

## The civil sphere: theory, methodology and case studies

Nelson Arteaga Botello<sup>1</sup>

### Course objectives

Identify and critically understand the theoretical and methodological efforts of the civil sphere theory. The course addresses how the latter accounts for the construction processes of expanded and restricted solidarities in different social and cultural contexts. The theory of the civil sphere appears as a horizon of relevant dialogue with the problems of contemporary societies. At the end of the course, it will be possible to identify the comprehensive and explanatory components of a recent and innovative theoretical perspective, but with rapid growth in recent years in different academic contexts.

The civil sphere is understood as an active symbolic structure of meanings and emotions that defines a world of values and institutions that simultaneously produce the capacity for criticism and social integration. It is thanks to this capacity for criticism and integration that society generates competencies for the control of the meaning of acts and social events that are considered, broaden or restrict the bases of solidarity and social inclusion, as well as strengthen or weaken democratic institutions. . The civil sphere is a framework of communication not

consensual and a set of communicative institutions –media, civil associations, surveys– and regulatory institutions – positions, judicial apparatus, voting– in constant transformation, which form the heart of contemporary democracies.

### Dynamic

The course is programmed with an organized structure of exposition of readings, session of questions, answers and discussion. Each session is organized according to specific times according to the reading load. Students are expected to participate actively, striving to understand the texts, develop statements and questions, and make critical arguments.

### Organization of the course

The teaching program is organized to give an account of the central assumptions of the theory of the civil sphere, the criticisms to which it has been subjected, as well as the efforts within it to expand its interpretative capacity beyond the intellectual space in which originated (the United States). Comprehensive efforts to understand how the civil sphere is intertwined with symbolic structures and emotions that define institutional worlds in Latin American, Asian, and European countries are reviewed. The program examines the practices and social meanings that are built around violence, war, migration, decolonization, feminist and digital mobilizations, as well as gender disputes and political scandals in Colombia, Ireland, Iraq, France, Mexico, Sweden, Argentina, Korea, United Kingdom,

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<sup>1</sup> PhD in Sociology. Professor-Researcher at FLACSO, Mexico. Member of the National System of Researchers, Level III. Faculty Fellow at the Center for Cultural Sociology (Yale University). His recent publications include: *Semantics of Violence: Revolt and Political Assassination in Mexico*. London: Palgrave-McMillan (2022). *Sociology and Science Fiction: Philip K. Dick beyond Orwell and Foucault*. Flacso-Mexco (2020). The Populist Transition and the Civil Sphere in Mexico, in: JC Alexander, G. Sciortino and P. Kivisto (eds.), *Populism in the Civil Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity (2021). Tognato, Carlo and Arteaga, Nelson. Strong program cultural sociology and Latin America, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (2021) 9: 419-429.

Cuba and the United States. It seeks to account for the construction of real civil spheres in different cultural and institutional contexts.

### **Topic 1. The civil sphere: Theory and methodology**

Define the discussion of civil society in social theory in order to clarify the structures and dynamics of the civil sphere: its communicative and regulatory institutions, as well as non-civil institutions and collective efforts to generate civil reparation dynamics.

#### *Session 1*

Alexander, Jeffrey (2018). *the civic sphere*. Madrid: CIS. pp. 21-146

#### *session 2*

Alexander, Jeffrey (2018). *the civic sphere*. Madrid: CIS. pp. 147-271.

### **Topic 2. Criticism and interpretive expansion**

To review the criticisms of the theory of the civil sphere from critical theory and social movements, as well as the questions raised by extending its interpretive framework to account for the tense intertwining between the non-civil and civil spheres in diverse social contexts.

#### *session 3*

Honneth, Axel (2015). Civil Society as a Democratic Battlefield: Comments on Alexander's The Civil Sphere, in P. Kivisto and G. Sciortino. *Solidarity, Justice, and Incorporation: Thinking through The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: University Press. pp. 81-95

Diani, Mario (2015) Social Movements, Civil Repair, and Social Movement Theory, in P. Kivisto and G. Sciortino. *Solidarity, Justice, and Incorporation: Thinking through The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: University Press. pp. 96-118.

#### *session 4*

Alexander, Jeffrey and Tognato, Carlo (2018). *Introduction: For Democracy in Latin America*, in J.

Alexander and C. Tognato (eds.) *The Civil Sphere in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.1-15

Palmer, David & Alexander, Jeffrey (2019). Introduction: The Civil Sphere in the Cultural and Political Transformations of Modern East Asia, in D. Palmer and J. Alexander, S. Park and AS Ku (eds.) *The Civil Sphere in East Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-17.

Tognato, Carlo (2019). Opening Up Civil Sphere Theory: From the United States through Latin America to East Asia, in D. Palmer and J. Alexander, S. Park and AS Ku (eds.) *The Civil Sphere in East Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 278-283.

Alexander, Jeffrey; Lund, Anna, and Andrea Voyer (2019). Introduction: Civil spheres, pro-civil states, and their contradictions, in J. Alexander, A. Lund and A. Voyer (eds.), *The Nordic Civil Sphere*, London: Polity. pp. 1-11.

