

IN DEFENSE OF SOCIOLOGY: AGAINST THE MYTH THAT SOCIOLOGISTS ARE CHARLATANS, JUSTIFY CRIMINALS AND DISTORT REALITY

EM DEFESA DA SOCIOLOGIA: CONTRA O MITO DE QUE OS SOCIÓLOGOS SÃO CHARLATÕES, JUSTIFICAM CRIMINOSOS E DISTORCEM A REALIDADE

EN DEFESA DE LA SOCIOLOGÍA: CONTRA EL MITO DE QUE LOS SOCIÓLOGOS SON UNOS CHARLATANES, JUSTIFICAN A LOS DELINCUENTES Y DISTORSSIONAN LA REALIDADE

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ABSTRACT: In the current context, of targeted attacks on the education system even from the then president of the republic, especially in the humanities, the debate about the relevance of sociology becomes relevant. In Brazil, the removal of the compulsory teaching of sociology in high school, added to the dismantling of higher education, creates a disturbing scenario, which puts the teaching of sociology in check and even belittles it and diminishes it with fallacies and false speeches before society. With this, it is of great importance that clarifications and acknowledgments in defense of sociology, and even a self-assessment of the researchers themselves, materialize to try to reverse this scenario, to explore this theme, the work *En Defesa de la Sociología: contra el mito de que los sociólogos son unos charlatanes, justifican a los delinquentes y distorssionan la realidad* will be analyzed, seeking in this work elucidations and possibilities for the development of this stony path.

KEYWORDS: Teaching. Sociology. Society. Subject.

RESUMO: No contexto atual, de ataques direcionados ao sistema de ensino partindo até mesmo do então presidente da república, em especial as áreas de humanas, o debate acerca da relevância da sociologia se torna pertinente. No Brasil, a remoção da obrigatoriedade do ensino de sociologia do ensino médio, somado ao desmonte do ensino superior, cria um cenário perturbador, que coloca em xeque o ensino da sociologia e mesmo a menospreza e diminui com falácias e falsos discursos perante a sociedade. Com isso, é de grande importância que esclarecimentos e reconhecimentos em defesa da sociologia, e mesmo uma autoavaliação dos próprios pesquisadores, se concretize para tentar reverter esse cenário, para explorar esse tema, a obra *En Defesa de la Sociología: contra el mito de que los sociólogos son unos charlatanes, justifican a los delinquentes y distorssionan la realidad* será analisada, buscando nesse trabalho elucidações e possibilidades para o desenvolvimento desse caminho de pedras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ensino. Sociologia. Sociedade. Indivíduo.

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RESUMEN: *En el contexto actual, de ataques dirigidos al sistema educativo incluso desde el entonces presidente de la república, especialmente en las humanidades, cobra relevancia el debate sobre la pertinencia de la sociología. En Brasil, la supresión de la enseñanza obligatoria de la sociología en la enseñanza media, sumada al desmantelamiento de la enseñanza superior, crea un escenario inquietante, que pone en jaque a la enseñanza de la sociología e incluso la menosprecia y disminuye con falacias y falsos discursos ante la sociedad. Con esto, es de gran importancia que se materialicen aclaraciones y reconocimientos en defensa de la sociología, e incluso una autoevaluación de los propios investigadores, para tratar de revertir este escenario, para explorar este tema, la obra *En defensa de la sociología: contra Se analizará el mito de que los sociólogos son charlatanes, justificando a los delinquentes y tergiversando la realidad, buscando en este trabajo elucidaciones y posibilidades para el desarrollo de este pedregoso camino.**

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Enseñanza. Sociología. Sociedad. Individual.*

The publication of the work *En Defensa de la Sociología: contra el mito de que los sociólogos son unos charlatanes, justifican a los delinquentes y distorsionan la realidad* by Bernard Lahire (2016b) brings a current debate on the public status of sociology, being its reading more that relevant in the current Brazilian context, in which sociology has lost space in the scope of educational policies, having its relevance questioned with regard to the formation of young people in high school, in addition to suffering direct attacks in the public sphere. Even though there are substantial differences between the space that sociology occupies in the public arena in Brazil and in France, I believe that reading *En Defensa de la Sociología* can bring substantive contributions to the community of Brazilian sociologists. Also in the global arena, the multiplication of attacks on sociology in the public sphere is observed, at the same time that the professional field of sociologists and the spaces for their insertion in civil society is diversified (BLOIS, OLIVEIRA, 2019).

