

*Revista Crítica Penal y Poder (Nueva Época)* e-ISSN: 2014-3753

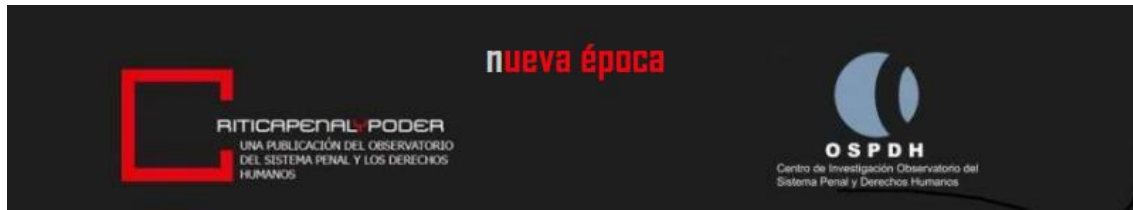
Noviembre de 2024, nº 27

Observatorio del Sistema Penal y los Derechos Humanos

Universidad de Barcelona



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## TESTIMONY OF A SOCIOLOGIST OF IMPRISONMENT<sup>1</sup>

*TESTIMONI D'UN SOCIÒLEG DE LA PRESÓ*

*TESTIMONIO DE UN SOCIÓLOGO DEL ENCARCELAMIENTO*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1344/cpyp.2024.27.46310>

### ABSTRACT

*A testimony is a selective representation of highly complex experiences. In this testimony I turn to the civilized imperial mindset also inculcated in schools and universities. I hope that this concept can help the understanding of how, even if unconsciously or against their will, teachers and schools give up independent thinking to fulfill the techno-scientific missions assigned to them by their profession. The most important question for a sociologist remains unanswered: what has forty years of professional experience taught my generation of sociology professors?*

**Keywords:** *sociology; professionalization; imperial mindset; centrifugal science.*

### RESUM

*Un testimoni és una representació selectiva d'experiències molt complexes. En aquest testimoni em torno a la mentalitat imperial civilitzada també inculcada a les escoles i les universitats. Espero que aquest concepte ajudi a entendre com, encara que sigui inconscientment o contra la seva voluntat, professors i escoles renuncien al pensament autònom per complir les missions tecnocientífiques que els encomana la seva professió. La pregunta més important per a un sociòleg segueix sense resposta: què han ensenyat quaranta anys d'experiència professional a la meva generació de professors de sociologia?*

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**Paraules clau:** *Sociologia; Professionalització; Mentalitat imperial; Ciència centrífuga.*

## RESUMEN

*Un testimonio es una representación selectiva de experiencias altamente complejas. En este testimonio recorro a la mentalidad imperial civilizada que también se inculca en escuelas y universidades. Espero que este concepto pueda ayudar a comprender cómo, incluso inconscientemente o contra su voluntad, los profesores y las escuelas renuncian al pensamiento independiente para cumplir las misiones tecnocientíficas que les asigna su profesión. La pregunta más importante para un sociólogo sigue sin respuesta: ¿qué me han enseñado cuarenta años de experiencia profesional a mi generación de profesores de sociología?*

**Palabras clave:** *sociología; profesionalización; mentalidad imperial; ciencia centrífuga.*

## Introduction

In a 2009 documentary, Duesberg [now disgraced, highly awarded American scientist] is somewhat empathetic, if not sympathetic, toward his detractors: “They are prostitutes, most of them, my colleagues—and to some degree, myself. You have to be a prostitute to get money for your research. You’re trained a little bit to be a prostitute.” He smiles and adds, “But some go all the way.” (Kennedy Jr., 2021, p. 523)

As a sociologist of incarceration, I described the vocational dispositions of guards, prisoners and criminals within the general framework of sociabilities of power (Dores, 2008, 2009, 2010b, 2010a). Such dispositions, although especially salient in prisons, structure modern societies as a whole. Prisons are not marginal to power. They are the weight on the plumb line that stabilizes the hierarchy of societies in the service of the imperial mission (Dores, 2021b).

Following the Portuguese Carnation Revolution of 1974, the socialism that was inscribed in the Portuguese constitution implicitly included the abolitionism of prisons and police repression. This was the spirit of the time (Mathiesen, 2016, p. 6). With the war on drugs, the 1980s saw an increase in the number of prisoners. The Portuguese Ombudsman's first report on prisons (1996) revealed that the drug related convictions that filled prisons were accompanied by a no-investment policy on prisons. This resulted in a death toll record in 1997 (106 deaths per 10,000 prisoners). At that time prisons were not yet a topic in the social sciences in Portugal. Although Boaventura Sousa Santos, the best-known and a worldwide-award-winning Portuguese sociologist, is one of the pioneers of the sociology of law, it was only in 2016 that the first national recurrent meeting of the Sociology of Law and Justice was organized, where criminologists converged.

