

NOTES ON RESEARCH
AND WRITING
(NOTAS SOBRE INVESTIGACIÓN
Y REDACCIÓN)

Raúl Rojas Soriano

*"El trabajo de investigación no puede
sino ser complejo y delicado;
demanda mucha fineza de
análisis y sobriedad intelectual..."*

*"Conocer la psicología particular
del público al que se
quiere conquistar [con el escrito]"*

*Antonio Gramsci,
Prisión italiana (1926-1934).*

PLAZA Y VALDES
P Y V
EDITORES

Source

Rojas Soriano, Raúl,
Notes on research and writing
(*Notas sobre investigación y redacción*)
Plaza y Valdés Publishers, Mexico. 2013.
292 p.
ISBN: 978-607-402-593-4

VII

**Historic state of the *issue*¹ instead of
“Theoretical and conceptual framework” or
“State of the art”**

1. I used the concept *Theoretic and conceptual framework* for the first time in my book *Guide for Conducting Social Research*, which first edition appeared in 1976.

With time, while imparting classes and conferences on methodology for researches, and while placing my intellectual work in a dialectic perspective, I realized that said concept (*theoretical and conceptual framework*) did not reflect the essence of said tendency, because talking about frames means, literally, referring to something that is “located” in a well-defined spatial, temporal or intellectual context, as if it were, for instance, a picture or painting.

This gives the impression of being a straitjacket, in other words, the *theoretic and conceptual framework* would be imposed as something immovable. Actually, we must think of it as a process since the whole of existing knowledge about the problem if investigation is not something established, definitive; quite the opposite, it is being modified permanently through the advance of science and the changes which manifest constantly in reality, both social and natural.

Likewise, this concept (*theoretic and conceptual framework*) does not denote the *dialectic conception* of the investigation process, which I started working on in the 1970s, and which is an original approach regarding said process.

¹ Concept elaborated by Antonio Gramsci, Prison notebooks. Literature and national life, p. 51.

In my work *Methods for the Social Investigation: A Dialectic Proposal*² (first edition dates back to 1993), I develop said conception in detail, considering investigation as a *whole of specific processes*³ *dialectically linked*.

Therefore, investigation must **not** be treated as “the sum of stages or steps” (which are analysed as if they were linearly and mechanically linked), which constitutes a schematic vision. Unfortunately, said lineal idea keeps erroneously dominating the books, classes and conferences about methodology and investigation techniques.

It is pertinent to mention that since many years ago the creation of a new term has been tried, one that can substitute *theoretic and conceptual framework*, so as to recover the dialectic focus of the knowledge process.

2. In 2010 I was preparing the book: *Metodología en la calle, salud-enfermedad, política, cárcel, escuela...* (*Methodology in the Streets, Health-Illness, Politics, Prison, School...*), in which I include Antonio Gramsci’s contributions about methodology for investigation, intervention and presentation. While I revised his works I finally found the concept I was looking for; I found it in the *Prison Notebooks*, written by this revolutionary intellectual while being imprisoned by Dictator Mussolini in 1926.

The concept that Gramsci presents (*Prison Notebooks: Literature and National Life*, p.51.) recovers the dialectic by including the *permanence* of reality, and therefore, of knowledge (state), and the *turn*, in other words, *the movement, the constant change* (historic). I refer to the concept historic state of the issue, understanding issue as theme, matter or subject of study, according to the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy and the Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms*.

3. The expression *historic state of the issue*⁴ implies, from

² The original title was: *Dialectic of social investigation*. The commercial requirements of the publishing house were imposed, proposing me a new name, remaining the title referred before.

³ I create the concept *specific process* in the referred text to substitute the words “step” or “phase”.

⁴ According with the historic conception and Gramsci’s dialectic, we must use the referred concept or, in any case, I propose the following expression, coined on the basis of the gramscian idea: historic state of knowledge.

my point of view, and following Gramsci's thoughts, the revision of literature to sustain the scientific bases of investigation.

The previous statement means to do extensive research, recurring in a critical manner to the various information sources, in order to determine which contributions are more relevant for the subject being investigated. This way, a more objective and precise knowledge about the studied phenomenon is achieved.

The expression Gramsci constructs (*historic state of the issue*) should lead us to *avoid* the use of the concept *state of the art*. This term, which comes from the American academic tradition, has been used in the last few decades by many investigators and teachers in many parts of the world. These, without a critical reflection about the advisability in use this concept in our academic, scientific and cultural context.

