



EDITORIAL

ON VIRTUAL LOCKDOWN OF TEACHERS

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How to cite this article (APA):

Gómez García, J. G. (julio-diciembre, 2020). On virtual lockdown of teachers [Editorial]. *Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales*, 11(2), pp. 396-401. <https://doi.org/10.21501/22161201.3629>

It seems that university activities, in these current exceptional circumstances, have been reduced to virtual activities of confinement. The confined virtual university has been imposed, even for those who do not want it, in a way that makes increasingly distant, not only the day to once again meet with colleagues, friends and students face to face, in classrooms, cafeterias, conferences or marches, but also blurs the closest experiences of the semester that has just ended. It is a symptom of moral dejection or perhaps an extraordinary occasion to imagine an *express* Middle Ages, of meditative enclosure as monks in abbeys, with the subtle difference of having Internet connection and Rappi, those who can count with the former and request the service of the latter, of course.

Two months of confinement have left so far, a thousand personal and collective learnings to which it is reasonable provide a more specific profile for sociocultural studies. We perceive the picture of the globalized world as if it were in a freezer, in a dimension in which the poor fantasy of Hollywood could never imagine. Desolate streets, tourist centers with no crowds, emblematic avenues with only a few guards and wandered walkers, icons of the world doing at home what many of us do, images aired on television a thousand times of people connected to ventilators and warning: “look, you see”, in other words, things to idly reinvent and that we started to do in our family environment. Collapsed world stock markets, presidents who arrogate to themselves legislative and even judicial functions, diabolical pacts to control fuel prices, uncontrolled media invasion, price speculation of nitrile gloves, alcohol, sanitizers, face masks; and of course, it

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cannot be missed, the free show as in *Mario and the Magician* by Thomas Mann, from the circus charlatan Donald Trump, which encourages us in the hope to think that the great colossus is starting to fall apart.

There has been a little bit of everything, and it is tiresome to try to make an inventory of the trifles things that have temporarily altered our daily life, which is in turn the rhythm and self-conferred trajectory of our *university self*. It is a temptation to refer to one's own experience, and to speculatively rethink what is likely to change in our academic environment, without having to use a rented oracle. But let's go for it and bother the dear reader with matters of the pandemic.

Never before had I use an online app, Google Meet precisely, I did not even know of its existence, and when I had to go through the torture of signing in into my institutional email account -which I had neither open in 20 years of teaching- and become perplexed from the fact that it was possible to meet with students for class via this little whole, I could not help but feel as if I were a baby. It was almost a triumphant experience. I spent four hours, without losing concentration, and I suppose without altering that of students, since we all remained there, linked in the most unlikely way after the chance of the philosopher's stone. I stepped on the 21st century moon this way, and I did not complain in any way.

This is how I have held on and continued with my classes in both *Universidad de Antioquia* and *Universidad Nacional* -in the latter I finished the semester a month ago. I found out about Google Meet for my own benefit and that of my students and it is not my intention with that to weight their virtual abilities at all. It was just a matter educational lottery, which I won without buying a ticket. It was just a situation, one among many others with adverse consequences that need to be assessed.

We know (we are all aware of what I am saying here) that what is actually disturbing, frustrating and unworthy in this experience of confinement, is the fact that most of our students lacked from internet connection, a computer (which in this digital era is comparable to lack of a toothbrushes), they had no suitable or at least reasonable conditions to be at home, as some did not even have food. Others had no patience and so I wanted to encourage my closest student environment with non-ordinary calls. This made the triumphant teaching debut of the *banderillero* Juan Guillermo Gómez García, an odiously paradoxical case.

As we have seen, this confinement has caused, for the most part, a traumatic experience for the country. Everything is getting out of control for this government, which does not fall apart because it does not even have the weight for that. It floats like a cork in water, led by the dark and cloudy streams. We evidence with the greatest concern, the speculative expectations in favor of banks, the big agricultural businessman and other prophets of doom and gloom. But I see, with the greatest concern, an announcement made in news in a very biased and almost invisible way, promoting

virtual teaching packages from the large multinational corporations for colleges and universities. It was a news and it was advertisement at the same time. It therefore seems like, virtual education is going to become a great business from all points of view. The big multinationals and their intermediaries get rich (the usual, Tom-Jerry & Co.) by selling these packages to the Ministry of National Education (MNE), and the Ministry can gradually in the medium and long term put aside teachers. The sun will raise and we will be astray.

I would like to conclude, if the length allows me to, by adding two parts of a book that has almost been written in itself during this pandemic, *Confined Letters*. They are two segments. The first is the introduction to the book (unpublished, of course) and the second, a letter from a student (with the required consent).

1. Confined Letters

These were the pages I wrote while I was confined at home because of the coronavirus pandemic, just as the rest of our clubbed country. My case was exceptional, I was in good health and had access to a salary that allowed me, among many other things, to complete my research *Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot y España* and submit it to the *Alejandro Angel Escobar* Foundation Prize, it also allowed me to simultaneously read *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Freud, Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*, while also attending cooking affairs. I complemented these entertaining weeks during which I did not get bored for even a second, with virtual courses on German Literature from the 18th-19th century and History of Latin American culture (*Cuban Counterpoint* by Fernando Ortiz). I graded (absurd task) final works. I stayed up late a couple of times talking with Juan Camilo Dávila about the damned Nazi Carl Schmitt ... I couldn't ask for more.

I drank, a lot less to my own surprise, a couple of beers a day were enough for me, never a full bottle of wine. I saw the country collapse, in our lying newscasts that could not successfully cover the gaps of our social non-structure. There were no reasons for celebrations or parties. I slept badly a few nights, others I slept better. I washed my hands several times a day as the propaganda ordered, and sprayed with alcohol Nana's and Magdalena's computers and cell phones, which truly annoyed them. I went out very few times, only to take April for a walk, the little dog who was the one who understood the situation the least.

