

Editorial

Sociology as a profession. Formation, organization and practices of sociologists In a context of change.

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The last few years have not been easy for the development of sociology in Latin America—and other parts of the world. The exhaustion of many administrations linked to the so-called cycle of progressive governments and the corresponding rise in a series of pro-market and culturally and socially conservative governments, have led to an increasingly hostile climate for many sociology practitioners and, in particular although not exclusively, those working at public organizations and academic institutions.

In some cases, as in Argentina at the beginning of Mauricio Macri's administration, public officials (allied with certain media outlets and journalists) pointed to the presumably "useless" work done by most sociologists (and other social science and humanities specialists). Enthroning an economist logic, they questioned the supposed lack of immediate economic returns for what now appeared to be an expense difficult to justify during times of budget cuts (and the necessary austerity after "populist

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squandering”). Within this framework, some researchers—generally oriented to sociology of culture—, were targeted by public slander campaigns which ridiculed their topics of research while aiming to discredit the discipline and institutions where it was developed (Representantes de Investigadores en Formación del IdIHCS-Conicet & Frente Amplio de Graduados FaHCE, 2019). In other cases, as in Brazil, in addition to budget cuts, the attack was more dogmatic, tracing the work of most sociologists to the so-called *cultural Marxism* and the feared *gender ideology*. While the attack against sociology had begun during the Michel Temer administration, when the decision was made to eliminate it as a mandatory high school subject³, it was with the Jair Bolsonaro administration that aggressions took on a more direct approach. In addition to an incendiary campaign that flashes back to the so-called “Lead Years” of the 1970s, a series of significant cuts to subsidies and grants threatened one of the main academic and graduate studies systems in the region. The justification was based on an efficiency argument: in a tweet on April 26, 2019, the president of Brazil revealed the government’s plans to “descentralizar [cortar] investimento em faculdades de filosofia e sociologia (humanas) [para] focar em áreas que gerem retorno imediato ao contribuinte, como: veterinária, engenharia e medicina”⁴.

It must be highlighted that these attacks do not “float in the air,” but are constructed upon a social anti-intellectual trend that was developing prior to the arise of these governments. This anti-intellectualism questions the explanatory capacity of the social sciences, undermining the role that sociologists may play in contemporary society and its pressing issues and challenges.

³ The introduction of sociology as part of the high school curriculum had been determined in 2008 under the Luiz Inácio da Silva administration. It is important to clarify that it continues to be taught in several states of Brazil that have not applied the new law.

⁴ “Decentralize [cut] investments in philosophy and sociology faculties (humanities) [to] concentrate on areas that provide immediate returns to taxpayers: veterinarian studies, engineering and medicine.” (Traducción de los autores).

The arguments of important public figures, from politicians to journalists, to strongly discredit sociology among broad audiences, and the bastardization of complex matters, cannot leave us indifferent.

Of course, this reality is not exclusive to the region (Piovani, 2019). Far from here, and even in countries where sociology is deeply rooted, such as in France and Canada, visible within a long tradition of collaboration with different State entities and a consolidated academic system (Masson, 2012), sociologists have had to support attacks from conservative politicians and intellectuals that associate their discipline with the misunderstood “culture of excuses” (Lahire, 2016), willing to “justify” the worst crimes and dissolve individual accountability in the framework of social injustice and other criminal factors (Singh, 2014).

As it can be seen, we are far from the golden age of the mid-20th century when sociology (along with other social sciences) appeared to be a fundamental element for social wellbeing and the consolidation of democratic societies (Picó, 2003). The characterization of “development” as a complex process that in no way adheres to the economic aspect, but included a hodgepodge of social and cultural variables, gave this discipline a marked influence in government spheres, but also in more general public spaces (Blanco, 2006). The situation was such that Talcott Parsons (1959) did not hesitate to refer to the consolidation of a true sociological era begun in the post-war years, led by a growing investment in the development of sociology both inside and outside of the university walls (Blois, 2014; Buxton & Turner, 2019). In our region, the most visible correlation of that “era” was the multiplication of sociology majors and growing expectations regarding the services that the future graduates could offer to address the challenges of the time (Blois, 2018)⁵.

⁵ In 1951, in Mexico, the National School of Political and Social Sciences was founded within UNAM, including a social sciences major that was later transformed into a sociology major. In Chile, in 1958, the first sociology major was created at the

Whatever the case, what is being questioned today in Latin America is the utility of sociology and its purpose, and of course this problem is not new (Carli, 2019). However, this situation is still concerning when considering that the professional activities of sociologists in the region have clearly expanded during the past couple of decades. Beyond the traditional insertion in universities and academic centers, which were able to grow and offer quality research on topics of strong social relevance, an increasing number of practitioners began to address the more immediate needs of customers and non-academic audiences. These practices, developed within the scope of the State, companies, market research and opinion agencies, like NGOs and trade unions, have been expanded the range of employment options for sociologists, who have had to develop different knowledge and skills than those required in the academic sphere. In fact, from the orientation and development of public policies to combat poverty, to the planning of public relations and advertising strategies for large companies, passing through primary and secondary education or the management of human resources in a multinational company, the activities and spaces for sociologist intervention have been varied. In this sense, sociologists have shown a notable versatility and great capacity to penetrate different fields and, in more than one occasion, reach hierarchical positions with clear social impact.