The quantitative increase of researchers in prisons suffers from a bias: the hyper-specialization of objects of study, such as prisons, loses sight of the national and international historical and scientific framework. It reduces critique to functional moralism. For example, investigations to discover ways of social

reintegration within prisons are mainstream (Dores, 2017). What lessons can be learnt from revisiting a thirty-year personal experience? What mechanisms limit the power of the critical study of prison systems? This article uses objective introspection (Mead, 1930) and the theory-method “mindsets” developed by the author to answer these questions.

The imperial spirit naturalizes hierarchization (Silva, 2003) and idolizes violence, including prisons: it hides behind them, accusing anything that opposes its exploitative civilizing mission, such as abolitionism, of violence and disrespect for hierarchy. It works top-down, as imperial power, and bottom-up, as submission to the imperial mission (Dores, 2008, 2009). This article has four parts: the presentation of the concept of mindsets, examples of the practical effects of adopting the imperial spirit, the description of obstacles to the development of abolitionist ideas, and examples of structural limitations imposed on academic success.

### **Centrifugal sociology and Mindsets**

I experienced a freedom as a university professor that no longer exists. I started by teaching how to use computers and sociologically questioning their applications. Times have changed. Any child uses computers, and many are addicted to the internet, a risk that was not easily foreseeable in the 1980s, when the internet was not widely available to the public. That experience made me conscious of what I should teach: centrifugal sciences (Dores, 2021a) discovering universal substrates (Schofield, 2018). Centripetal sciences, technosciences, have their utilitarian merits, but they are conditioning centrifugal sciences in such a way that they limit innovation (Park et al., 2023). We must recognize the merits of the work developed by the professionalization of sociologists while also recognizing that sociology as a discipline has allowed itself to become isolated, with significant consequences. Namely, it is powerless to explain and clarify why wars, prisons, and misery persist, despite humanity’s dominance over nature. It is powerless when relationships with the environment become more important for the destiny of humanity than relationships between humans.

The professional practice of sociology in Portugal was understood as an anti-fascist activity, given It was censored by the Estado Novo (the fascist regime of 1926-1974) and emerged from a post-imperial and post-colonial culture.<sup>ii</sup> This is reflected in the positions that emerging political parties in the new democratic Portuguese state took vis-à-vis sociology. The Social Democratic Party, in legal opposition before the revolution, regarded the professionalization of sociology as going too far. The Socialist Party, emerging from the illegal opposition to the Estado Novo, looked with sympathy at the expansion of sociology. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the general secretary of the CGTP-Intersindical (the largest trade union federation in Portugal) and a member of the Communist Party, received a doctorate in sociology and left his leadership position to become a university professor of sociology, leading some union members to follow in his footsteps.

As in other parts of the world, sociology in Portugal is polarized between two rival schools. The academic school is headquartered at ISCTE-IUL in Lisbon, the school where I became a professional,

an institution known for being close to the Socialist Party, and the critical school, in Coimbra, led by Boaventura Sousa Santos and closer to the *Bloco de Esquerda* (left block) party.

The struggle for the imposition of criteria of truth accompanies the struggle for institutional and political power in academia (Foucault, 1999). Such struggles have effects on the internal organization of universities, on the careers of professors and other professionals, and on social relations within the organizations. The experience and perspectives related here are those of someone who wanted to succeed in the academic world but was kept in the margins. Someone who retired in the same professional category with which he started as a university professor. Someone who lived the professional and cognitive freedom that today he considers impossible. This testimony points to the value of centrifugal science, overlooked by evaluation systems. Proof of this oversight is the underdevelopment, in sociology, of concepts such as mindsets, empire, imperial mindset, society, constitutional moments, violence, war, abuse, sacrifice, human nature. In general, concepts that imply biological dynamics and the natural sciences that study them are abandoned or reduced to their cultural aspects, disembodied.

In drawing up this testimony I used centrifugal sociology. Centrifugal sociology is based on concepts such as self-assigned freedom (M. Kuhn, 2016), the discussion of scientific paradigms (T. S. Kuhn, 1970) and universal substrates (Schofield, 2018) as gravitational waves in physics or as *estados de espirito* (mindset) (Dores, 2009, 2010b, 2010a) or the empire (Dores, 2019a) in sociology. This sociology resulted from the research I developed to answer the question that led me to study sociology, namely, how are people forced to subject themselves to the emotional instability of societies? How did my generation, in the space of a few years, adapt to fascism, revolution (1974-75) and democracy? How did proud revolutionary Portugal become conservative and timid? I developed a sociology set out to help human rights succeed in their fight against socially and institutionally produced discrimination, of which prisons are telling examples and my specialism.

