

Corrado Gini, Robert K. Merton

**Correspondence, 1936-1940. Edited and Annotated  
by Marco Santoro**

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Flashback

# Corrado Gini and Robert K. Merton: “Correspondence, 1936-1940”

Edited and Annotated by Marco Santoro

by Corrado Gini *and* Robert K. Merton

doi: 10.2383/89512

[1]

8<sup>th</sup> November 1936, XVI

Dear Merton:

I have awaited so long before writing to you not only because I was submerged by work but principally in order to have ready all the photographs that I liked to send to you. I hope to have them to-morrow [sic]. As you will see, some of them are not bad. If you remember the enlargements made by the Cambridge photographer, you will appreciate the difference between them and those of our roman photographer. To the other photographs I have added also two views of Philadelphia.

I was not extremely fortunate with my travel. The sea was never good. Thus it was absolutely impossible for me to pay any attention to your splendid fruit-basket and this was in danger to be sent to the fishes, the importation of fruits to Italy being strictly forbidden. Thinking to your tastes and knowing that you strongly prefer

<sup>1</sup> *Gini, Corrado, 1936-1940* in “Robert K. Merton Papers,” Series II: *Correspondence, 1930-2003*. Box 31, Folder 7, Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collections, Columbia University in the City of New York. Reproduced with permission of Harriet Zuckerman. No attempt has been made to improve Gini’s English. One of his letter is in Italian, as this is how I found it in the RKM Papers. All footnotes added by the editor. For the historical context of these letters, and an attempt to make sense of them in biographical as well as sociological terms, see Santoro [2017], in this same issue. Thanks to Harriet Zuckerman for her permission to publish these letters and aid for reading them in their context.

duckies to fishes, I thought to interpret [sic] your wishes, putting the basket as a price to the best custom party in the fancy-ball, and I may assure you that the group of American duckies who won it appreciated it very warmly.<sup>2</sup>

Camavitto sent already to you the volumes of the Committee and of the Institute that you wished.<sup>3</sup> The volume of Revelli will be ready only during this month and it will be equally sent to you.<sup>4</sup> I suppose that you have received and distributed the twenty reprints of my article in *Rural Sociology*.<sup>5</sup>

May I ask you to call the Tercentenary Office asking when they will send to me the second proofs of my tercentenary lecture? I had corrected the first proofs, but it is necessary to see also the second, because I have added all the first part which was omitted in the reading. It was understand [sic] that they had to sent to me a second proof.

I will send to you a reprint of the paper on the correlation coefficient related with the booklet of Finley or Furley upon which you called my attention (By the way, is the name Finley or Furley? I have written Finley, but I am not sure, and here I have no means to check it). You may be interested perhaps in knowing that my thesis, which was opposite to that of Finley, as well as to that of the reporter, Prof. Fréchet, has been accepted at the meeting of the International Institute of Statistics at Athens by the reporter himself and approved unanimously by the assembly.

I have been very much surprised of the big triumph of Roosevelt. The Italian public opinion here is not very much interested in the matter, but, in any case, decid-

<sup>2</sup> It is not perfectly clear what "duckies" mean. From the correspondence (see Merton's letter to Gini on November 24, 1936) we cannot say if the term was already in use at Harvard as a joking, and surely condescending, nickname for □ (female) students of Radcliffe College, the women's liberal arts college founded in 1879 in Cambridge, Mass., that functioned as a female coordinate institution for the all-male Harvard College (note that from 1879 to 1943, Harvard professors repeated to Radcliffe students the lectures they gave at Harvard). For a taste of the possible meanings conveyed by the term, it is useful to know that "ducky" or "duckie" is a British slang meaning "dear; sweetheart; darling; pet," commonly used as a term of endearment or familiarity. The *Online Etymology Dictionary* informs also that "duckie" could mean "excellent, splendid; delightful. Often used ironically" even if without necessary relation to the old English slang for "woman's breast." While we could think in the 1930s the common use of the nickname "duckies" was unrelated to this much earlier slang noun, we cannot exclude this sense was well known to Merton, whose passion for etymology and the history of words is well known. The linguistic joke with the word "fish" seems to support this conjecture.