This review refers to the version published in Spanish of *Pour la sociologie. Et pour en finir avec une prétendue 'culture de l'excuse'*, making it interesting to note that both versions were published in the same year, which may indicate that there is a demand to respond to the questionings suffered by sociology in the public sphere both in America Latin and in Europe. To a certain extent, I consider this work by Lahire as a continuation of the collection he edited called *À quoi sert la sociologie?* (2002), also readily translated into Spanish as *¿Para qué sirve la sociología?* (2006).

A significant part of this work appears as a response to the publication in France of *Malaise dans l'inculture* (2015) by Philippe Val, who had been director of *Charlie Hebdo*. According to Lahire, in this book Val endeavors to diagnose the genesis of the ills of



contemporary French society, which could be summarized in the term “sociologism”, even though there is no total misunderstanding of what sociology is. The political changes in France are also placed in the background of the debate that Lahire develops, promoted at least from the performance of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) in the French government, since his performance as minister, even though Lahire points out that the Criticism of sociology sometimes comes not exclusively from politicians considered to be on the right, but also from the left itself.

The first point that Lahire develops in the chapter “*Acusada de excusar: la sociología en el banquillo*” is how in several means of communication, and even in the academic debate, sociology is accused of making “excuses” that would excuse individuals, which if would oppose the idea of “individual responsibility”. This process, far from being something new, would have already blossomed in previous decades, in the wake of politicians who presided over the United States of America such as Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and George W. Bush (2001-2009), who publicly stated that intended to combat the ideas that sought to “blame society” in cases of crimes and delinquency. There would, therefore, be a certain understanding disseminated mainly in the media, that when seeking social explanations for phenomena such as violence, terrorism etc., there would be a process of excusing individuals, which would have as its origin the sociological discourse.

Lahire refutes such criticisms in the following chapter, entitled “Entender, juzgar, castigar”, indicating that those who denounce sociology for trying to understand or explain, in fact, would aim to judge without explanations. Also, according to the author:

Thinking that looking for the “causes” or, more modestly, the “probabilities of appearance”, the “contexts” or the “conditions of possibility” of a phenomenon is equivalent to “forgiving” in the sense of “excusing” or “absolving” individuals it is the result of a confusion of perspectives. The feat of understanding belongs to the scope of knowledge (laboratory). Judging and sanctioning are proper to the scope of normative action (court). Claiming that understanding “disengages” the individuals involved amounts to unduly reducing science to law (LAHIRE, 2016b, p. 31, our translation).

The French sociologist then opposes two perspectives, one that seeks to “punish without understanding” and one that seeks to “understand without judging”, the latter being characteristic of sociology. In this wake, he seeks to elucidate the purpose of understanding, whose purpose, in a synthetic way, would be: “to solve problems in a way that does not imply *exclusion* (incarceration, apartment or psychiatric confinement) or the *destruction* of the other (death penalty)” (LAHIRE, 2016b, p. 36, emphasis added, our translation). The scientific work,

with its necessary distance, would allow us to understand the individual actions inserted in present and past networks of interdependence.

In order to better substantiate his argument, Lahire in the chapter “*La ficción del Homo clausus y del libre albedrío*” indicates the idea of “*Homo clausus*” as a fallacy, as well as the idea of “free will”. For him, it is a philosophical or legal fiction, which recurrently accuses sociology of saying that we do not make choices or that we make decisions, however, what this science would do is indicate that such decisions and choices have multiple conditions. The argument that indicates that “inclinations”, “character”, “temperament” would be innate characteristics would have the great advantage, for those who use this argument, of the fact that it cuts any possible bond between the one who judges and the one who is judged. Exacerbated individualism, understood as a reading of human actions disconnected from interdependence bonds, would therefore be a myth.

