

A Liberating Horizon

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(Translated from the Spanish by Weldon Rogers – LACIS, Political Science, Spanish and European Studies major)

I consider receiving this prize a very special honor, as it will be the first time it is awarded to a social scientist. In this sense, what is most important to me is that the importance and epistemological validity of this vast field of knowledge has been recognized. Particularly important in this context is that today's many changes and difficulties are confusing knowledge, social practice, institutions, human rights, and are affecting democratic regimes.

It is important to recognize that we live in a time of paradigmatic transition in which the rigid dichotomy between the natural and social sciences is no longer valid. The absence of this division gives place to vast areas of knowledge in which trans-disciplinary understandings can be combined, just as non-scientific understandings are born of the experience with the working classes and their struggles. The bluntest example of this combination pertains, perhaps, to the issue of the environment.

A conference of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, held a short while ago in Cancun, has shown that the challenges that we face force us to draw closer to the disciplines and technical solutions that they offer us. These challenges imply that the dimension of changes to our civilization suggests that intercultural translation as much between knowledge as between social practices and their agents will take place.

It is also significant that, given the internal pluralism within the sciences in general, this prize has rewarded the type of social science criticism that I have sought to produce for 40 years. An objective but not neutral social science, a social science engaged with the struggles of the oppressed and those discriminated against, with the fortification of highly strong democracies and human rights, with the utopia of a post-capitalist and post-colonial future, with a liberating horizon; in sum, supportive and committed to the idea that that other world is not only desirable, but possible.

Secondly, it is an honor to receive a prize that belongs equally to my Mexican colleagues and friends with whom I learned so much and shared so much scientific labor and social struggles. It would be impossible to name them all, but I cannot forget Pablo González Casanova, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Enrique Dussel, Héctor Díaz-Polanco, Ana Esther Ceceña, Enrique Leff, Raquel Sosa, Aída Hernández, Carlos Lenkersdorf, Antonio García de León, Bolívar Echeverría, Armando Bartra, Carlos Monsiváis,

Gustavo Esteva, Xóchitl Leyva Solano, Hugo Zemelman y José Gandarilla Salgado. We, despite our great diversity of opinions, have converged to struggle for a more just, more free, more intercultural and, in sum, more democratic society.

The third reason that I am honored to receive this prize is because of the understanding that we have created which nurtures the wisdom of the working classes and their struggles, them being especially women farmers, workers, indigenous peoples; the unemployed, students, young victims of the drug trafficking violence, or humiliated emigrants. I learned this very early on when I lived in a *favela* shack in Rio de Janeiro in 1970.

I learned this shortly after the popular education project directed by Ivan Illich in Cuernavaca that was shared with Brazilian and Chilean exiles in a context about which Mexico is so rightly proud: the welcoming of all exiles of 20th century dictatorships, from Europe and Latin America. I learned this later in my solidarity work with the working classes from the entire continent, and in Mexico, through the struggles of the indigenous peoples and the Zapatistas from Chiapas and of the indigenous and other peoples of Oaxaca.

And finally, I'm learning it through the struggles of so many young people, men and women fighting against the drug trafficking violence that asphyxiates the country, chiefly the northern regions. Their opinions and strategies in reducing the violence differs from those of officials, but agree on the same objective that the President formulated in his New Years' message: "We are going to defeat the criminals to finally build a peaceful and safe Mexico, where no one lives at the margin of the law and where no one lives in fear."

We, the social scientists engaged in our societies and their struggles, cannot be more in agreement that peace must be understood as a just peace, as a non-repressive security constructed for the well being of communities that exists as a result of law that is equal and under the fundamental principles of the Constitution and is respected by all, particularly by those independent tribunals who are its highest guardians. In sum, the struggle for justice and peace is a long journey.

Mexico City, January 14, 2011. Text read by Boaventura de Sousa Santos on receiving the Mexico Science and Technology Award.