<sup>3</sup> See letter by Dino Camavitto to Robert K. Merton, October 20, 1936, in *Robert K. Merton Papers* cit. This is an accompanying letter to four volumes in Italian published on behalf of the Comitato Italiano per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione and sent to RKM for review. Camavitto thanks in advance RKM "for the reviews [...] that you kindly will make on the american journals" (sic). It is worth noting that Merton had already reviewed on the newly founded *American Sociological Review* Corrado Gini's book on "economic pathology" on which Gini's course at Harvard was grounded: see Merton [1936a].

<sup>4</sup> See Revelli [1936]. In the letter the name is mistakenly written as "Ravello."

<sup>5</sup> See Gini [1936a].

edly in favor of Roosevelt. There have been some special happenings which favored the democrats over any prevision? In any case I hope that now Mrs. Merton will no more have any extra-work for compiling list of new subsidies!

Our Press Ministry asked to me to give a radio message of a few minutes for the American publics; the said message will be delivered the 23 November about 8:15 PM, New York time. You could not however in any case understand my voice. You have so discouraged me about my oratory ability, that I preferred that my message be read by another person. I don't know until now what I will say, but certainly I will be kind towards my American friends. On the contrary, I have not been very kind towards Norman Angell and the other amateur pacifists in an article that I have written about Raw Materials and colonies. I will send you a reprint in a few days.

Is Bash working about the emigration paper?<sup>6</sup>

Please extend to Mrs. Merton and receive my best souvenirs and write when you plan to come to Rome.

Cordially yours,  
Corrado Gini

[2]

24 November 1936

Dear Professor Gini:

Mrs. Merton and I were delighted to hear from you, since we were much interested in the circumstances of your voyage and arrival in Rome. We are certain that Rome must have been as happy at your return as we were saddened by your departure. We have felt your absence keenly and it is more than merely a polite gesture when we urge you to visit Cambridge again as soon as it is possible.

Much against our ill, we are compelled to agree that your Roman photographers are definitely superior to our Cambridge ones. You are quite right in saying that these enlargements bring out in detail many aspects of the pictures which were previously shrouded in darkness. We appreciate very much your thoughtfulness in sending us reproductions of these photographs; we are especially delighted by the fact that you consented to include some of yourself. By the way, you may be interested in knowing that one of the views taken in Philadelphia – the one of the City Hall – included partially a view of the office building in which Suzanne worked when she was in that city. The photograph was so realistic that it awak-

<sup>6</sup> Reference to a student of Gini's course who was writing a term paper on the topic of migration.

ened homesickness in my wife, and she is returning home for the Christmas holidays.

I have carried out your commission to call at the Tercentenary Office, but as usual with little success. They inform me that so many corrections and additions were made on the first proofs by almost all the honorary guests that they have made it an iron-clad rule not to submit any additional proofs to any of the writers. Despite the fact that I emphasized their promise to send you second proofs they definitely refused to agree to send them. However, they promised to exercise particular care in reading the proofs in order to prevent the appearance of any mistakes. I regret that I was unable to accomplish any more in this matter.

You have apparently once again had some difficulty in reading your own handwriting. The author of the brochure on the correlation coefficient is Paul Hanly Furfey (not Finley or Furley)<sup>7</sup> in collaboration with Joseph F. Daly. The full citation is as follows: P.H. Furfey and J.F. Daly, "The Interpretation of the Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient," The Catholic University of America, *Educational Research Monographs*, Vol. VIII, June 1, 1934. Of course, it does not surprise me that Prof. Fréchet accepted your views, since you apparently detected some fallacies in his interpretation as well as in Furfey's. I will be grateful for a reprint of this paper as well as any other which you publish.

The professorial members of the Department of Sociology met last week and voted to recommend me for a three-year appointment as an instructor. This represents a promotion, since my previous appointments had been from year to year. As I indicated to you before your departure, this means that we will probably travel to Europe, if possible, this coming summer. We have made no definite plans as yet, but is very likely that we will leave immediately after the close of school (early in June) and stay in Europe until the first week in September. As yet we have not selected the place where we intend to spend most of our time, but it will probably be in a German-speaking country. Needless to say, we will visit Rome during this journey if there is any prospect of seeing you there.