An important element in this analysis is Gramsci's conception of the *historic state of the issue*; for this thinker the term state refers to a concrete moment within the socio-historical process of knowledge generation about reality, which is itself a dialectic one.

Thus, the objectivity of knowledge, especially in social sciences, depends, in a way, on the socio-historical context in which both the study object and the investigation develop.

On the other hand, in the American tradition what seems to be proposed is an accumulative idea of knowledge: "the state of knowledge that has been accomplished", keeping itself apart from the contradictory development of society.

Therefore, they abandon the concept suggested by Charles Wright Mills, one of the most notable American sociologists, which *does consider* in his analysis the historical specificity of the phenomenon through the categories he builds: Social historical structure (*The Sociological Imagination*, p. 85).

4. Moreover, it is pertinent to remark that the concept *state of the art* is not registered by specialized lexicons, for example, the *Critical Dictionary of Social Sciences* by the Complutense University of Madrid, among others. Aside from this, our language already counts with expressions that make the use of the construction *state of the art* unnecessary. This considering the preference that native term of a language must have over foreign terms.

This does not mean to engage a puritanism that rejects the inclusion of *foreign expressions*, but to limit their use to pertinent cases, which only happens when within Spanish there is not a con-

cept for what we want to express referring a phenomenon or idea. This way of proceeding contributes to the defense of the Spanish language, which is a fundamental part of our culture.

As to the concept *state of the art*, the *Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Doubts* of the Royal Spanish Academy and the Association of Spanish Language Academies stresses the convenience of avoiding said Anglo-Saxon construction:

*Estado del arte (State of the art). Censurable imitation of the English state of the art. "There will be immensurable occasion to see there... the most advanced developments, the state of art of our various technologies". In Spanish, it is recommended to substitute it with the expressions **current state or situation, latest advances or state of the issue**, depending on the case.*

In this analysis it must be mentioned that the term art has several meanings in our language, and that none of them conveys what the investigators, actually using it, pretend to express (see the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy* and the specialized lexicons like José Ferrater Mora's *Dictionary of Philosophy*, among others).

5. As if the arguments already mentioned were not enough regarding the improper use of the construction *state of the art*, it is necessary to remember that this concept was first used by Latin-Americans who had studied in American universities, who upon returning to their countries of origin imposed said linguistic expression in the academic and investigation circles in their respective institutions.

Other specialists, those who studied in Latin America and worry about "keeping up with fashion", have allowed themselves to be swallowed by the American flow without making a critical analysis of said concept (*state of the art*). So it has been rashly suggested that "everything that comes from the United States (or Europe), must be immediately assimilated so as not to be left behind regarding the academic and scientific of the society in developed countries".

Such attitude reflects, in my opinion, the American imperialism that nowadays appears not only in the economic field, but also in the academic and scientific fields, which affects significantly our national identity.

6. There are few academic publications that avoid the use of unacceptable foreign expressions as the one being analyzed here. One of these is the Chilean magazine *Formación Universitaria* (University Education), which in its article “Ni estado del arte ni state of the art” (“Neither state of the art nor *state of the art*”), express:

“In our magazine we promote the good use of the Spanish language; therefore mistakes such as the barbarisms that I comment [*state of the art*, among others] must be left out of our language⁵” .

7. According to the previous statements, I consider important to mention that before making use of any theory, concept, method or instrument that is developed or constructed in a context different from ours, its pertinence must be careful and critically analyzed. This depends on the studied phenomenon, as well as the objectives and available resources, and other aspects analyzed in this book.

This reflection demands the examination of the contributions of scientists from Latin-America and other parts of the world who are published in national magazines for, in case it proceeds, letting them join our research to orientate new theoretical discussions as well as the design of technologies of our own, strategies and action programs.

8. According to the presented and as way of conclusion, it is necessary to consider: 1) the exigency⁶ of the *Diccionario Panhispánico de dudas* (*Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Doubts*), on the correct use

⁵ Online version: ISSN0718-5006. CIT 2013. Chile. At: <http://dox.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-50062009000300001>. Consulting date: June 17th at 4:45 P.M.