Without a doubt, these changes expressed broader social transformations tied to the so-called *knowledge society* and the correlative valuation of technical knowledge. Even though so-

University of Chile, followed by another at the Catholic University the following year. In 1953, the School of Sociology and Cultural Anthropology began to operate within the Central University of Venezuela, while in 1959 a sociology department was created at the National University of Colombia, to later become an entire faculty. Likewise, and as part of the same modernization program, in 1957, the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) and the Latin American Center for Research on Social Science (CLAPCS), the former offering graduate studies, while the latter helps coordinate and integrate the research work developed in different countries.

ciologists' work beyond the academic sphere was unprecedented, the new context brought about an important redefinition of sociology's fields of intervention and the discipline's own scenario, now characterized by the consolidation and multiplication of a varied set of sociologist "functions," with their own particular working styles, beneficiaries and challenges. This set of audiences is what allowed sociology to gain social relevance and professional density, an interesting contrast to what happened in the 1940s in Argentina (and elsewhere), narrated by Guido Giorgi and Esteban Vila in their contribution to this *dossier*. In that context, those who defined themselves as sociologists faced significant obstacles when trying to earn a living as "professionals" when there was no one interested in or requiring their particular expertise (as opposed to what happened, for example, in parallel in the United States or France).

Nevertheless, how can we explain the constant reproaches regarding sociology's lack of utility in a context marked by the professional exercise of the discipline in a wide range of social spheres? Moreover, how can we show that it is often not easy for the sociologists themselves to demonstrate the contributions of the discipline when they are challenged by people from outside? The causes of this situation are, without a doubt, varied and numerous, but one of the factors may be found in the obstacles faced by sociology throughout the years when positing its constitution as a "profession" capable of offering its services to different audiences and when promoting a more or less fluent dialogue between the different professional profiles it covers. Among those profiles, rather than synergistic relations, as highlighted by Burawoy (2005) in the case of the United States, there was a strong trend towards division and compartmentalization among orientations that, in their battle for prestige, ended up limiting their collaboration.

Roughly speaking, two main orientations can be identified according to Dubet (2012): sociology as *critique* and sociology as *technique*. The former, far from being a discipline that could

claim a certain jurisdiction over a given problem in particular, as classical professions have often done (Abbott, 1988), assumes the mission of deconstructing the social world, breaking down ideologies and denouncing power relations, while questioning those who see sociology as a “profession.” The other proposes a greater degree of rationality among institutions based on offering advisory to the decision makers. This rationality, unlike the other conception, is above all an instrumental rationality, which adheres to the consideration of the best means to the proposed ends. According to the classic model offered by Weber, this conception looks to provide “clarity” to the players to become more aware of the obstacles, the perverse effects or cultural webs that debilitate their ability to take action (Dubet, 2012). Of course, this is an ideal typology and, in practice, these conceptions may overlap in a single individual (a sociologist may put into play different conceptions throughout his or her career or, even, at the same time according to the role or function he or she is performing). However, as we anticipated, both orientations have tended to present themselves as excluding options, limiting the exchange between the two.

One example of this are the more recent professional diversification processes that generated significant dispute in more than one case. Around the world, sociologists embarked upon more or less intense debates on the role of the discipline given the growing social demands and the risks of interaction—or lack thereof—with customers and non-academic audiences brought about for the discipline. Due to its important global repercussion, we remind readers of the controversy surrounding the so-called *public sociology*, initiated by Michael Burawoy in his renowned speech as president of the *American Sociological Association* (Burawoy, 2005; Perlatto & Maia, 2012). Burawoy, inspired by a vision that did not shy away from a clear Marxist sensitivity, called U.S. sociologists to join in the pursuit of audiences committed to defending “society” against the importance of the “market” and the state apparatuses, two institu-

tions that according to his diagnosis were dedicated to maximizing profits and ensuring socio-political order. In his vision, he tried to recover the “original vocation” of the discipline for intervening in society in favor of the common good. This position led to a series of debates around, in general, the defense of the scientific nature of the discipline which, according to some critics of Burawoy, the idea of *public sociology*, with its questioning of the evaluative neutrality ideal, threatened (Turner, 2005). The controversies were no less significant on the other side of the Atlantic. In France, for example, the differentiation and expansion of the professional practices of sociologist—the emergence of what one analyst referred to as the “hidden side of sociology” (Piriou, 2006)—was translated into a series of more or less explicit debates between those who defended a more “ecumenical” vision of sociology, where different insertions could contribute to the overall development of the discipline (Dubar, 2006), and those that, like Lahire (2006), were inspired by a traditionally Bourdieusian vision (Blois, 2014, 2015) that defended academic autonomy as the only way to produce a science that could question the social order.