I have received the volumes, for which I wish to thank you and Dr. Camavitto. Needless to say, I have not yet read them all – your *Demografia* is a volume of such a

<sup>7</sup> Paul Hanly Furfey (1896-1992) was a priest and social scientist based at the Catholic University of America. After completing a doctorate in Sociology in 1926, he became a member of the CUA's department of Sociology in 1935, remaining there till his retirement in 1965. One of the most influential Catholic social scientist and social reformer in the USA, in his writings and teaching offered a vision of the social order in many ways alternative to US mainstream sociology, and close to the sociological theory of another influential (especially in Italy) sociologist-priest, Luigi Sturzo. See Rademacher [2017]. Interestingly, Gini had no knowledge of him in 1936, and met his work (and name) through Merton's mediation.

scope that I shall find it difficult to do justice to it – but I hope to complete my review as soon as possible.<sup>8</sup> I have already sent in a review of Sonnabend's later work.<sup>9</sup>

In response to the “duckies,”<sup>10</sup> you may be interested to know that many of the Radcliffe duckies have repeatedly told me how much they enjoyed and profited from your course. Knowing them as well as I do (!) I do not hesitate to say that they are speaking the truth. Bash is continuing his work on immigration and will write you a letter in the very near future.

In general, we continue the same quiet, undisturbed existence which was characteristic of us last year. It is possible that I may attend the meetings of the American Sociological Society in Chicago this Christmas, but I have not definitely decided.

I have published several brief papers which are related to my work in *Wis-sensozoologie*,<sup>11</sup> but I am not sending you reprints since I believe that you will not find them of particular interest.

Dr. and Mrs. Silverstein, as well as [...] Hutchinson ask to be remembered to you.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Mrs. Merton sends her most affectionate regards, and I continue

Most sincerely yours,  
[RKM]

### [3]

5<sup>th</sup> January 1937, XV

Dear Dr. Merton:

The season contribution paid to the pandemy of grippe has caused a delay in replying to your letter of November 24. I understand with pleasure that very likely you will be in Europe from June till September. I expect to be in Rome during June and outside in the following months. So I hope that you will visit Rome at your arrival

<sup>8</sup> See Merton [1937a].

<sup>9</sup> See Sonnabend [1935].

<sup>10</sup> Reference to a linguistic joke made by Gini in the previous letter.

<sup>11</sup> See Merton [1936b; 1936c; 1937b]. Interestingly, Merton doesn't make any reference in this letter to his seminal 1936 article on the “unintended consequences of social action” (see Merton [1936d]) where his exposure to Gini's theoretical work is explicitly acknowledged.

<sup>12</sup> Theodore Silverstein (1904-2001) has been a good friend of RKM. Born in Liverpool (UK), he earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University and taught there for a while before accepting a position at the University of Kansas City. After WWII, where he served in an élite intelligence unit, he became a very distinguished medievalist teaching at the University of Chicago until his retirement in 1973. Edward P. Hutchinson (1906-1990) was a sociologist specialized in demographic research. After his Ph.D. in biology and public health, earned in 1933 from M.I.T., he joined in 1935 the faculty at Harvard College as instructor in sociology, holding that position until 1940. In 1945, he became an associate professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, remaining there for the rest of his career.

in Europe. I think it would be advisable for you to take an Italian ship from Boston (or New York) to Naples, which is only at three hours of travel from Rome.

Thanks for your intervention at the Tercentenary Office. I have written to them that they do not know the elementary exigencies of the collaboration with international scholars.

I am mailing, under separate cover, the reprints of my paper on correlation coefficient as well as the copy for review of the book by Revelli. If you will give me the address of Mr. Furfey, I will send also to him a copy of the reprint.

I have just seen in *Rural Sociology* your review of Sonnabend's later work<sup>13</sup> and it seems to me quite good. We are expecting the others. In the bibliographic quotation it would be better to indicate, not the printer which changes from a book to the other, but the editor, that is the Italian Committee for Population Problems.

I congratulate you for your three-year appointment as well as for the several papers published. Of course, I will be always glad to receive your reprints.

Yesterday the revised paper of Bash arrived. Certainly it represents a distinct progress on the first edition presented in September. The logical treatment is however not completely satisfactory in some points. For that reason, I think that it is not possible to reach A+ and A will be the proper mark. I will write to Bash today or tomorrow. Herewith you will find the note that I beg you to send to the competent office. However I am not sure that it is written in the proper form. Please correct it if necessary.

I have lost the address of the Silversteins: for that reason I have not yet written to them. Please remember me cordially to them as well as to Dr. Hutchinson and also to the Ratcliffe duckies who remember me.