⁶ Besides questioning in this chapter the construction *state of the art*, I mean otherwise, to the use of the term *E-mail* in Hispanic countries. *The Pan-Hispanic Dictionary* rejects such Anglicized doubts (pp. 251-252); as well as the *Publications Manual* from The American Psychological Association (which I criticize in the previous chapter regarding quotation format). The manual says: “In Spanish there should be used the expression correo electrónico (e-mail), [instead of e-mail]” (p.95).

Our language is not closed to the inclusion of *foreign words* where appropriate or theoretical constructions developed in other contexts, for example, *historical state of the issue*, from the Italian Antonio Gramsci, which I discuss in this chapter. The Spanish language is constantly changing to suit the sociohistorical conditions in which individuals and social groups handle themselves.

of our language, as well as one of its proposals stated in point 4 (*state of the issue*), and 2) the historic and dialectic conception of the investigative process. Therefore, in our academic, scientific and cultural context we must use the concept **historic state of the issue**, created by Antonio Gramsci, or, following the thought of this Italian thinker, make use of the term I propose: *historic state of the knowledge, instead of state of the art*.

Esteemed reader, I will thank you immensely if you send me your valuable comments on the contents of this chapter, which is part of my book *Notas sobre investigación y redacción (Notes on Research and Writing)*.

If you consider this might interest for teachers, investigators and students that you are acquainted with, please forward them the present text. Thank you very much.

Dr. Raúl Rojas Soriano

raulrojassoriano@gmail.com
raulrojassoriano@hotmail.com

P.S. I annex my CV (brief). My works, save for two, can be reading in full in Google books and, starting September 2013, in my website: www.raulrojassoriano.com

Bibliography

Diccionario Crítico de Ciencias Sociales (Critical Dictionary of Social Sciences), Universidad Complutense de Madrid-Plaza y Valdés Publishers, Mexico, 2009.

Diccionario de sinónimos y contrarios (Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms), Teide Publishers, Barcelona, 2001.

Ferrater Mora, José, *Diccionario de filosofía (Dictionary of Philosophy)*, Sudamericana Publishers, Argentina, 1995.

Gramsci, Antonio, *Cuadernos de la cárcel. Literatura y vida nacional, (Prison Notebooks. Literature and National Life)*

Juan Pablos Publisher, Mexico, 1975.

Diccionario panhispánico de dudas de la Real Academia Española y de la Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, (RAE Spanish Usage Dictionary and Spanish Language Academies), Santillana Ediciones Generales, Spain, 2005.

Manual de publicaciones de la American Psychological Association (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association), El Manual Moderno Publishers, Mexico, 2012.

Rojas Soriano, Raúl, *Guía para realizar investigaciones sociales (Guide for Conducting Social Research)*, Plaza y Valdés Publishers, Mexico, 2013.

Rojas Soriano, Raúl, *Metodología en la calle, salud-enfermedad, política, cárcel, escuela... (Methodology in the Streets, Health-Illness, Politics, Prison, School...)*, Plaza y Valdés Publishers, Mexico, 2010.

Rojas Soriano, Raúl, *Métodos para la investigación social. Una proposición dialéctica (Methods for the Social Investigation: A Dialectic Proposal)*, Plaza y Valdés Publishers, Mexico, 2011.

CURRICULUM VITAE of the Dr. Raúl Rojas Soriano (Brief)

- Raúl Rojas Soriano is Doctor on Sociology, titular professor and investigator at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).
- He has been an academic evaluator at the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT).
- He was president of the College of Sociologists of Mexico.
- He has been invited by more of a hundred Mexican and foreign universities, and by more than seventy teacher training schools and technological institutes, as well as by another academics institutions, government de-

partments, national health institutes, hospitals, prisons, information agencies, political parties, syndicates, artists' associations, writers, professionals, students and entrepreneurs, and by national and international book fairs, forums in which he has given more than a thousand conferences.