Centrifugal sociology differs from centripetal sociology in that, additionally to specializing in the objects of its study, it seeks to open itself to other cognitive worlds, looking for universal substrates such as human nature, civilization, empire, *mindsets*. In this testimony I turn to the civilized imperial *mindset* also inculcated in schools and universities. I hope that this concept can help the understanding of how, even if unconsciously or against their will, teachers and schools give up independent thinking to fulfill the techno-scientific missions assigned to them by their profession.

### **The imperial mindset taught in schools**

Dr. Fauci, the head of the US 's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is the man known worldwide for his role in affirming science during the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside and contradicting President Trump. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a lawyer and independent candidate for the 2024 US presidency, son of the politician with the same name assassinated in 1968, wrote a book with the intention of rescuing science from the image it acquired during the pandemic.

Ideally, science and public policy are never static. They are a process, a collaboration, a debate and a partnership. (...) We encourage and invite dialogue, criticism, engagement—and every suggestion will be heard and considered (Kennedy Jr., 2021, p. 23).

There are here two conceptions of science: the science exemplified by Dr. Fauci, which solves problems, and the science advocated by Kennedy, Jr. in his book, which raises questions and problems. There is centripetal science – hyper-disciplinary, technology-centered sciences – and centrifugal science (Dores, 2021b). In the case of healthcare, centripetal sciences are used in the centralized healthcare-industrial complex, while centrifugal scientific practices are comparable to decentralized, personalized clinical care (Bernstein & Alt, 2021).

Schofield (2018) wrote about the discussion about and division between Bohr's quantum physics and Einstein's unified field theory, which marked the Copenhagen Congress in 1927, on the eve of the 1929 financial crisis. At the time, the military-industrial complex, which exploits science for military and civilian purposes, was beginning to get organized around serving the emerging North American superpower. This constituted a huge advantage for science, especially for technoscience, but meant unbalanced support for fundamental science (Lacey, 2012; Neary, 2017; Philip Rose, 2021). In this context, after World War II, sociology discussed how to position itself in the scientific field (Parsons, 1948). Between the priority given to grand theory, typical of the previous period, and the medium-range theories (Merton, 1968) that would become hegemonic, sociology opted to privilege specialized science. All the other disciplines of the social sciences did the same and became mutually alienated and divided into subdisciplines. Economics has its back to sociology, and both focus on subdividing into specialized economics and sociologies. Allegedly this happened because it made it easier, faster, and more effective for educating and for professionalization (Guibentif, 2018).

Table 1. Divided sciences

Physics	Social Sciences	Medicine
Universal substrates	Centrifugal	R. F. Kennedy, Jr, the “Negationist”
Specialized subjects	Centripetal	Dr. Fauci, the “Boss”

Efforts towards interdisciplinarity and intersectionality have proved to be insufficient to compensate for the dominant hyperspecialization imposed by science policy. The latter works through financial incentives and assessment schemes (Kennedy Jr., 2021, chapter 6), and translates into the hegemony of a centripetal science dominated by non-scientific interests, those of funders, and of whomever employs the scientists.

Kennedy, Jr. wrote about the professional history of Dr. Fauci managing science applied to healthcare in the USA over the last 50 years. Such history parallels my life as a professor and university researcher in the emerging field of sociology in Portugal. I found in Kennedy’s reporting of Dr. Fauci’s career the

power of the empire. Empire is a concept that I have developed (Dores, 2019a) to open sociology and the social sciences to the natural sciences (Wallerstein (1996), in a centrifugal strategy.

The imperial *mindset* is like a gravitational force. It brings together what otherwise seems to be disconnected. It connects different levels and times of reality, such as everyday life, life in organizations and political lives. It connects personal experiences, the news, and history's different periods. It connects the taught sciences to cutting-edge sciences. Leaders, workers, and consumers, we all share the same naturalized, trivialized, normalized, incorporated imperial *mindset*, interpreted from different socially fixed positions (Clark, 2014).

As stars are strongly connected by gravity, or the trees of the forests are related by chemical exchanges between their roots, so humanity is linked, in its dispersion, by the imperial *mindset*. It is from the evolution of the imperial *mindset* among humans, capturing more and more people into its orbit through modernization (Eisenstadt, 2003), that a humanity that aspires to unification, to global citizenship, emerged.

This empire relates to civilization as the invisible hand relates to markets or gravity to Newtonian's physics. It corresponds to an unconscious collective will that is reproduced also through education. It's a process whereby people atomise their collective identity to individual status, thus becoming instruments of the imperial mission. As a result of education, we are willing to make sacrifices, such as waging war (from which I narrowly escaped) or working to survive (from which I also escaped quite a bit, as will be seen).