For Mrs. Merton and you the most cordial greetings and the best wishes for the new year.

Very sincerely yours,  
Corrado Gini

**[4]**

6 February 1937

Dear Professor Gini:

We were sincerely sorry to hear of your illness and delighted to learn of your recovery. We are also experiencing a pandemic of grippe in this country, but this far my wife and I have managed to avoid any serious illness.

<sup>13</sup> See Merton [1936e].

As far as our trip to Europe this summer is concerned, we are somewhat uncertain. We still want to go, of course, and if it is at all possible we shall do so. But various expenses in connection with our families have reduced considerably the funds which we have available for this purpose, and hence we may not be able to make the journey.

We were recently blessed with the visitation of a burglar who stole all my wife's jewelry. The police are not very efficient and we have little hope of recovering any of the stolen good.

The first volume of the Tercentenary Conference addresses has just appeared and I am reviewing it for *Isis*. This is the volume on "Factors Influencing Human Behavior" which contains the papers by Malinowski, Piaget, Janet, Jung, Lowell, etc. The next volume, "Authority and the Individual," as you probably know, is scheduled to appear within a few weeks.<sup>14</sup>

Thank you very much for your off-prints of the paper on the correlation coefficient.<sup>15</sup> Paul H. Furfey can be reached at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. I am certain that he would be greatly interested in your article.

Thank you also for Revelli's book.<sup>16</sup> I have now sent off reviews of all the books which you have sent me, with the exception of Mukerjee's *Migrant Asia*,<sup>17</sup> which I have given to Zimmerman to review and Sonnabend's earlier book on *Migration of the Slavs*, which I do not feel at all competent to review. If you wish, I shall return this volume to you.

Dr. Hutchinson tells me that your paper has appeared in the *Annals* of the American Academy of Social Science.<sup>18</sup> He found it very instructive and states that it revealed shortcomings in Angell's discussion which he had previously not noticed.

I am to give a course on Social Organization next year.<sup>19</sup> Do you know of any studies which I may use to advantage in a course on this subject?

<sup>14</sup> Three volumes containing papers from the Conference's symposia were published by Harvard University Press in 1937 under the titles of the symposia themselves. For more on this series of publications see Elliott [1999].

<sup>15</sup> See Gini [1936c].

<sup>16</sup> See Revelli [1936]. See Merton [1937c] for his review of this book.

<sup>17</sup> See Zimmerman [1937] for a review.

<sup>18</sup> See Gini [1937c].

<sup>19</sup> This is how Merton recalled the circumstances of this early course in an interview to Caroline Hodges Persell [1984, 363]: "The first major course I gave, as a youngish instructor at Harvard back in 1937, was entitled "Social Organization." I still remember its number, Sociology 4. In a way, that was the seedbed for the course you took long afterward, what became the "Analysis of Social Structure" [taught at Columbia University since 1943, i.e. two years after his move to that University]. It all started back then. In the first year or two of teaching, I had remarkable students. Harvard had intermediate courses wisely arranged to include undergraduates and graduates. The undergraduates included Bernard Barber, Albert K. Cohen, the future anthropologist Albert Damon, Glenn Frank, J.R. Titts, H.W. Riecken (and the disappointing youngest son of FCR,



[Letter stops here]

[5]

Roma, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1937, XV

Dear Dr. Merton:

I received your letter of February, 6. Very sorry for the efficiency of American burglars. I hope that the police be not inferior to their antagonists. Sometimes one is lead to appreciate the Mexican system, according to which police are recruited from the most experienced convicts.

I would regret very much that you would postpone your trip to Europe. I hope that some favorable circumstance may give to you the possibility of reconstruct the necessary funds. I have sent to you five copies of the reprints of the American Academy of Social Science as well as those of *Econometrica*.<sup>20</sup> You may conserve them for yourself or distribute them to interested people, as you like.

I suppose that you will not be interested in having some reprints of my Harvard Lecture, as all our Harvard acquaintances will certainly receive the volume. The lecture will also appear in *Scientia*.<sup>21</sup> Its first part has been already published. I suppose that in one of the next numbers also your article on history of science will be published.<sup>22</sup>

I notice that you have changed your plan of researches, probably according to the rather instable direction of the Department but, after all, I do not regret that you will leave the historical ground for more properly scientific subjects.