Latin America, as is to be expected, did not remain outside the debate on the formation and actions of sociologists in society. Those who, given the crisis of the traditional public intellectual model, promoted the decisive intervention of sociologists and other social scientists in different civil society institutions and the State, were opposed by others that also echoed Bourdieu, calling attention to the biases brought about by the instrumentalization of the discipline based on government entities or companies. There were, of course, others who defended the sociological practice developed in close connection to social movements and subaltern sectors. More recently, the academic “professionalization” processes and diffusion of ongoing accreditation mechanisms incited criticism from those faced with what they see as a growing entropy and called for greater interest in the “public issue” and the fate of the society that sociologists study (Svampa, 2008).

The work by Leyva Piña and Rodríguez Lagunas regarding the case of the sociology major at the Metropolitan Autonomous University-Itzapalapa, within the context of the current administration of Manuel López Obrador and his strategy to expand the number of university students in the framework of institutions strongly affected by the neoliberal devices of incentives for teachers, offer concrete and recent cases to situate a large part of the dilemmas and tensions faced by sociology in its constitution as a profession and discipline concerned with operating as a critical intellectual, while also socially relevant, initiative. Galindo Castro, on the other hand, offers a more long-term vision of the debates on sociology as a “profession” and its relation to the main technical and methodological aspects in Latin America.

As it could be anticipated, the scientific and professional associations of sociologists, which sought to bring together and promote exchange⁶ with more or less accidental trajectories according to the countries, have generated further resonance of these debates. Its concrete effect on the work of sociologists has depended on the differentiated strength and gravitation of these institutions in each sociological scenario. Here the positions have been multiple. Some institutions have sought to promote a greater opening for the professional exercise of sociology beyond the academic scene, though not without clear difficulties as shown by the works of Cecilia Carrera in the case of Argentina and Alonso Domínguez, Blanco & Gil Gómez in the case of Spain, both included in this *dossier*. Others tended to reproduce a more traditional perspective of sociology as an eminently academic practice. In any case, even in associations with a clearly academic profile, the multiplication of sociologists’ practices has not been ignored, as in the case of Brazil with the teaching of sociology within the elementary school system (Meucci, 2015; Oliveira, 2013, 2015), and in Uruguay (Fernández, 2018).

⁶ Most emerged since the mid-20th century, after UNESCO established the International Sociological Association in 1949.

Giving continuity to these debates addressed from a multiplicity of focal points, the present dossier called for articles that examined the historical and contemporary transformations of Latin American (and Ibero-American) sociology from different perspectives and approaches, with a particular focus on the formative processes, organizational spaces and professional activities of sociologists. We believe that the reflection on the discipline, understood in the broadest sense—which is not bound by its development as an academic practice, as seen in studies on the development of sociology—, offers a fundamental contribution to sociologists' reflection on their practices and vital inputs when addressing the complex current context in several countries around the region. It is important to note that we do not consider the insertion in academic and the insertion in other more “applied” institutions as mutually exclusive, but we believe that sociology as a whole has must to gain if it were to promote a greater articulation among its different scopes of action. Of course, we cannot deny the existence of local and national specificities that require an in-depth analysis of each case. Therefore, the possibility of including in this *dossier* articles written from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Spain constitutes an auspicious basis for a broader reflection that is also situated upon the challenges faced by sociology as a discipline and profession in the region and beyond.

Articles in the *Dossier* Section

In addition to the five articles mentioned above, the present dossier includes two interviews. The first interview is with Celso Castro, director of the Brazilian Social Sciences Report Project, organized by the Brazilian Center for Contemporary History Research and Documentation (CPDOC). This ambitious initiative has collected testimonies from over one hundred professionals and looks to constitute a wealth of filmed interviews focused on the life stories and professional actions of the most important

Brazilian sociologists and social scientists. The material, which continues the known tradition of the institution where it was prepared, looks to offer input to contribute to the memory and reflexivity of Brazilian sociologists, while also constituting an important amount of information for those looking to carry out a more systematic study of the development of social sciences in Brazil. The initiative also has a broader vocation, as highlighted by the director in this interview:

Em tempos difíceis para as Ciências Sociais, como os que vivemos, essa é uma aposta mais que acadêmica. É também uma aposta política, de valorização, perante outros setores da sociedade que não o nosso próprio, do ofício do cientista social e daquilo que ele produz⁷.

