



Conference Buenos Aires, 28-30 October 2010

Working title:

“Cultural elements in social sciences and in academic labor - Epistemological and educational challenges constructing a scientific multi-versalism”

1. Workshop rationale

The era of globalization confronts social thought with a twofold paradox: Firstly, in the era of globalization knowledge about foreign societies and policies has gained importance, especially since the anticipated arrival of a “multi-polar” world makes knowledge about different regions indispensable. Due to the effects of globalization on the historically nationally constructed societies also local phenomena increasingly incorporate international dimensions requiring the internationalization of the social sciences knowledge production. However, due to their emergence in the context of nation states namely in Europe, the categories social science uses for interpreting social phenomena, have strong conceptual ties with particular nation states and their societal cultures. While countries and their societies beyond Europe to which the concept of nation state had been exported rarely gained the powerful tradition as nationally constructed societies as they did from where the concept originates, the concepts and categories of the social sciences that emerged in the context of the European national based societies have been spread over the world constituting the international standards of a scientific universalism.

Secondly, while the process of globalisation adjusts the economies of the societies on the globe to the standards of market economies, the very same adjustment of the *economic* standards raises the attention of those very societies to their particular identities interpreting

globalisation through the perspective of the role *they* play in the globe, constructed via the roots of their individual histories and their distinctive cultural and political traditions. The reconfiguration of space and power through globalization necessitates the understanding of the peculiar social and cultural prerequisites of social thought allowing for diverse interpretations of globalization and of the emerging new world order.

However, the need for diverse interpretations of the “Global” is confronted with the need to question the scientific foundations of a former worldwide acknowledged scientific universalism, constitutive of what has been considered as modern scientific knowledge, which, however, as Said has shown for the Asian societies, is often only the interpretation of the world through the eyes and the categories of a European social science perspective.

As a result, the need for multiple interpretations of the global does not only have to encompass the parochial categories of nation-based societies as their analytical framework allowing for internationalized scientific interpretations of the world, but also have to overcome the universalization of the Western parochial interpretation of the global, inevitably questioning the global validity of Western social science concepts, thus also eroding the established universal foundations of social science thinking.

If the SSH are to be global they must become open to a plurality of cultural realities and schemes of interpretation, without falling into cultural relativism. In this process it is very likely that they become reformulated and even transformed through multiple dialogues and interactions among the individuals, groups and institutions that generate and ultimately create a new social science world order. This creation of a new global social science world order will inevitably have to go through a phase of a scientific multi-versalism, encountering all the conflicts incorporated in the epistemological contradiction of a pluralism of universalisms.

The main objective of the workshop is to reflect on how to escape from local parochialism as a theoretical framework for interpreting the global, how to overcome the universalization of Western parochialism, its concepts and categories of social thinking hegemonizing the interpretation of the global, and how to begin to create and establish a bottom up scientific multi-versalism based on the different cultural standards of sciences and of academic labor.

2. Agenda topics for the World SSH Net

The workshop will focus on what are cultural elements of science and scientific labor and how such cultural standards of academic labor in different science communities and different disciplines could be transformed into a bottom up constructed scientific multi-versalism that replaces the top down Western scientific universalism, stemming from the era of colonisation.

It therefore reflects on the following topics

Topic 1. *Cultural elements of social sciences and of academic labor,*

Topic 2. *Epistemological and methodological implications of a scientific multi-versalism,*

Topic 3. *Educational challenges for polycentric research*

Topic 4. *Follow up activities: Future issues, blogs and workshops*

1. Cultural standards of science and of academic labor

Shifting from any additive ex post collaborations towards an internationalized knowledge production raises one fundamental epistemological question: While there might not even be any different concepts of what constitutes scientific knowledge or of the cognitive processes implied in the generation of knowledge, the question remains, is it true that social sciences are unaffected by any cultural context and does scientific work have not any cultural dimensions? Questioning this implies the most important critique of the epistemological foundations of a scientific universalism. What are such cultural elements in the concepts of social knowledge and in the process of knowledge production, these questions constitute the first main issue of the workshop.

2. Epistemological and methodological implications of a scientific multi-versalism,

Assuming that this is the case, it has two important implications: firstly, identifying such cultural elements or standards of scientific work and, secondly, discussing the role they play in international collaborations is a huge issue to be researched and a topic to be explored in our workshop. Reflecting on how such cultural elements epistemologically and methodologically affect the collaborative generation of scientific knowledge is the second fundamental issue for constructing a bottom up global scientific community based on multiple concepts of science and of academic labor.

3. Educational challenges for polycentric research

Even if there was no cultural element in the social sciences the challenges for science education and its traditional individualized modes of accumulating scientific knowledge are enormous for any variation of international academic labor. Even already the mere international ex post exchange of knowledge implies modes of combining multiple styles of academism. If however, international research collaborations have to synthesize different styles and standards of academic labor for the collective generation of knowledge, rather than imposing presupposed universal standards, the implications for academic education preparing for such a polycentric research approach become most obvious.

4. Follow up activities: Future issues, blogs and workshops