John Roosevelt); the graduates included Robin Williams and the future diplomat, Paul Nitze." The course was taught by Merton in the fall of 1937 to 33 students. See Nichols [2010, 86] for a description of the course's content, and Marsh [2010] for a detailed overview of Merton's course on "The Analysis of Social Structure" as taught at Columbia in the early 1950s. It doesn't seem from this literature Gini had contributed anything to Merton's early teaching and research on social organization. As I argue in the introductory article to this correspondence, the relevance of Gini's work in both statistical and sociological theory for Merton's elaboration of his own thinking has been greater than it appears from the available sources and reconstructions [see Santoro 2017].

<sup>20</sup> See Gini [1937c; 1937e].

<sup>21</sup> See Gini [1937d].

<sup>22</sup> See Merton [1937d]. Founded in Italy in 1907 as *Rivista di Scientia* by the mathematician Federigo Enriques and the engineer Eugenio Rignano, the journal changed its name in 1910 to *Scientia*. It published articles in Italian, French, English and German. Among the names of scientists, mathematicians and philosophers who contributed papers since 1910 till 1940 (the journal's status and visibility declined after Italy entered WWII) we find those of Einstein, Lorentz, Poincaré, Mach, Freud, Peano, Russell, Heisenberg, Fermi, and Carnap.

“Social organisation” is a very wide subject. If you will send to me the summary of your course, I will be pleased to suggest some studies which you may use for its preparation.

For what concerns Sonnabend’s book on “Migration of the Slavs,” the Italian Committee expects a review, instead of returning the volume. I think that it would be better to find some reviewer interested in the matter. Why not, for example, Dr. Boldryeff?<sup>23</sup>

I have sent to Mr. Furfey the reprint of my paper on the correlation coefficient.

If Dr. Hutchinson is interested in Angell’s discussion on raw materials, please call his attention on my article “Colonie e Materie Prime” (in *La Vita Economica Italiana*), of which I have sent to you the proof. There the shortcomings of Angell’s argument are fully demonstrated.<sup>24</sup>

I am glad to understand that Bash is working very industriously. Please call his attention on the recent book of Carr-Saunders on *World Population* where, at pages 204-205, Walker’s theory is strongly criticized.<sup>25</sup>

With the best greetings for the Easter to Mrs. Merton and you

Cordially yours

Corrado Gini

## [6]

22 April 1937

Dear Professor Gini:

I am so happy that my wife and I will spend the summer in Europe, after all. We have calculated that we have funds which are just sufficient for this purpose. We plan to spend most of the summer at Gründlsee, which is between Salisburg and Wien. We will arrive at Antwerp, on June 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>. We have had to take this boat instead of an Italian liner, because of the greater economy of the former; and unfortunately we are so situated that we have to “count our pennies.” Where will you be spending the summer? I hope that we may have an opportunity to see you. Do you plan to attend the meetings of the International Congress of Sociology in Paris? We expect to do so.

I have received the various reprints for which I thank you very much. I have distributed all but one of the *Econometrica* off-prints as well as some of those from

<sup>23</sup> The review would be published at last, written by another scholar: see Coon [1938].

<sup>24</sup> See Gini [1936b]. The reference is to Angell [1914]. Originally published in 1909 under the title *Europe’s Optical Illusion*, the book was a best seller at its time, arguing that war, any war, was economically a failure.

<sup>25</sup> See Carr-Saunders [1936].

the Academy. By the way, I have just received a letter from a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania who is writing a paper on your sociological theory, under the direction of Professor Rex Crawford. I do not know whether this study is just a term paper or whether it represents a doctoral dissertation. I have referred this student to the appropriate bibliography and have indicated some of your more recent publications.<sup>26</sup>

My monograph on Seventeenth Century science has just been completed and will be published some time this fall.<sup>27</sup> Sorokin's volumes<sup>28</sup> will appear in several weeks. They will probably make quite a wide-spread impression; they are already being advertised very widely.

I have seen the first part of your lecture in *Scientia*.<sup>29</sup> I have received my copy of the Tercentenary volume, which recalled to me the occasion of your lecture. Both my wife and I then talked about that evening and other occasions when we have had the pleasure of your company.

Sonnabend's book on the Slavs will be reviewed by Professor Zimmerman.<sup>30</sup>

Please forgive this brief letter, but I am very tired. May we hope to hear from you before we leave for the summer? My wife sends her regards.