Table 2. Human nature, justice, civilization, and institutions

Vital principles	Justice principles	Civilizational principles	Institutional principles
Physical survival	Retaliation	Faith	Contract
Spiritual strength	Ordeal	Empire	The invisible hand of the market

When studying the impact of computers on society, I had already understood that, in Portugal, decisions about information technology were virtually incomprehensible to anyone who did not know Silicon Valley. But before reading Kennedy (2021 chap. 6) I had not understood that the professional assessment I was subject to in the last half of my professional life, from 2006 onwards, also depended on what happened in the USA in the post-war period (Denis Rancourt, 2009).

My professional history, the history of the sociology department in which I was integrated, the history of sociology in Portugal, the history of post-war sociology, and the history of science and its applications, are linked by the *imperial mindset*. To understand how supporters and opponents of the Atlantic alliance between the USA and Europe cooperate and compete, under the hold of the *imperial mindset*, one must go a little further back in history and a little higher in the structure of civilization.

European navigational expansion created conditions for the emergence of science. The study of social life was excluded from the outset, as the Catholic Church oversaw it (Damásio, 1994). It was not until the 19th century, with the success of the anti-clerical movements, that the issue of the materiality of working conditions arose - and it went on to mark the 20th century (Castel, 1995; Marcuse, 1991). However, until now the natural and social sciences continue to turn their backs on each other. Disciplines subdivide into sub-disciplines that typically do not communicate with each other (Guibentif, 2018).

Teaching children or adults has been reduced to experiments in reducing teacher knowledge to what students can learn, infantilizing them in the process. On the other hand, in terms of professionalization, the mutual isolation of disciplines and work organizations, as well as hierarchisation, are geared towards the exploitation of sciences and hyper-specialized human commodities that have no contact with each other and only have a compartmentalized knowledge of the subject they work with. In schools, universities, and companies, centripetal science prevails: catalogs of closed answers to prefabricated and abstract questions that function to serve the imperial mission.

The calls for more complete education (Snow, 1956) reflect the recognition and desire to overcome the limitations of teaching and the consequences of professionalization. Keeping in mind, when teaching, the ways in which human nature evolve in institutions and why the sciences are divided, for better and worse, requires the availability of teachers and students to learn more than what is asked of them at present (Denis Rancourt, 2009; Dores, 2021a; Pacheco, 2014).

The university model during the fascist obscurantism of the Estado Novo in Portugal (1926-1974) had neither scientific credibility nor a future in a more open society. The transition experience that I lived through in the 1980s and 1990s as a sociology professor resulted from an intense collective desire for higher education, limited by the lack of scientific resources that take a long time to train and organize. In the 21st century came the standardized assessment rules imported in bulk by the European Union to reduce science to its centripetal, hyper-specialized, mutually isolated, more easily manageable professional aspects. The devaluation of the Portuguese language in favor of English in Portuguese social sciences institutions is perhaps the most evident result of the imperial subservience implied in the process.

My testimony is that of an old university professor with no known merits, whose story can serve to relate current imperial practices within the daily life of universities and within relations between professors and students (Carrico, 2016). As a student, I had experienced the fascist and anti-scientific university. I became convinced of the advantages of universal education and the opening of universities to thousands of students every year, despite having read the warnings of Ivan Illich (1971). I concluded that, after all, the centripetal science dominant in education and universities is an obstacle to the liberation of the scientific spirit (Dores, 2021b) and a suppressor of hope for a better society. The emperor has no clothes! Will there be the courage to recognize it (Dores, 2019b)?

## A brief testimony

An exercise in objective introspection is pursued (Mead, 1930). It has in mind the rivalry between structural-functionalism and symbolic interactionism, on the one hand, and critical theory, on the other. Instead of opting for one of the currents, I prefer to take advantage of all three, with emphasis on the one least involved in sociology. Symbolic interactionism can help to find bridges between the macro and the micro, biology and social sciences, between human nature and human genius, between social action and the construction of organizations that represent institutions, between the backdrop and the episodes of everyday life, between historical decisions and people's inner conversations.

Three youth experiences shaped my character. At the end of puberty, I stopped socializing with other kids. The futile games of power and the duality of the criteria, including machismo, used to discriminate against others, became unbearable to me. For 12 years I was treated like a hero in an amateur team sport. As a university student, I experienced the Carnation Revolution as part of a group of activists who did not follow any political party and adhered to the process of democratization through professional life.

Sport boosted my ego and taught me how fleeting glory is. The revolution left me with the curiosity to understand what happened when the mood of Portuguese society was transformed from one day to the next, on April 25, 1974, and November 25, 1975, at the beginning and at the end of PREC (*Período Revolucionário em Curso* – Ongoing Revolutionary Period). Freed from fascism, the People were effectively the ones who wielded the most power between these two dates. Today nobody believes how people lived during that year and a half, nor how they lived before the 25th of April. Today it is the turn of politicians and other professionals to be obeyed, regardless of the will of people and groups without access to careers. These are limited to adapting to the new social situations managed by superiors, on the streets, and in organizations. What is it that imposes itself on us? Is it society? I ended up joining a sociology course in 1979-80.

