

Christopher Elliott

November 29th, 2021

SOC-105-001

Sociological Comparisons to Harari

The concepts and aspects of sociology are ones that cannot be definitively explained in a single phrase or statement. There are many different sociologists and other individuals who claim to have found specific reasoning for an aspect of how our society can be understood, but each of these opinions and perspectives can overlap and complement each other, or disagree entirely. After reading *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* by Yuval Noah Harari, and getting to learn about his opinions on certain sociological topics and how he believes they play a part in our society today, it is easy to use his commentary in a comparison between other authors and evidence that have been discussed in class. There are both similarities and differences between Harari's writing and that of the many readings we have covered this semester; mainly a similarity in the topic of society's system or matrix, and a difference in the effects of rituals when used by individuals to strengthen and create religion.

One of the similarities between Harari's theories and other sociological perspectives is in relation to the topic of how our society is set up and how its structure affects the grouping of humans and our interactions with those different from us. The concept of "The Matrix of Domination" can be related to Harari's insistence that the system of our society is still affecting certain groups negatively, especially minorities.

"The Matrix of Domination" is based on the idea that there are multiple circles of oppression that exist and overlap into how each individual is viewed and treated in society. The

The beginning of the matrix in society is believed to be partially due to the Eurocentric masculine biases that spread around the world in the time of colonialism; as Europeans discovered new territories and populations of people that proved to be different from any of the ideas that they used in their society previously, they created new concepts of categorizing individuals into groups that led to some being more privileged than others in society. The privilege that individuals had was very proportional to their power and standing in society; depending on where an individual fit in each circle of oppression, they could either fall into the group of the oppressors (those with more power and a higher standing in each circle of oppression, more participation and say in controlling society) or the oppressed (with less power and lower standing than the oppressors, very little say and participation).

These beliefs and biases very quickly became a central part of how the matrix of domination shaped society. The matrix can be split into multiple levels, but the main three involve personal biography (an individual's own collection of experiences, values, emotions, and unique identity within their social space), group or community (based on similarities in stance in class, race, religion, political views, etc.) and systemic or national (the formatting and way of functioning for institutions such as schools, churches, media, and other organizations).

Altogether the levels of domination combine to create a symbolic system that we all live in and are sorted in based on how much power we can obtain or hold. This idea of a large system or matrix that in part depends on the power and influence of certain individuals can be connected to a similar idea of Harari's, where the formatting of society has caused us to be more susceptible to unconscious prejudices.

form smaller and smaller groups within society, and how those groups then interact. He goes on to state that this structure of society is also a large part of why social justice issues such as discrimination and racism are so prominent and challenging to face and change. Because society is set up with a structure of hierarchy and power that is centered among the higher groups and individuals, this makes it possible for perspectives and biases to be leveraged into the system; trickling down into the rest of society as unconscious biases that then impact us when making everyday decisions. Harari summarizes this in the remark that “most of the injustices in the contemporary world result from large-scale structural biases rather than from individual prejudices...” (pg. 232); meaning that though we may not actively think and act in a biased way, there is no denying that part of our consciousness already has those biases because of how society and those with power have shaped the way we think.

However, this does not mean that there is no opportunity for us to pursue an even more equal and inclusive society despite our present societal structure (or matrix). The reason that we do not already have a more nondiscriminatory society is because our society has formed its truth around the opinions and wants of the people who hold the power in society; both tangible and intangible. Harari mentions these people of power as “the global elite” and that in order for there to be an explanation to change society’s current structure, we must look at how we are being affected by the truths of these individuals that surround us. He states that, “If you really want truth, you need to escape the black hole of power... [and] revolutionary knowledge rarely makes it to the center, because the center is built on existing knowledge,” (pg. 226). Most people will be content to live in the information at the center of society, because that is the truth that they have been known and living with, whether or not it is the most just perspective. In order for us to live

structure of society and to who is holding the power.

On the other hand, a difference between the sociological writings we've explored in class can be seen in "The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations" and in Harari's writings, specifically amid the topic of religion and religious rituals. Though both seem to agree that religion can play a large part in how people bond within their social and physical communities, there is an added aspect that Harari details about the drawbacks of religion as a coordinating force, depending on how and which rituals are used to enhance the strength of the religion within an individual.

At the beginning of the semester, some of the first things we discussed were about the nature of religion and how it has played a part in our emotional and social development as a species. In Emile Durkheim's "The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations", religion is largely described as something that occurs in our brains where we begin to attach meaning to certain objects or activities. Each object or activity begins to have its own separate meaning for the entirety of those who believe in the religion, evolving into things such as using wedding rings, eating communion bread, and going to church every Sunday. Religion provides us with the ability to coordinate ourselves socially into agreeing on what certain things mean for each and every one of the beliefs we have that make up whatever religion we choose to follow and believe in everyday, and each of the small differences in beliefs and rituals has led to the creation of different societies and cultures that have evolved out of different religions or even further into separate religious denominations. Ultimately, rituals are very important in the creation and function of religion because rituals provide a deeper meaning or reasoning for individuals to do

physically act and feel emotionally bonded over the same beliefs as others.

Harari's take on religion is somewhat similar in the fact that religion can and is used as a binding force between individuals that leads to communities. He also mentions the important role that rituals play in religion; defining them as "a magical act that makes the abstract concrete and the fictional real," (pg. 287). Rituals serve as a binding force for those who partake in them, but Harari brings up that rituals are not always strengthening religious beliefs in a positive manner, and that "of all rituals, sacrifice is the most potent, because of all the things in the world, suffering is the most real. You can never ignore it or doubt it," (pg. 291). Just because a ritual can strengthen and allow you to feel as though you really and truly believe in a specific religion or set of beliefs, there is always the drawback of having to give up something and suffer to feel that stronger connection. Harari summarizes the effects of sacrificing and suffering in the name of rituals in his statement that "the more they sacrifice for a particular belief, the stronger their faith becomes... [and] if you suffer because of your belief in god or in the nation, that does not prove that your beliefs are true," (pg. 291).

In conclusion, there are multiple sociological concepts that can be compared to Harari and all of his opinions in his *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. "The Matrix of Domination" has similarities to Harari in that both summarize that our society functions on a structure that allows certain people to hold power and influence how groups and individuals within society function and become susceptible to biases. Additionally, the concept of "The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations" shows differences to Harari's writings on the topic of religion. Though both talk about the importance of rituals for individuals to believe in and feel like they are participating in religion; Harari goes further to describe how rituals are not always without

these comparisons shows how there can be both overlap and inconsistencies between sociological concepts and authors. Though there may not be one single right or wrong answer, there are at least many different opinions and ideas to consider on each topic.