Yours,  
[RKM]

## [7]

17<sup>th</sup> May 1937, XV

Dear Merton:

I am happy to understand that Mrs. Merton and you will come to Europe.

My plans for the summer are not yet established. It is certain, however, that I will go several times to Paris for one Congress or another, probably not, however, for the Congress of Sociology. The first time, I will be there from 21 to 26 of June for the Congress of "La Mère au Foyer." It is possible that you will be also in Paris at the same days. In order to know my address in Paris, you may apply to Prof. Vincenzo Castrilli, Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 2, Rue de Montpensier, Paris.

<sup>26</sup> The Pennsylvania graduate student's letter and Merton's reply are stored in the same folder of Merton and Gini's correspondence.

<sup>27</sup> The thesis would be published one year later as an issue of the journal *Osiris*, and re-published as a book in 1970. See Merton [1938].

<sup>28</sup> References to Sorokin [1937].

<sup>29</sup> See Gini [1937d].

<sup>30</sup> In fact the book would be reviewed by another collaborator of *Rural Sociology*: see Coon [1938].

In September I will be almost certainly in Venice for the Meeting of the Italian Society for the Advancement of Sciences. I suggest that, returning from Paris, you come to Venice. The date of the Meeting of the Society is not yet established, but it will be almost certainly between the 10 and 15 September. Thus, there will be an interval of some days after the Congress of Paris that you and Mrs. Merton may spend with me in the country home of my family at Motta di Livenza, not far from Venice.

Thanks you for the references given to the student at the University of Pennsylvania. Naturally I will be interested in reading his paper when published. Some detailed reviews of my sociological works have appeared recently in some journals in Romania, but I can judge of their importance only from the length, because I am quite unable to understand the language of our sister country.

What about Bash's work?

I have received an announcement of Sorokin's volumes, but the publisher gave a negative reply to our demand for a copy for review; and it is too costly a work to be purchased.

My lecture has been completely published in *Scientia* and the review gave to me the reprints of the french [sic] translation. For the english [sic] reprints, I am always awaiting for the fifty copy [sic] from the Tercentenary Office.

The news from America have occupied the first place in European newspapers in this last period. Not less than the Hindenburg's disaster was necessary to detach the public attention from the dreadful assault of the 2,000 Harvard's students against Radcliffe College. I am sure that you have gallantly fought to protect your duckies!

Please present my best regards to Mrs. Merton and hoping to see both in the next month in Paris.

Cordially yours

Corrado Gini

**[8]**

24 February 1940  
7930 Plum Street, Apt. D  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
U.S.A.

Dear Professor Gini,

We were very glad to hear from you, even in the form of reprints. It has been so long since we have had a letter from you, and much has happened since then. The

face of Europe has changed considerably and it appears that it will continue to do so. Somewhat less important changes have occurred in our lives here.

As you can deduce, I have been called to Tulane University as Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department.<sup>31</sup> We like it very well here, but of course we miss Cambridge with which we associate so many pleasant memories. A second innovation is our seven-weeks daughter, Stephanie. As you can readily imagine, she has introduced many profound changes in our way of life, but we are gradually adjusting ourselves to her presence. She seems moderately intelligent and we find her extremely attractive, although she required far more of our attention than we had anticipated.

I am planning to spend the summer in Mexico, since we are not too distant from that interesting country. Do you have any suggestions about places to visit? I would be particularly interested in spending some time with an Indian group, but I have much to learn about the possibilities in this connection. Further, can you suggest anyone I should see for assistance?

I am taking the liberty of sending you some reprints of recent papers of mine. I have studied the account of Italian contributions to statistical science which you recently sent me.<sup>32</sup> I found it both instructive and interesting. I trust that you will continue to send me reprints of your many writings.

Suzanne joins me in sending our very best regards.

Sincerely yours,

[RKM]

## [9]

3 Aprile 1940-XVIII

Caro Merton,

Ricevo con ritardo la vostra gradita lettera del 24 febbraio al ritorno da una spedizione scientifica in Sardegna.

La notizia della nascita di Stefania è stata per me una gradita sorpresa, e non capisco bene dalla vostra lettera se si è trattato di una sorpresa anche per voi. In ogni modo però credo che alla fine ne sarete contenti e perciò faccio a voi, e soprattutto alla signora Susanna, le mie congratulazioni più vive.