I spoke on the phone with my friends, I wrote to my friends through WhatsApp, I relaxed alone on my bed, which I named "my Schönbrunn bed", with one of those bookish pedantries that must be explained. I also wrote a hundred emails, some definitively idly. In one of them I mentioned that we all are, at last in the Magic Mountain, another of my bookish pedantries, and Rodrigo Zuleta reminded me that in there, at least, the sick ones were in optimal conditions, sheltered from the miseries that make of confinement a true

hell. Yes: in here, we have always lived in a pandemic, only until a few days ago the national government decided to confine us. That is the comparative difference. *Confined letters*. Mady, a dear friend who died of something else a few days ago, would guard them as if written by himself.

2. **Professor Juan Guillermo**, this is Daniel Esteban Gutiérrez Vargas student from the course Historiography 2.

I would like to write a few words to you, more heartfelt than thought. First about me and the reason why I study History, the mean I find in studying History, remembering something you said in class, in regards to constructing a text about the profession. And second about the University and the course.

Given this circumstance of quarantine, it has just now been possible for me to contact you, asking for your permission and forgiveness, since I consider you to be a respected person, even though I do not know you in personal spheres, you reflect wisdom and experience.

In this quarantine I have not been able to attend virtual classes—I want to clarify that I attended all the face-to-face, the only ones I lost were the last few—even to spaces where information about the University is provided. Where I live, there is no access to those resources and this exceptional situation prevents me from properly finishing the semester, at least to my view of what is proper. In addition to the lack of internet and equipment to connect — I don't have a computer to work on my assignments — it is added the lack of financial resources to buy food, cover matter related to medicine and hygiene goods, essential at the moment. I have to admit that this situation is not new, since it can be considered that I am part of the marginal population of Colombia, the one that survives in day by day, the so-called *Popular*. This social condition of scarcity of resources has been a constant for 23 years, along which I have seen how different people are in this country, how indolent we are, and how we resist in the midst of daily live; such as robberies, begging, deaths, rapes, fights inside families and everything that is seen in the newspaper, which bombards us with bad news.

When social and personal problems—existential—are combined in a person, they become philosophical concern—unlike Marx and what is said in his letter, I have not been a person who has studied a lot or has been raised in a 'knowledgeable' environment. I started reading and learning the world just when I was 18— which is manifested in questions like why *do I have to starve all day? Why was I born poor? Why am I ugly?* among others; in my case, also the question *why I was born with a foot deformity?* – equinovarus foot—and many questions that arise, which are analyzed thanks to academic reading and experiences more than street

wisdom. When analyzing the environment and starting to inquire to seek answers to these questions, one is led to some evidence in Colombian history, the exploitation of land, peasants and working people is not new, it even comes from the beginning of civilization.

So, in order to respond to an essential matter, a personal issue, it is necessary to inquire into others—in their experiences—in society and, ultimately, in history. Thus, thanks to history—its practitioners, their practice and their rules for practicing—I have learned that Karl Marx wrote and thought about the same situation that I live, a situation that many people live in the world, the exploitation of man by man, the dirt of private property, political opportunism—issues that in my opinion are huge problems, because there are people who possess in excess and others who do not, but both coexist and basically share the same needs, which we know thanks to natural science—and other social and working issues. Also, thanks to history, I know that there are people who have thought of themselves, who have questioned their environment—Babylonians, Greeks, Egyptians, Chinese, Indians, native peoples of America—have sought to solve their concerns.

An example of the above stated would be The Buddha —perhaps a fantastic example—who, when realizing reality or something that he had not perceived, decides to undertake the path to his salvation or inner calm, because when facing old age, death and the disease—unpleasant things like extreme poverty, hunger, poor health, usual things in Colombia – he felt bad, just as I feel bad and other people feel bad as well, people who are braver than me and work and do something for themselves. The reason to drop a degree in Biology Teaching and then decide to study History, was to explore these concerns to obtain an “own” or apparently own criteria. I think that a purport I find in studying history and pursuing a career as a historian, is the philosophical one, focused mainly on the individual existence connected with the social one. Sharing Edgar Morin’s idea of complexity, which refers to the connection between elements and contexts in a set; my problems are connected with the problems of others, thus my actions are connected with that of others, where I am as an individual and value, not in isolation. This idea of complexity fits historical study; the analysis of past times, events and ideas. Thus, thanks to the historical record and its preservation, it is possible to learn about previous epidemics and pandemics, as well as how to act, value advances and changes in specific fields of knowledge—advances in cell biology, medicine, etc.

In these times of special behavior, it is necessary to be aware of our own history – for example the history of slavery- so we can identify other ways to act and not making the same mistakes. Uncovering history and philosophy becomes more essential during this time than in any other as we are at the mercy of media, science and the institutions.

Without elaborating too far on this part, I would like to say that human rights are not entirely fulfilled and I wonder if that is possible, since life can be easily lost if other rights are not guaranteed, in Colombia they are constantly trampled on.

I think the protests that have been taking place for the last couple of years and that continue to be seen, have no effect as we are not rational citizens, what we were exposed to in class—the little I was exposed to in class – in regards to reasoning as the guide of history is not at all fulfilled, and if so, that scientific reasoning is voracious. In my opinion, there is a lack of religious reasoning, more sacred than superficial, not consumerist — a universal reason in the style of Hegel— but it is just an opinion. Without further ado, this is what I can say about myself and what I study.