

In memory of Yolanda Ruano

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Last September, after a twelve-year long fight against cancer Yolanda Ruano, died in Madrid. Her death has broken an important scholar career at the Philosophical Faculty of the Complutense University of Madrid, where she was a Professor. In spite of her youth, Yolanda Ruano had become a reference point in Spain and Latin America for the study of Max Weber's thought.

She published two books about the analysis of modernity and the modern subjectivity in Max Weber's sociology, both of them dedicated to her daughter Marta, one of the great passions of her life. Her other passion was the professional and academic work as a vocation to which she felt always called. The first book, *Rationality and Tragic Consciousness. Modernity according to Max Weber* (*Racionalidad y conciencia trágica. La Modernidad según Max Weber* [Madrid: Trotta, 1996]) had the beautiful dedication 'To Marta, my hope'. And the second book, *Freedom and Destiny. The Modern Subject in Max Weber* (*La libertad como destino. El sujeto moderno en Max Weber* [Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2001]) carried another arresting dedication: 'To Marta, who erases the shadows that cloud my soul and lifts my life'.

I met Yolanda Ruano for the first time in 1980 and then also in 1984 when she was my student at the Complutense University and I introduced her for the first time to Max Weber's Sociology. From then on, she became very interested in the German sociologist and wrote on him for her PhD. Looking from the Spanish speaking world, I think we have lost one of our researchers on Max Weber who had achieved a wide international recognition. Her internationalization began in 1989 with a four-month stay at the Department of Social and Political Sciences of Cambridge University, where she had the privilege of working with Anthony Giddens. It continued in 1992-93 with the stay of one academic year as a Research Fellow at Oxford University, where she developed an interesting project on 'Epistemology of the

Social Sciences. Elective Affinities between Wittgenstein and Max Weber'. In recent years she became a member of the Editorial Board of *Max Weber Studies*. In 2004 she received an invitation to give a lecture at the Munich Congress on 'The fascination of Max Weber: A history of his reputation', which dealt with the reception of Weber in Spain. In 2005 she organized a summer course at the Complutense University in El Escorial to celebrate the first hundred years of publishing the best-known book by Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. That same year she attended the Congress held in Buenos Aires on 'The validity of Max Weber's thought one hundred years after *The Protestant Ethic*', where she had two lectures: 'Modernity, polytheism and tragedy' (research paper published in the Congress book) and the second on 'The presence of Max Weber in the Spanish thought' (published in *Arbor*, July-August 2007). Both papers by Yolanda Ruano were greatly appreciated by the Weberian specialists present at the conference. And even after the exhausting days of the congress Yolanda made the effort to travel to the Patagonia with the purpose of giving a lecture on the idea of professional duty and reified labour in Max Weber.

Yolanda's life has been marked by the tragedy of her illness for many years. Her long and painful struggle has made her the heroine of a tragedy, fighting for her life until the end with all her courage, even knowing that the final battle was lost. Perhaps because of this, she has been very aware of the role that tragedy plays in the sociology of Max Weber and in his analysis of Western rationalization and the modern individual.

Yolanda's professional passion for Weber was also a passion for thinking and searching the *Daimon* who moved the threads of her own life. It was like an echo of the lucid and disenchanting appeal that Max Weber directed to his students at Munich University in the tragic days after the end of the First World War. That appeal was addressed to a society structured by work, in which the professional dedication to science could continue giving a meaning to individual existence:

From this we want to draw the lesson that nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone, but we shall act differently. We shall set to work and meet the *demands of the day*, in human relations as well as in our vocation. This, however, is plain and simple, if each finds and obeys the *dæmon* who holds the fibres of his very life.

This call remains valid today, at least for those of us dedicated to the academic life. But perhaps we should learn to combine these final

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words of Weber's famous lecture on *Science as a vocation* with the final words of Goethe's autobiography *Poetry and Truth*. Speaking on 'demands of the day' and of '*dæmon*', Max Weber quotes Goethe's ideas on '*Forderung des Tages*' and '*Dämon*'.

Goethe was well aware that life is subject to random external circumstances, usually negative. Yet we can always at least try to be a good charioteer and struggle to control the reins of our destiny. These words (which Goethe puts also in the mouth of the protagonist of his drama *Egmont*), perfectly summarize his perspective on how each of us has to take charge of the own existence, even amid all the difficulties of the time, circumstances and chances in which the complex tree of life is developed:

The coursers of time, lashed, as it were, by invisible spirits, hurry on the light car of our destiny, and all that we can do is to hold the reins with calm self-possession and a firm hand, and to guide the wheels, now to the left, now to the right, avoiding a rock here, or a precipice there. Whither it is hurrying, who can tell? And who, indeed, can remember the point from which it started?

This fight to find the *dæmon* who moves the threads of the existence along with the willingness to drive the light car of one's own destiny are lessons we should extract from Yolanda's books on Max Weber. She has demonstrated in them her deep knowledge of the great German sociologist and at the same time she has expressed herself, writing the textual narration of which the one's own life consists: The thread of her life has become text around Weber's, whose name actually means 'Weaver'. We will always keep Yolanda's life and texts in our memory, for there is much to be learnt from them.