At the age of 25, in 1981 I started my first permanent job programming computers. I was part of the team national champion in my sport, and I was at university studying sociology with pleasure. The following year I felt there was something wrong with what I was learning at university. I couldn't say the cause of my discomfort and decided to overcome it. I finished the course, which, surprisingly, opened for me the doors of a university teaching career with a simple degree. There were no doctorates in the country.

Contrary to what I expected, the university was not a space for lively and organized discussions between professors like those I had experienced during PREC or as a student in the classes. For the first twelve years (1984-96) I didn't have a work meeting. I taught computer science to sociology students and had complete control over my time. But, despite earning a lower salary, it was better than doing nothing in a computer programmer's office just to meet the work schedule (in the six years I worked at an IT center, I had to work at a constant pace for only six months. I remember colleagues on sick leave with mental health problems because of that situation. I learned the hardship of being employed and not having a job). Portugal was famous for its low productivity at work.



With the fall of the USSR and the end of the Cold War (1989-91) there was a sense that we had reached the end of history and the end of ideologies (Fukuyama, 1999). I imagined that a new intellectual era of greater creative freedom could open up (Lyotard, 1985). The university served as a base for me to investigate the innovations that might arise, such as those caused by the introduction of computers in the lives of companies and people. But I never stopped looking for professional occupations that could eventually be more satisfying.

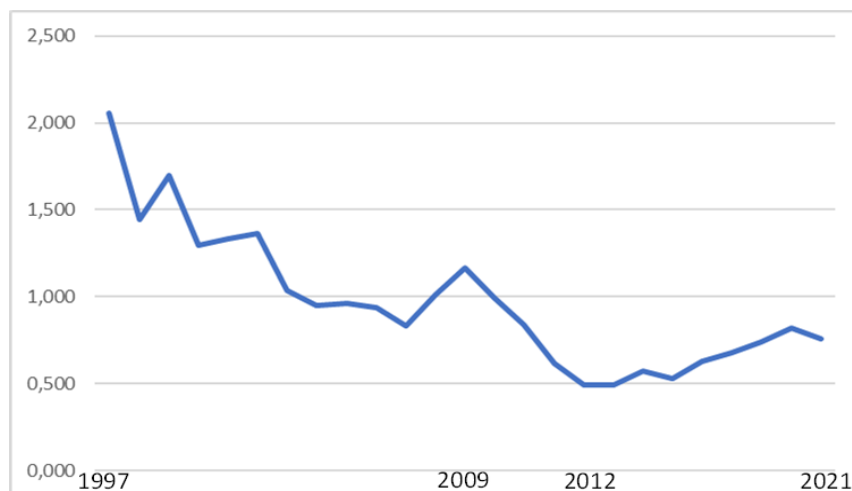
In 1990, I applied and was accepted for a position at the National Institute of Statistics (INE). The institute was undergoing a profound reform of the academic and commercial qualification of its structure and staff. Keeping my post as a professor at the university was accepted and even recommended. INE had taken its French counterpart as a reference (Reform of the National Statistical System, 1989, law nº 6/89 of 15. April). The reform ultimately failed.

In 1993 I found myself again without assigned work, now at INE. I used the opportunity to prepare my doctoral dissertation, whose exams took place in 1996. Committed to the completion of the dissertation, I did not have academic guidance. The context of a shortage of doctorates, my isolation at the university, being a sociologist among engineers, and INE's inability to develop its project for the academic qualification of its staff, had consequences. At the time I mostly felt tired. After delivering the dissertation, I discovered prisoners' human rights activism (Dores, 2002).

I had been following the work of the Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia (APS - Portuguese Association of Sociology) since its foundation (1985). Initially, I had tried to participate in the education and professional sections, following the topics I was studying, namely computers in schools and the profession of IT personnel. In both cases, I found power struggles and acrimony instead of a willingness to cooperate and exchange ideas. I didn't insist on participating in the daily work of APS. I didn't miss any national conferences. I submitted my contributions, almost always published.

In the Portuguese academic experience preceding my own, a doctorate was the end of an academic career. Gradually, the doctorate became a license to enter competitive academic life. The 86 doctorates awarded in Portugal in 1986 increased to 2,668 in 2012 and reduced to 2,080 in 2021. Research and Development budgets grew from 57 to 1,657 million euros between 1986 and 2022, therefore not keeping up with the pace of growth in the number of doctorates. Figure 1 gives an image of how the abundance of PhDs has turned into a scarcity of resources to support such qualifications.