This question unfolds in the debate on the dominated, better deepened in the chapter “*Terminar com las falsas evidencias: la sociología en acción*”, in which Lahire indicates that within a certain liberal discourse, individuality ends up erasing the processes of domination. In this direction, sociology would present itself as an important tool that aims to challenge false evidence. In his words:

Sociology *historicizes* states of fact that are supposed to be natural (such as the differences between men and women, generational conflicts and competence conflicts). It also *de-essentializes* or *de-substantializes* individuals, who have become what they are due to their relationship with a whole series of individuals, groups and institutions (sociology of criminal careers, artistic careers or individual sportsmen, etc.) and, above all, it contradicts case voluntary or involuntary lies about the state of reality and disarms illusory discourses (LAHIRE, 2016b, p. 66, emphasis added, our translation).

The author also emphasizes how sociology brings a plurality of perspectives, which allows us to think about social problems from a new angle, re-dimensioning them. He also highlights that sociology is not just the science of collective phenomena, it is also dedicated to singular cases, which would help to overcome an abstract image of the individual, which would be operationalized from the relational character of sociology. To support his argument, Lahire uses not only references to his own research, but also references to different authors such as Marx, Elias, Hughes etc. In this direction, he points out that unlike other readings of the social, such as that carried out by the media, scientific work has the possibility of thinking things in a radical way (author's emphasis), which goes after the deepest causes of action.



Finally, Lahire closes the discussion in “*Conclusión: Ciencias para la democracia*”, pointing that:

The repeated attacks on sociology, and more generally on all sciences that strive to make sense of the social world, are a reminder of its extreme fragility. Thus, they generate awareness of the need to defend them whenever possible. This defense becomes all the more necessary the more they are regularly attacked in the school system, at the high school or even at the university (LAHIRE, 2016b, p. 83, our translation).

Lahire then resumes some lines of public attack on the humanities and social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, which takes us back to recent events in the Brazilian context, which include the loss of mandatory teaching of sociology in basic education, with the Reform of Secondary Education, in addition to the more direct attacks made by the President of the Republic in 2019. One of the ways for Lahire to defend sociology is precisely the demand for its teaching in the school system, which in his understanding could respond to the modern demands of school education of citizens. This position by Lahire, defending sociology in the school system, has already appeared in a text published in Brazil (LAHIRE, 2014), resulting precisely from his conference sent to the *III National Meeting of Sociology Teaching in Basic Education*, which took place in the city of Fortaleza in 2013. With the presence of sociology in the school system:

Individuals in our societies would get used to considering, as they did with the physical world, that social reality is structured and that it can be known by rational means. The diffusion of these sciences would not magically abolish inequalities, injustices or domination, but it would make life more difficult for all forms of ethnocentrism and lies, and would allow all citizens to be more aware of the world in which they live, of their historical character and, finally, of the possibilities they have to transform the order of things (LAHIRE, 2016b, p. 89, our translation).

Despite ending the book with these words, this work also has an appendix entitled “*El mundo según Val: una variante de la mirada conservata*”, in which Lahire explores the work of Philippe Val (2015) more diligently, seeking to demonstrate his lack of foundation in certain points, with emphasis on the lack of knowledge about sociological knowledge, and at the same time its alignment with a certain worldview, which ends up defending the point of view of the dominant ones.

As pointed out at the beginning of this review, Lahire's text becomes especially relevant in the current Brazilian context, and also allows us to perceive that attacks on sociological science go beyond national barriers. This obviously does not imply an emptying of sociology's



own discussion, on the contrary, these constitutive clashes in the political field and the scientific field invite us to reflect on the place of sociology in the public sphere.

It is up to us, within the scope of knowledge production, to think of alternatives in terms of broader dialogues that allow us to re-dimension this place of sociology, reaffirming in the terms set out by Lahire, the relevance of this science for the consolidation of a democratic project, being, in this sense, one of the most pertinent strategies to defend the place of sociology in the school system. With that, I mean that Lahire's text at the same time leads us to broader reflections on the place of sociology in the world, it also invites us to a more accurate reflection to think from the local contexts which paths to follow in the defense of sociology.

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