In Messico, io vi consiglierei di visitare i Seris dell'Isola di Tiburon e delle coste di Sonora. Io, con la spedizione del Comitato Italiano, li ho studiati dal punto di

<sup>31</sup> On Merton's reasons for leaving Harvard and moving to New Orleans, as well as on the two years he spent at Tulane University as a teacher and a researcher, see Hodges Persell [1984, 376-378].

<sup>32</sup> Possible reference to Gini [1938a].

vista antropologico, demografico e medico-biologico,<sup>33</sup> e voi potreste molto opportunamente studiarli dal punto di vista sociologico. Così le due ricerche si verrebbero a completare. Prima di me essi erano stati studiati sommariamente da due antropologi: Mac Gee e Kroeber;<sup>34</sup> ma nessuno li ha studiati finora dal punto di vista sociologico.

L'Isola di Tiburon è a poca distanza da Hermosillo, capitale dello stato di Sonora ed io potrei indirizzarvi facilmente ai signori Thompson che sono stati a contatto coi Seris e hanno accompagnato me nella spedizione, oltre che, naturalmente, alle autorità della tribù, che immagino non saranno cambiate. Suppongo che voi conosciate la relazione preliminare (la sola finora pubblicata) della mia visita ai Seris che è stata pubblicata in *Genus* Volume I, n° 1-2.

Se voi vi decidete per tale spedizione potrò darvi le opportune lettere di presentazione e qualche indicazione e consiglio che potrà esservi utile.

Sono stato anche lieto di apprendere che siete stato chiamato all'Università di Tulane, come capo del dipartimento di Sociologia. Credo che effettivamente abbiate fatto bene a lasciare l'ambiente, eccessivamente chiuso, di Cambridge. D'altra parte, il Sud offre certamente al sociologo argomenti di studio non meno interessanti del Nord e la vicinanza del Messico è un altro vantaggio, da questo punto di vista. Io serbo il più gradito ricordo di una fuggevole visita a Charlottesville e a Williamsburg.

Vi ringrazio dei vostri estratti che ho scorso con interesse. Io ve ne ho mandati a diverse riprese negli ultimi tempi, parte a Cambridge e parte a New Orleans ("Problems of the international distribution of population and raw materials"; "Methods of eliminating the influence of several groups of factors"; "Le rilevazioni statistiche fra le popolazioni primitive"; "Die problems der internationalen Bevölkerung – und Rohstoffverteilung"; "I contributi italiani al progresso della statistica"; "I pericoli della statistica"; "I problemi dell'evoluzione"; "L'evolution des groupements sociaux").<sup>35</sup> Spero che vi siano arrivati tutti debitamente. A parte, vi mando ora una mia conferenza<sup>36</sup> che spero vi interesserà particolarmente e su cui avrei piacere di avere le vostre impressioni. Di alcuni punti trattati nella conferenza, abbiamo avuto occasione di parlare a Cambridge. Su tale argomento ho materia non per una, ma per sette od

<sup>33</sup> See Gini [1934].

<sup>34</sup> See McGee [1898] and Kroeber [1931]. For a recent description of this ethnic group see Bowen [1983].

<sup>35</sup> See Gini [1937c; 1937e; 1937f; 1937g; 1938b; 1939a; 1939b].

<sup>36</sup> Possible reference to Gini [1940a]. But see also Gini [1940b; 1940c; 1941] and for an anticipation Gini [1937b]. The main argument of this conference was that in the United States a new "economic psychology" (indeed, a new economic culture, today we would say) had been developing, centered on work as a pleasing activity and different from the bourgeois one. While no reference to the "Weber thesis" was evident in Gini's work on this subject, we can be sure that Merton didn't miss this link.

otto conferenze e forse varrà la pena di scrivere ancora qualche cosa in argomento, ma, prima di farlo, desidererei conoscere quali sono le impressioni che questa prima conferenza ha suscitato.

Vi prego di ricordarmi con viva cordialità alla Signora Susanna e abbiatevi, coi miei auguri saluti,  
vostro aff.mo  
Corrado Gini

**[10]**

5 May 1940

Dear Professor Gini,

I wish to thank you for your cordial letter and for the copy of your analysis of American society which arrived recently. I read the latter with deep interest and I must frankly say that I can take no objection to your observations. I was particularly impressed by your suggestive remarks on the difference in attitudes toward work on the part of Americans and of Europeans. This is certainly a basic source of the American ethos. Your analysis of the contributions of immigration to the economy of this country is both original and convincing. I had never before thought of immigration in this light and I am certain that the great majority of American social scientists had not previously considered the problem. I am indeed happy that you gave me the opportunity of reading this excellent contribution.