Figure 1. Public budget allocations for R&D per PhD per year (in thousands of euros) in Portugal



Source: DGEEC/ME-MCTES – DIMAS/RAIDES (in PORTADATA updated of 2022-07-18)

In 1996, passing the doctoral exam automatically meant a five-year contract as an assistant professor, the first step in the career, renewable indefinitely upon presentation of an administrative report at the end of that contract. Which is exactly how it turned out for me. Without plans, integrating the sociology department since 1996, I found group games as voting blocks and discrimination against those who questioned the leading propositions (Johnson, 2009). Two recurring themes were interdisciplinarity and the need to organize formative discussions between colleagues. The voting group refused to discuss interdisciplinarity or the organization of open scientific discussions. The claim was that both interdisciplinarity and discussions were very important but that they were already included in the department's activities. Later official assessments stipulated that colleagues should coordinate their teaching and research work among themselves, which still has not been corrected today (Guibentif, 2018). Even a superficial look at the current organization of ISCTE schools will show the separation between sociology and the other social sciences, the creation of structural barriers to interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinary debates, at least for sociology.

I preferred to dedicate myself to human rights activism. At the turn of the 20th century, I decided to use this humanly intense experience and the information gathered and recorded about prisons as professional capital in sociology. I had a new plan that was different from the study of the information society that had occupied me until then.

At that time there was a criminology course in Porto, directed by Cândido Agra, who had a collaborator in Lisbon who refused to meet with me. He claimed not to want contact with the activist that I was. In national terms, the pattern was the same in the very small field of prison studies. My 1996-2016 activism (Dores, 2004) limited academic collaborations. I organized an international conference in 2001, with success (Dores, 2003). From it came the idea of building the European Prison Observatory (OEP), which was only implemented in 2013 by *Antigone*, an Italian NGO, with the funding support of the European Commission. My last research grant was received between 2002 and 2005, to study the relationship of

immigrants with the Portuguese justice system (Dores, 2009). Between 2007 and 2009 I participated in a European study on prisons. Between 2013 and 2019 I participated in four European studies within the framework of the OEP. Then there was the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2001 and 2012, the university received denunciation letters from the Ministry of Justice, department of prisons, alleging that I was improperly using its name for purposes that bothered that institution. In the summer of 2004, the year I did my sociology aggregation course, Paulo Albuquerque, organizer of a course in Penitentiary Studies at a prestigious private university, asked me to visit the Director General of Prisons with him. He wanted help in overcoming the administrative ban on the participation of prison staff in the course, which was due to my participation as one of the professors in the course (which he was not willing to do without). I listened to an hour of recriminations about my activism and, for once, the course took place. The Director General did not mention the allegation contained in the letters my university received from the Ministry of Justice, that I was improperly using the name of the university where I worked.

Tacitly prevented from developing my knowledge of prisons through teaching, between 2005 and 2009 I employed interdisciplinary academic areas to help me understand how social normativity accepts the existence of institutions as unjust as prisons (I was director of a Master's degree in Social Institutions and Social Justice) and the effects of people internalizing socially organized revenge rituals (I was director of a Master's degree in Risk, Trauma and Society). In order to respond to the university's policy of reducing the number of courses on offer, following the adoption of the Bologna process<sup>iii</sup>, in 2008 I proposed to offer a Master's degree in Emergency Sciences (civil defense; disaster management; social transformation) that would bring together the two areas of knowledge previously developed. The proposal was rejected with acrimony and no alternative. My academic career, past and future, had just been summarily condemned. Effectively, the working hours as a professor which I dedicated as director of the two Masters between 2005 and 2009 were not replaced, while the work distribution pressure increased for my colleagues. My isolation was blatant. I retired sixteen years later with the same professional entry grade with which I started.

With the 21st century, times were changing, but my employment contract was indefinite. Deprived of professional resources, such as students to do research with, I was willing to work without them. I gave priority to innovation and the production of centrifugal knowledge (observation from the outside of institutions, societies, and empires), in the quest to find out what type of society organizes prisons and is capable of changing people's *estado-de-espírito* so radically as on the 25th of April or the 25th of November.<sup>iv</sup>

In the early 1990s, tuition fees were introduced in higher education to give universities their own budget and allow for the state to disinvest from the sector. A dozen years later, with the Bologna process, young doctors began to compete for precarious and competitive contracts whose evaluations submit them to the international industry of academic publications and science administrators who can protect or not new contractual possibilities. My power and competence to guide them in this new world were null or even counterproductive. I feared for my teaching position, but that was never in question. Instead, I was

spared the increased workload (number of classes) imposed by the Bologna process. I felt bothersome, and I decided to try to understand why.

