strongly differentiated". In this differentiation, it clearly emerges how in Southern realities there is not only marginality, but also an extraordinary vitality.

4. Final reflections

We are aware that the goal of this Special Issue is quite ambitious, especially in a phase where sociology seems to have lost its reformist aims, the ability to explain and comprehend phenomena and to share theoretical pillars (Szelényi, 2015). However, this work has highlighted some key points:

1. It has been difficult to collect systematic and state-of-the-art reviews, in order to identify different research traditions on socio-educational problems, to analyse strong and weak points of national studies and to orient a new future agenda toward under-researched and important thematic areas. This professional task for sociologists of education in Southern Europe could be fundamental in order to facilitate comparative and rational studies on the most crucial topics concerning education.
2. Explaining or comprehending similarities and diversities among the heterogeneous South of Europe is a complex challenge, both from a theoretical and methodological point of view. The fragmented scenario painted by the articles of this Special Issue is crossed by global, national and un-

certain trends, expressed by contradictory forms of social life and socialization processes of new generations. This contemporary and globalized socio-educational order (Maccarini, 2019) still needs adequate, universal and plural reflexions, revised categories and new interpretations on the North-South divide and its spatial, relational, cultural, political, and epistemic meanings.

3. As “Southern Theory” or “Epistemologies of the South” suggest, if we are not able to represent our social world, we are not even able to transform it. This link between knowledge and action remarks the importance of designing solutions and educational policies, also from the Southern point of view. In this sense, comparative research on policy models and policy effects could be very useful. We also hope a more participated and transformative trend can emerge and foster in educational research, looking at the traditional and rediscovered emancipatory role of social sciences (Pellegrino & Massari, 2019). As sociologists of education “we have the possibility of discovering the terrain for the reconstruction of social theory, which is nothing less than the reconstruction of social emancipation... we can hope to construct a new critical theory, rooted in alternative knowledges, histories and experiences” (Sultana, 2012, p. 37). We hope to find alternatives founded on more democratic, inclusive, and intercultural strategies of management of heterogeneity, based on a way of life featured by proximity, reciprocity, and sociability, perhaps typical of every South (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015).

The Issue ends with the post-commentary of two very experienced colleagues, *Peter Mayo* and *Vincenza Pellegrino*. Their praiseworthy contributions give further suggestions to face these three challenges and for a future agenda that includes the Southern perspective in the frame of Sociology of Education.

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