The inclusion of this interview looks to raise awareness of this important company among the Latin American audience. The other interview takes a look at the vision of Kathya Araujo, a renowned researcher and professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies (IDEA) at the University of Santiago, Chile. Carried out by Natalia Campos and Juan Morales, the interview offers a rich inquiry into the hot topics related to current events and the trajectory of sociology in Chile as a scientific discipline and a profession demanded by different clientele. According to Araujo, Chilean sociology has undergone an auspicious process of growth and consolidation -evidenced in the increase of PhD holders and research projects-, but also subject to a growing fragmentation, which leads to little “conversation” among sociologists specialized in different fields. That trend, she highlights, is accentuated by certain assessment mechanisms that prioritize publications in international journals, further debilitating local exchange. On the other hand, at a time as particular as the present, Araujo calls

⁷ “At a difficult time for the social sciences, as that seen today, this is a more academic proposal. It is also a political proposal, which looks to understand the function of social scientists and their actions with other sectors of society that go beyond the academic world.”

attention to the “political” and “institutionalist” bias of Chilean sociology, and proposes a review of the study of “society.” She clarifies that this is not about avoiding political matters, quite the contrary. Araujo understands that this rodeo is fundamental to more deeply and thoroughly conceptualizing the political challenges at hand. While here perspective of the Chilean case is organized around its contrast with other realities, the reflections made by Araujo offer stimulating material for readers from around the world.

The dossier section begins with the article “Why Defend Sociology: An Extension of the Sociological Manifesto in Times of Darkness,” by Adrián Galindo Castro. In this paper, Castro examines the theoretical and methodological turns experienced by sociology in Latin America based on determinant historical processes such as industrialization, the external debt crisis and neoliberalism. After discrediting the attacks of Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, as unsustainable fallacies, he reflects on the path taken by this social science in Latin America and the roles played by its great interlocutor, the State, in the examination of the theories mobilized, especially in the university and public spaces.

Cecilia Carrera in “Professional Associations of Sociologists in Argentina and Disputes over the ‘Profession’” describes some of the activities carried out by professional associations that arose since the mid-1970s for the purpose of examining the place these organizations and their participants have held in the professionalization process of sociologists and in the construction and disputes over the meanings of the “profession” and sociology in the country. This article highlights the heterogeneity of Argentinean sociology, which goes beyond the theoretical traditions and academic lineage. In this sense, it attempts to outline the different actors in the discipline’s broad sphere and their participation in the debates to define what it means to “be dedicated to sociology” and the changing meanings of “sociology as a profession.”

In a similar vein, although addressing an earlier historical period, we find the contribution by Guido Giorgi and Esteban Vila: "A Challenging Case of Professionalization: Argentinean Sociology Networks Between 1940 and 1955." This article is deliberately situated in the period prior to the creation of the first sociology majors in Argentina. In continuity with previous works that directed attention to the weakness of institutional development of sociology during the first half of the 20th century, the authors sustaining that between 1940 and 1955, there was no "professionalization" process within the community of Argentinean sociologists. Without a clear demand or positions that would help develop the discipline as a full-time occupation, and with no possibility of aspiring to jurisdiction over a given social issue, sociology tended to be considered more of an intellectual, philosophical and/or cultural discipline.

In "Winds of Change for the Sociology Major Offered by the Iztapalapa Unit, at the Metropolitan Autonomous University," Marco Antonio Leyva Piña and Javier Rodríguez Lagunas analyze an empirical case in Mexico of a program created in 1975 within the framework of the founding of UAM, revealing the impact of neoliberal education policies that changed the institutions forms of assessment and gave way to, among other things, the creation of a new curriculum approved in 2011. As documented, that curriculum is marked by curricular flexibility, which the author claims would not help solve the professional challenges currently faced by the degree program. More recently, UAMI sociology faces pressures to configure its ties between sociological formation and the professional profiles of its students, which poses a certain challenge when protecting what is referred to as formal sociology, its theories and methods, without ignoring the development of practical and applied sociology aimed at facilitating the graduates' insertion in the job market.

Finally, Ángel Alonso Domínguez, Jacobo Blanco and Carlos de Gil Gómez in "Professional Identity, Regulation and Practice of Sociology and Political Science in Spain," analyze, based on

the data taken from a survey, the actions of that country's professional associations and the strategies implemented to increase their presence, influence, power, credibility and attractiveness for potential members. It is interesting to point out that, as opposed to the Latin American cases, those associations group together sociology and political science graduates, since both programs originally shared the first few years of study. As they point out, with the exception of the associations in Madrid and Catalonia, these institutions are not very big and have limited resources, thus restricting their possibility of offering services to members and attracting newer generations.

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