I used a blog (2014-2019) to record my own studies on what sociology stands for. I discovered centripetal sociology, closed in organizational, ideological, and disciplinary systems (Dores, 2021b). Satisfied with the results obtained, I began to dedicate myself to the study of centrifugal sociology, which I believe can complete centripetal sociology with a view to freeing it from itself, insisting on the classic project of transforming social philosophy into science (Dores, 2019c).

### **The success story of sociology in Portugal**

From the 1980s onwards, when sociology was losing influence in the Anglo-Saxon world, a bubble developed in Portugal: according to Burawoy, the largest community of sociologists in the world emerged in “close association with socialist governments”, running the risk of “identify[ing] with the desires that it attributes to the ordering party”, as noted by Ferreira de Almeida, one of the fathers of Portuguese sociology (Machado, 2022, pp. 78–81). Boaventura Sousa Santos became, nationally and internationally, the figurehead of Portuguese critical sociology. In 2023, after fifty years of career, he was accused of harassment at university by several of his former collaborators, who also denounced colleagues who protected him in these activities. The sociologist replied: “It is not always easy to consciously realize that you are engaging in [male chauvinist] behavior that in the past [in the 1940s, when he was born] was not seen as inappropriate (...). I recognize that at certain times I may have been the protagonist of some of these behaviors” (Santos, 2023). He promised to become more attentive. How so?

This testimony shows the power of the imperial spirit embodied in people as a pre-configured discriminatory and hierarchical disposition, in this case, in the life of a persistent and distinguished academic activist. Who are we, its students, to be free from such emotional and cultural conditioning? What is at stake is not the personal morality of a successful sociologist. What is at stake is the way in which struggles for power were and are organized around violence, harassment, intimidation, trauma, competitive division, and the imperial mindset, of which sexuality is an instrument.

The authors of the text that exposed the situation (Viaene et al., 2023) refer to being inspired by graffiti that appeared (but were then erased) throughout the city of Coimbra, revealing and hinting at secrets in the University and the sociology department. The case shows how the denunciation of heteropatriarchy itself is built in symbiosis with the heteropatriarchal tradition. The authors of the harassment complaint that, finally, could not be completely erased and was publicly answered, pointed out the underlying scientific question: “the growing critical call from within academia for an urgent paradigm shift in this professional field and strive towards a more collaborative, transformative, and interdependent community” (Viaene et al., 2023, p. 223). Which will come first, the paradigm shift in universities (Halffman & Radder, 2015; Hodgson, 2016; Kilkauer & Young, 2021; Readings, 1997) or the emergence of interdependent, collaborative, and transformative communities?

Will this episode mark a different stage in the history of sociology? Can sociology pretend to have nothing to do with it? That is what it has been doing. Sociology has resisted the criticisms that sociologists have leveled at it (Mouzelis, 1995, p. 7).

This helps to explain how the most successful sociologist in Portugal has not questioned the machismo that inhabited him throughout his professional career; the very mechanism he dedicated his career to combating. Successful sociology does not confront, but is subject to, the systems employed to evaluate academic work, including the so-called *woke* culture.

Professional success requires the incorporation of rational, emotionally cold responses to the political guidelines that organize the field, following funding requirements, regardless of personal convictions. Bottom-up perspectives and the inner life are marginalized and muzzled in the name of success. Sociologists do not escape the general reduction of people to specialized commodities. They too reduce their potential for scientific innovation (Park, 2023) by preferentially practicing centripetal sciences and minimizing centrifugal practices.

Guided and financed by centripetal, utilitarian science policies, the social sciences and sociology have specialized without feeling the need and without the opportunity to question the effects of the cognitive results of their competitive work in the social contexts in which sociologists work, including universities. Trained to separate their emotions and convictions from their professional performance, sociologists and other university students may not know how to distinguish between harassment and collaboration, guided above all by the need turned desire to maintain professional positions.

Is harassment in universities in fact meant to be part of the professional training, even in sociology (Coser, 1956, p. 27; Darhendorf, 1958)? What is certain is that harassment goes on in day-to-day life. It is difficult to denounce, due in part to colleagues' and hierarchies' inability or unwillingness to understand it. This desensitization is implicitly required of everyone and therefore naturalized.

Auto-defensive professionalization schemes, evaluation systems conditioned on results, control of institutions by elites, harassment in the workplace, submission to hierarchies, persistence of socially condemned practices, such as exploitation, waste, stigmatization, paternalism, misogyny, authoritarianism, are structured and subjective social experiences. It would be strange for universities to be outliers. Over the past 40 years, the lightness of the organization that formed the first generations of sociologists turned into a heavy organization. Just as privacy has become more threatened at the same time that knowledge becomes more democratized, also there no longer are ivory towers in universities, as academic lives are more monitored, less innovative and less free than they once were.