I am deeply interested in your suggestion that I visit the Seris. I had originally planned to spend my time in Oaxaca, but there is no necessity for my doing so. However, there are some problems connected with my going among the Seris. Professor Linton, a chairman of the department of anthropology at Columbia University and the successor to Franz Boas, tells me that the Seris are very antagonistic toward strangers. You have also suggested this in your preliminary report on the Seris published in *Genus*.<sup>37</sup> Inasmuch as I am just beginning to study Spanish and since I do not, of course, know the Seri language, do you think I would be able to obtain sufficient information from a two-month visit there? Moreover, I do not have any special funds for this trip and consequently I would be unable to employ the services of Mr. Thompson. However, if you believe that all this does not constitute an obstacle I shall certainly make an effort to conduct my researches among the Seris.

<sup>37</sup> See Gini [1934; 1937a]. Gini's expertise in this research area is witnessed by the almost 900 pages of the *Bibliografia sulla Demografia delle Popolazioni Primitive* (see Gini, ed., [1938]). See also Gini [1940d], an early chapter of which had been sent to Merton: see letter of April 3rd, 1940.

May I therefore ask for the letters of introduction which you mention and especially for any advice which you may be able to give me? Do you have any specific suggestions for research which you have derived from your own experience with the Seris? I intend to leave for Mexico sometime in June and so I would appreciate this information as soon as you can conveniently manage it. My new position and my new Stephanie have both taken a great deal of my time this year, but now I hope to complete a number of papers and to write a book on Social Structure. I have been promoted to full professor at Tulane, starting next year.

Let me repeat my deep appreciation of your first article on the American scene. I hope that you will write the remainder of your analysis and publish the entire work in the form of a book, which might well be translated.<sup>38</sup>

I trust that I shall soon hear from you. With affectionate regards from Suzanne and

Your obedient servant,<sup>39</sup>  
[RKM]

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<sup>38</sup> Gini will indeed publish a book on this topic but much later: cfr. Gini [1956]. It has never been translated into English. It is worth noting that Gini's ideas on America as "a labour society" have been referred to by Hannah Arendt in a footnote of her influential book *The Human Condition* [1958]. Arendt's references are to a series of German translations of Gini's articles on the topic published in the 1950s (but see Gini [1940b] for an early publication). For a Spanish early translation see Gini [1941].

<sup>39</sup> With respect to this unusual formula, recall that Merton "was not only a scholar of Seventeenth century British science but also of Seventeenth century British literary customs and he enjoyed using terminology from the period and continued to do so until he died." (Harriet Zuckerman, private correspondence).



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**Corrado Gini** (1884-1965) was an Italian statistician, demographer and sociologist. He taught at the University of Cagliari, Padua and Rome, where he founded the Facoltà di Scienze Statistiche. He was also the first President of ISTAT.

**Robert K. Merton** (1910-2003) was an American sociologist. He spent most of his career teaching at Columbia University, where he attained the rank of University Professor. In 1994 he was awarded the National Medal of Science for his contributions to the field and for having founded the sociology of science. He is considered one of America's most influential social scientists.

## **Corrado Gini and Robert K. Merton: Correspondence, 1936-1940**

Edited and Annotated by Marco Santoro

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Abstract: The article collects ten letters between the Italian statistician, demographer and sociologist Corrado Gini and the American sociologist Robert K. Merton, they exchanged from 1936 till 1940, after a visiting period Gini spent at Harvard University between 1935 and 1936, having the young Merton, at the time PhD student, as teaching assistant. The correspondence is a testimony of the close relationship – professional and personal – the two scholars developed in those years, exchanging advices, research suggestions, bibliographic references and publishing opportunities. The correspondence has been transcribed from the original letters, edited and annotated by Marco Santoro.

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*Keywords: Corrado Gini; Robert K. Merton; Correspondence; Sociology; Statistics; Harvard University; International Circulation of Knowledge; Academic Life; Academic Practices; Intellectual Friendship.*

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