### **Topic 3. Violence**

How the logics of violence and war are interpreted and read in the communicative and regulatory institutions of the civil sphere are analyzed: how competencies are deployed to control their sense and institutional practices that tend to generate solidarity reparation mechanisms.

#### session 5

Tognato, Carlo (2020). Radical protest on a University Campus: Performances of civil transition in Colombia, in J. Alexander, T. Stack, and F Khosrokhavar (eds.), *Breaching the Civil Order. Radicalism and the civil sphere*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 42-69.

Kane Anne (2020). The civil sphere and the revolutionary violence: The Irish Republican Movement, 1969-1998, in J. Alexander, T. Stack, and F Khosrokhavar (eds.), *Breaching the Civil Order. Radicalism and the civil sphere*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 170-109.

#### Session 6

Smith, Phillip (2005). *Why War? The cultural logic of Iraq, Gulf War, and Suez*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 99-153.

Arteaga, Nelson (2022). *Semantics of Violence: Revolt and Political Assassination in Mexico*. London: Palgrave-McMillan. pp. 77-125.

#### Topic 4. Decolonization and migration

Understand how the logics of solidarity and social inclusion are expanded and restricted in processes of decolonization and migration.

#### Session 7

Choi, Sung-Eun (2020). Pied-Noir trauma and identity in postcolonial France, 1962-2010, in R. Eyerman and G. Sciortino (eds.) *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonization. Colonial Returnees in the National Imagination*. London: Palgrave. pp. 137-168.

Jaworski, Nadya (2020). "We Always Have Been and Always Will Be a Sanctuary City": Cities as Righteous Actors in the US Civil Sphere, in N. Jaworsky and C. Tognato (eds.) *The Courage for Civil Repair Narrating the Righteous in International Migration*. London: Palgrave. pp. 231-262.

#### Topic 5. Political Dynamics

The construction space of the civil sphere in the regulatory institution that frame the electoral processes is examined.

#### Session 8

Morgan, Marcus (2022). Symbolic action and constraint: the cultural logic of the 2017 UK General Election. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 10: 355–397

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin, Tavory, Iddo. Politics as a vacation. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 5: 307–321

Norton, Matthew (2019). When voters are voting, what are they doing? Symbolic selection and the 2016 US presidential election, in J. Mast and J. Alexander (eds.) *Politics of meaning / Meaning of politics. Cultural sociology of 2016 US presidential election*. London: Polity. pp. 35-52.

#### Topic 6. Feminism and gender

Understand how feminism and gender disputes have managed to strengthen the logic of universal inclusion and expanded solidarity

#### Session 9

Michelson, Anna (2021). The politics of happily-ever-after: romance genre fiction as aesthetic public sphere. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. 9:177–210.

Nilsson, Henrik and Trulsson, Asa (2019). "You can't liberate the free": Gender work, and Swedish Hijabis, in J. Alexander, A. Lund and A. Voyer (eds.), *The Nordic Civil Sphere*, London: Polity. pp. 95-123.

#### Session 10

Luengo, Maria (2018). Shaping Solidarity in Argentina: The Power of the Civil Sphere in Repairing Violence against Women, in J. Alexander and C. Tognato (eds.) *The Civil Sphere in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 39-65.

Broch, Trygve (2023). *The Ponytail: Icon, movement, and the modern (sport) woman*. London: Palgrave. pp. 1-26.

### Topic 7. Digital world

Examine digital expressions as frameworks that allow understanding the expansion and reduction of communicative and regulatory institutions in the civil sphere.

#### session 11

Norquist, Jeffrey (2020) "Something other than real life:" digital life resistance in the civil sphere. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 25 November: 1-23.

Ostertag, Stephen (2020). A Cultural Sociology of social media: Social Drama, Cultural Affordances and Blogging in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina. *Cultural Sociology*. 15(1): 113-133.

Martinez, Liliana (2018). *La Joven Cuba*: Confrontation, conciliation, and the quest for the civil through blogging, in J. Alexander and C. Tognato (eds.) *The Civil Sphere in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 95-117.

### Topic 8 What to do with the civil sphere? Theoretical-methodological dilemmas

What are the challenges and the new routes to think about the civil sphere? Is it possible and necessary to decolonize theory?

#### session 12

Hammer, Ricarda (2020). Decolonizing the civil sphere: The politics of difference, imperial erasures, and theorizing from history. *Sociological Theory*, 38(2): 101-121.

Tognato, Carlo and Arteaga, Nelson. Strong program cultural sociology and Latin America, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (2021) 9: 419-429.

### Evaluation form

Students will be evaluated based on the following criteria. Exhibition (30%), participation in the seminar (30%), and a written work (40%), in which some of the topics and concepts addressed during the course are presented in an original way, as well as the discussion developed in the sessions (Arial 12, 1.5 spacing, 1,000 words).