

Sociology and hope

The crisis of hope in the sociology crisis

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The seminar brought together researchers from USP, Cambridge University and the University of Lisbon. It had been considered, over several years, in conversations with Graham Howes, Peter Burke and Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, in Cambridge, and Fraya Frehse, at USP. It was an interdisciplinary seminar because it is precisely in interdisciplinarity that sociology has historically defined topics and issues of research, and enriched itself theoretically. It was in interdisciplinarity, here in Brazil, that sociology unveiled historical hindrances to the social development of the country and revealed the alternative of the historically possible.

We have but to remember that of the great founding names of sociology at USP, many graduated from the perspective of what in sociology are the so-called ancillary disciplines. Claude Lévi-Strauss, founder of the Sociology chair and one of the forefathers of modern anthropology, was a philosopher by academic trade. His successor, Roger Bastide, practiced a sociology with strong connections with anthropology and psychoanalysis. His first course at USP was precisely about sociology and psychoanalysis. Florestan Fernandes, who succeeded both, got his master's and doctoral degrees with research on anthropological topics, not to mention that his professorship thesis on black people is sociology of extensive and consistent dialogue with history. The beautiful sociology of Antonio Candido is underpinned by the dialogue with anthropology, history and literature.

The following generations were educated based of these convergences, up to the inflection that started with the political crisis of the 1964 coup and the generational crisis that reached its climax with the student revolt of 1968. Since

then, sociology has closed in on itself, generally preferring topics that reduce it to the here and now. The very education of Social Sciences students today is restricted to fragments and to an early ultra-specialization. At the same time, what for sociology had always been ancillary disciplines seizes, competently, the topics typical of sociology, as has been the case with anthropology, geography, history, and psychology. Sociology is at risk of becoming a residual science of the trivial.

In large part the void created by the two mentioned crises - political and generational - was being filled by imitation and copying, giving rise to a sociology that turns us into a branch of Paris, New York or London. As if Brazilian society were not facing very serious problems or no longer had the structural references of the original, of that which is proper to it and claims for research and theory founded on the difference of the unique. The path that gave anthropology the universal breadth and consistency of its theories, which sociology is slowly losing by mistakenly applying here interpretations and formulations related to a society which we are not. We are giving up the richness of our social references and their importance to the development of sociological theories.

It was this scenario that motivated USP to organize the Seminar and the choice of its reference topic, Hope, a key concept of the different theoretical orientations of sociology. Therefore, a concept fraught with possibilities for mapping the crisis of sociology in different realms.

Sociology was born dissatisfied with the here and now and remains demarcated by different concepts of hope. Within the scope of positivism and the premise of progress, it took over and developed different theoretical formulations of dynamics and social change in the framework of order. Not infrequently it became interested in the possibility of inducing social change to overcome and suppress states of anomie and achieve situations of equilibrium and consistency in the link between social consciousness and social relations. Within the scope of dialectic and the premise of overcoming social contradictions, it took over and developed different theoretical formulations of radical social change in the context of the historically possible. It also focused on factors of order by proposing the sociological unveiling of the mechanisms of social alienation, an issue that in positivism would appear in parallel, although distinctly, under the concept of anomie. And even from the perspective of comprehension it elected the primacy of rational to understand the residual forms of action and power, the weaknesses in face of the objectively possible.

Sociology has experienced its crises of interpretation in the crises of each society it proposes to study. The debate about sociological knowledge, the diversity of its theoretical orientations and the antagonisms that oppose one another is a debate about perspectives, ways of seeing that express ways of being. But that express also what society could supposedly be and is not. It is in this frame of reference that sociology is, in the broad sense, a science of hope that gets lost in the growing option of the sociology or the here and now, the sociol-

ogy of societies where there is no longer a place for historical creation and social transformation.

This dossier does not include, at the request of the author, the beautiful lecture delivered by Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, “Reflections on hopelessness and failure,” because it is an unpublished chapter in the book about the German sociologist Rudiger Bilden, which she is publishing through UNESP Press. Bilden was a friend of Gilberto Freyre, in whose ideas the author from Pernambuco found inspiration to write “The Masters and the Slaves” (*Casa grande & senzala*).

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