

Introduction to Sociology

FINAL MESSAGE

By Professor Felipe Ramos

My dear students,

Nietzsche once said that he would accept only the followers that denied him because in doing so they would not be followers anymore, but free souls. This semester you got in touch with a different perspective in Sociology: a mix of Marxism (Marx, Lenin, Gramsci), critical theory (Frankfurt School), Imperialism (Wallerstein, Chomsky), Post-Colonialism (Boaventura de Sousa Santos), Dependency Theory (Celso Furtado) and other non-main stream sociological approaches that I take into consideration in my works as a sociologist from a country in the global South. Even though these theories do not have many followers (or free souls) in the United States of America, in Latin America they find a fertile soil to thrive. It occurs because Latin America is undergoing a process of regional integration that is a little bit similar to what happened in Europe after the launching of the Europe Union. But there are three main differences: (a) while Europe is facing a crisis, Latin America has fast-growing economies, mainly Brazil, (b) the goal of the Latin American integration is to overcome underdevelopment and (c) the regional integration in Latin America (mainly South America and Southern Cone) is much more political-based than economical. In this context, critical theories in general tend to gain many ears. To be a conservative in a society that has a lot of things to be conserved is understandable, but to be a conservative in a society that needs to change is not.

Once you now know the lines of thought that I use to form my sociological imagination, the question that arises is: what are the advantages to know these different and uncommon positions for American citizens? Walter Lippman, an American writer, said that “when everyone thinks exactly the same it’s because no one is thinking at all”. It means that the diversity of opinions is the necessary condition for the flourishing of the skill to think. Otherwise, what takes place is an overwhelming socialization that impedes the individuals to think freely and thus impedes them to be free individuals. The result would be the transformation of individuals in parts of a huge social machinery. Nobody is better than Aldous Huxley in Brave New World to explain us:

It is preferable to sacrifice one than to corrupt many. (...) There is no a more heinous crime than the lack of orthodoxy in the demeanor. A homicide kills only an individual; and what is an individual? (...) We can produce a new individual easily. (...) The lack of orthodoxy, however, threatens more than the life of a simple individual; it threatens the whole society. (Huxley, Brave New World)

In other part of the book he states:

The students agreed by nodding, showing strongly their assent to a statement that more than sixty two thousand repetitions made them to accept, not only as true, but as axiomatic, self-evident, absolutely unquestionable. (Huxley, Brave New World)

To avoid this horrific scenario, the best thing to do is to follow the advice given by Abraham Lincoln, US president: "Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe". The problem comes when we question what a fact is. Nietzsche warned us: "there is no fact; only interpretations". Hence, let us investigate everything, let us lay bare everything, let us deny everything. After this process of systematic denial, we will be ready to affirm once again, but now much more thoughtful and skilled. We can and must love our country and society. But to better serve it, we have to be aware even of the things that we usually tend to hide.

The United States of America is a great country and needs great students: ones that are questioners and curious about everything in order to achieve not the absolute truth that does not exist (or is not accessible to human beings) but two things that we can accomplish: an ever changeable knowledge and wisdom.

Thank you very much for being outstanding students and for giving me an opportunity to learn from you.