Intellectual desires for independence, autonomy and originality persist. Yet, the objectives of survival of institutions and research contracts, such as those recently demonstrated on the streets of Lisbon (Lusa, 2023), are more urgent. As noted by Mariano Gago, the physicist lauded for having been politically responsible for Bologna's policies, after getting them approved:

Look at [the] recent “regulations” for the individual assessment of teachers and researchers! Did you publish in A or B magazine? (But is there not anyone there who knows how to read the articles and is serious?!). An anxious and childish vision that intends to classify everything (magazines, articles, books...) “automatically”, based on regulations and algorithms, is reminiscent of the illusion of the cabalists to ward off the uncertainty of the world (Pina-Cabral, 2011).

It is not just sociologists who hesitate between alchemy and science, science and culture, specialization and philosophy, desires and reality. Physicists and politicians, like Mariano Gago, also hesitate. The whole world hesitates.

### **Final considerations**

To deal with the immorality of the imperial mission, the immorality of the mission to exploit the Earth and humanity, the imperial spirit hypocritically contrasts state violence and uncivilized violence. It does this by deifying the hierarchy that justifies all discrimination, presenting structural violence as a defensive reaction to savagery. In this light, prisons would be separate societies, purgatories between natural instincts and civilization.

Abolishing prisons, like abolishing capitalism, colonialism or patriarchalism, is desirable but utopian, so tells us the imperial spirit embedded in us by civilization. It is, therefore, the imperial mission consensualized through the incorporation of the imperial spirit that makes the effectiveness of criticizing prisons unfeasible.

For thousands of years, the imperial spirit was developed in isolation by aristocratic elites. It was adopted by the imperialist bourgeoisie and spread throughout the meritocratic world in the post-war period (Bourdieu, 1979; Sandel, 2020). Science is not immune to the alleged civilizational superiority: it is one of its symbols. This does not prevent science from also being a space of freedom and a potential instrument of liberation.

The sciences are conditioned to think about the immorality of prisons and the imperial mission in a centripetal, hyper-specialized, focused way. But they have the freedom to think centrifugally, if they organize themselves to do so. If they are able to detect and overcome embedded prejudices regarding the hierarchy of gender, merit, class, nationality.

The futility, the heroism and revolution that marked my subjectivity, I now know, are social responses to the immorality of the imperial mission. But the imperial spirit continues to prevail.

As with most leaders, there is no evidence that Dr. Fauci experienced ethical suffering in his profession (Kennedy Jr., 2021). Boaventura, however, certainly did (Santos, 2023). The imperial mission of exploiting the Earth, including the transformation of people into commodities at its service, in its different disciplinary and professional facets, mutually separated and distant, requires individuals to have the ability to detach from feelings and spontaneous emotions.

Bureaucracy sets in (Habermas, 1987), in science too. The academic evaluation becomes bizarre (Lahire, 2012, pp. 319–356. Most sociology graduates do not use what they learned at university in their professional lives (ISCTE-IUL, 2021).

The unorganized university I entered was my way of escaping the extreme professional competition that existed in computer programming, the prototype of the future *lean management*.<sup>v</sup> It represented freedom. Social and professional isolation was uncomfortable, but it was also the resistance and resilience training that every affirmation of freedom requires. The intrigues of youth groups that I ran away from, I encountered again at the university. Some colleagues took shelter with those in a position of power and others, including me, wandered around.

At the time, I didn't perceive it as an effect of the system, the anxious search for professional success through the assertion of power, the imperial disposition that, at the end of my career, I now recognize.

The *imperial mindset* should not be understood only in its explicit aspect of applying force, from top to bottom. Rather, as sociologists agree, power does not necessarily use force. It can use for example seduction or blackmail, as religion or protection rackets at the extreme. It can use victims' complicity in being willing to play roles that are independent of, or even against, their own interests (Springora, 2020).

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## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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<sup>i</sup> The translation/proofreading of this paper was provided by the *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* (FCT) through the funding of the R&D Unit UIDB/03126/2020.

<sup>ii</sup> The Portuguese state has been imperial since the 14th century. In 1961 it was involved in the last colonial war that closed the historical period of decolonization. Junior officers that had fought liberation movements in Africa organized a coup d'état on April 25, 1974, that was almost unopposed and triggered the Carnation Revolution. This forced the decolonization and democratization of the Portuguese state.

<sup>iii</sup> See <https://eua.eu/issues/10:bologna-process.html>.

<sup>iv</sup> April 25, 1974, is the date of the military uprising that ended 48 years of fascism in Portugal and November 25, 1975 is the date on which the left-wing military that framed the revolutionary period (PREC) returned to the barracks to respect the rules of social and institutional submission typical of Western democracies.

<sup>v</sup> At the bank where I was employed, the IT center was a shelter from competition in the programmer market. But the professional perspective was one of unhealthy stagnation, for a 20-year-old, with very little work assigned to me.