- He has given more than eighty master conferences in diverse Mexican and foreign institutions.
- He has written twenty-one books about investigation, education and health (five of them are co-authored) with more than a million sold copies:
- *Guía para realizar investigaciones sociales (Guide for Conducting Social Research)* (also published in Portuguese with the title: *Manual de pesquisa social [Social Inquest Manual]*, Vozes Publishers, Brazil)
- *Investigación-acción en el aula (Investigation-action in the Classroom)*
- *Formación de investigadores educativos (Training of educative researchers)*
- *Métodos para la investigación social. Una proposición dialéctica (Methods for the Social Investigation: A Dialectic Proposal)*
- *El arte de hablar y escribir (The Art of Speaking and Writing)*
- *El proceso de la investigación científica (The Process of Scientific Research)*
- *Teoría e investigación militante (Militant Theory and Research)*
- *Investigación social: teoría y praxis (Social Research: Theory and Praxis)*
- *Trabajo intelectual e investigación de un plagio (Intellectual Study and Research on Plagiarism)*
- *Sociodrama real en el aula (Real Socio-Drama in the Classroom)*
- *Capitalismo y enfermedad (Capitalism and Illness)*
- *Crisis, salud-enfermedad y práctica médica (Crisis, Health-Illness and Medical Practice)*
- *Historia de vida de un mexicano sentenciado a muerte en Estados Unidos (Real-LifeStory of a Mexican Sentenced to Death in the United States)*

- *Metodología en la calle, salud-enfermedad, política, cárcel, escuela...* (*Methodology in the Streets, Health-Illness, Politics, Prison, School...*)
- *Notas sobre investigación y redacción* (*Notes on Research and Writing*)

In co-authorship with Amparo Ruiz del Castillo:

- *Investigación-acción en la UNAM* (*Research-Action at the UNAM.*)
- *Vínculo docencia-investigación para una formación integral* (*Teaching-Investigation Link for an Integral Education*)
- *Apuntes de la vida cotidiana (reflexiones educativas)* (*Notes on Daily Life [Educational Reflections]*)

In co-authorship with Amparo Ruíz del Castillo and Martha Peral Salcido:

- *Una estudiante... Ericka Zamora acusada de guerrillera* (*A Student... Ericka Zamora accused of being a guerrilla*)

And in co-authorship with Ángel Peralta García:

- *Pablo Sandoval Cruz. Su lucha social en Guerrero por un mundo mejor* (*Pablo Sandoval Cruz. His Social struggle in Guerrero for a Better World*).
- He coordinated the work written by the interns at Mixquiahuala prison, Hidalgo (Mexico), titled: *En busca de la libertad a través de la escritura* (*Looking for Freedom through Writing*), Plaza y Valdés Publishers.
- Several chapters of Dr. Rojas' works have been included in anthologies published in Mexico and other countries.
- His works have been quoted in hundreds of books and articles, and in thousands of professional thesis from different degrees in various countries.

- He has prolonged diverse texts, from authors both Mexican and foreign.
- In 1999, by request of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Raúl Rojas Soriano supported the CONACYT to perform a sociological study to help in the defense of a Mexican immigrant condemned to death penalty in Arizona, United States of America.
- Dr. Raúl Rojas Soriano has participated in interviews at press, radio and television programs in several countries.
- For his academic work he has received several acknowledgements in and outside of Mexico.
- Currently, the Dr. Raúl Rojas Soriano works in the project “Investigation-action in Sport, Nutrition and Health. An Experiment with a Strictly Vegetarian (Vegan) Diet”.
- Being the test of his hypothesis he has participated in more than 25 athletics races, of which three have been mountain races; eleven were half-marathons (distance: 21 km), and three marathons (distance: 42km); the rest were 10 km races.
- To fully prove his hypothesis, “long and intense physical and intellectual activity can be successfully performed with a strictly vegetarian diet”, he participated in a high-resistance race, and completed it: the 85 km Ultra-Marathon, on the 9th of July 2011, León, Guanajuato, Mexico.
- This investigation is founded in laboratory and cabinet tests; it is presented in his work *Deporte, nutrición y salud (Sport, Nutrition and Health)*, which will be edited in June 2014.
- Dr. Raúl Rojas Soriano is preparing the following books for their publishing at the end of 2014:
 - *El oficio del investigador-escritor. Historia de vida de un texto (The Office of the Investigator-Writer. Life Story of a Text).*
 - *Aspectos humanos del Movimiento Estudiantil Mexicano 1968. Memorias de un brigadista (Human Aspects of the Mexican Student Movement of 1968. Memories from a Brigade).*
 - *Evocaciones. Vivencias personales (Evocations. Personal Experiences).*

English translation by: Nora D. Flores Castrejón
noracastrejon@gmail.com
Collaborator: Janneffer Coleman

Review in Mexico by: Maricela Alatríste Ortiz
Carlos Alberto Martínez Islas