



Global social science discourse: A Southern perspective on the world

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Abstract

The relationship of social science and society is actively under discussion today in processes of social identity-making in the world at large. This article explores how, in different contexts, powerful institutions such as universities, disciplines, states, and more recently, a varied array of social movements struggle to define principles by which to determine which knowledge holders should be included, and on what terms, within social science. The analysis starts by reviewing the dominant discourse about academic social science and speculates on some of the factors influencing it, which are contingent upon the social relations and identities built around it in the setting of a powerful institution such as the university. Next it refers to the community of practice that grew around development thinking and practices since the early 20th century, mainly in governmental and nongovernmental institutions, aiming at social intervention. Finally, the analysis identifies the huge world expansion of social science in recent decades and its implications in the era of globalization. In view of persisting asymmetries and inequalities, this article asks about the possibility of alternative ways of practicing research. It suggests the need for a comparative frame that would foster organic interconnections between multiple voices and nourish a diversity of approaches.

Keywords

Discourse, Global South, hegemony, social science, universalism

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Introduction

Embedded in universities, industry, and government, science has been a powerful cultural and ideological force in the construction of the contemporary world, with relatively autonomous and fairly atypical governance structures. A reason for this is the specialized nature of scientific expertise and a strongly perceived need to protect scientific work from outside 'interference.' Crucial governance structures from peer-review to policy-making have often been much more in the control of practitioners – that is, scientists – than has been the case in other areas of public concern. Hence, policy and the public discourse about science have been largely shaped by scientists and other writers from within a relatively closed community, producing a radically simplified version of reality that emphasizes linearity, progress, and the intellectual and material products of science. This form of reconstruction has served a powerful ideological purpose, helping to maintain scientists' control over public and private representations of their endeavor. With specificities of its own, social science has broadly shared the form of social and historical reconstruction of the natural and formal sciences.

As international academic exchanges and interactions explode, social scientists from Southern countries often find themselves in an awkward position. They regard themselves as contributing to universally valid theory, having been socialized into the values of (Western/international) science. Their knowledge, however, is usually not acknowledged as being of universal value but only of regional or local validity and scope (Keim, 2010).

At the same time, in the most unexpected places public interest and public engagement in social research has soared, bringing new challenges to many areas, which paradoxically have resulted in a loss of public trust and acceptance. To be socially acceptable in the global era, social science needs to address underlying framing issues as concerns both its own intellectual constituency, which has grown to huge dimensions, and its engaging of a demanding and variegated public. The debate should be kept open, allowing a range of possible outcomes and managing immensely increased expectations. This would imply organizational and most likely epistemological changes as well, opening a question mark about the future nature of social science.

This article starts by reviewing the evolution of the dominant discourse about academic social science as a general self-legitimizing social-historical reconstruction of scientists' outlook and speculates on some of the factors influencing it. These aspects are contingent upon the social relations and identities built in the setting of a powerful institution such as the university, and the consequences of this. Next it refers to the community that grew around development thinking and practices since the second quarter of the 20th century, mainly in governmental and nongovernmental institutions, aiming at social intervention. This different way of approaching social reality grew significantly along a different path from that of academic social science. Finally the analysis focuses on the huge world expansion of social science in recent decades and its implications in the era of globalization. In view of persisting asymmetries and inequalities, the article asks about the possibility of alternative ways of practicing research. It suggests the need of a comparative frame that would foster organic interconnections between multiple voices and nourish a diversity of approaches.

Locking up more than excellence in research? Closing down the discussion in academic social science

The identity of academic social science rests on its powerful socialization around the unique set of scientific values that grew in the university setting during the 20th century. Academic institutions, scientific societies, journals, funding mechanisms, and peer-review are elements that help structure the space and world of the academic scientist and participate in the global distribution of knowledge and values. In the transition from traditional to modern societies a criterion of interpretation was used based on the norms and trends observed in the most advanced societies of Europe and North America. Scientific disciplines came to represent cognitive frameworks that determined legitimate sets of problems for canonical scientific research and the methods, concepts, and traditions to solve them. The disciplinary structure of social science is a constraint for teachers, scientists, and students, while it is also a guide for learning and research. A common intellectual matrix is recognized, reflected in national disciplinary research styles (Jamison, 1982; Vessuri, 1993).

Since the beginning there were attempts to distinguish between ‘sociological’ and ‘social’ problems, by means of which social science would strategically distance itself from the turmoil of social reality to safeguard its ‘scientific quality.’ This was to a large extent the basis of the *ivory tower* legend that depicts academia as aloof and removed from the heat of struggles for power and resistance. While such distance has been contested at different times and places, on the whole it has remained at the root of the ideology of the university teacher and researcher in both the Global North and the Global South.

The institutional and intellectual structuring force of the social sciences has been so strong that in the early 1970s science was conceived as an activity carried out by a human group (the scientific community or better, communities distinguished by disciplines). These groups were ‘so totally isolated from the external world that to all practical effects it is not necessary to take into consideration the idiosyncrasy of the different societies in which scientists live and work’ (Ben-David, 1970). In the 1970s interest in the social study of science was concentrated in the social conditions of academic work. This perception often led to a view of science as being separate from the world of action, produced in a fragmented way, isolated from the real world. A comparative approach was adopted in the study of the constitution of professional teams in laboratories, organizations structured on the basis of disciplines, national plans, and scientific research institutes, as well as communication networks among scientists. All was encapsulated within the academic universe, and rather than cooperating with other social actors and producing integrated research to solve concrete problems, scientists often competed with each other to create valid descriptions of the world (St Clair, 2013).

Thus knowledge production is usually defined by the distance between the knowledge seeker and the object of knowledge, in constant tension to achieve the appropriate balance between distance and commitment. The issue of the adequacy of forms involving a greater distance or more engaged forms of social and human knowledge continues to be controversial and varies with time. As we get closer to the present, however, the firm hold of academic social science over its intellectual constituency has lost strength, and

social science must improve its capacity to respond to real problems and tell us what to do. Social scientists are changing their attitudes towards the hegemony of disciplinary departments and disciplinary research. Traditional disciplines in the future will most likely have to compete with interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and educational projects.

At different times and institutional locations, domains and objects of analysis were reconfigured, some issues shifting to the foreground while others receded. Depending on the author considered, current changes might trigger a new integration of the social and hard sciences, which have been separated for over a century, and also a re-coupling of knowledge and action. They might result in a new, truly universal and integrated profile of science. On the other hand, it could also mean that knowledge will be oriented increasingly towards local, context-dependent, problem-solving efforts integrated into epistemic 'communities' with actors originating in different social activities outside science.

Although it has been easier for natural and physical scientists than for social scientists to build a scheme of academic professionalization of research, academic social science has nonetheless become highly professionalized, exhibiting a steep ranking system. In a profoundly hierarchical structure the most valued position is set to be that of the academic scientist in the university context carrying out disciplinary research and teaching. The underlying idea is that a young person takes a job in a governmental or nongovernment organization (NGO) only because suitable academic careers are in short supply or too low-paid. It may also be the case that he or she is not talented enough to pursue a life devoted to research and intellectual endeavor. This is, then, a view originating in academia about 'hierarchy' and 'competition' between the academic values of 'free' research and those of oriented, applied work, which has often been even denied the quality of being research, clearly debased in terms of prestige. Robert Merton expressed the notion of the *ethos* of science and by implication of social science, for the United States, in the 1940s. This notion became institutionalized in the canon of American sociology of science as a 'norm of science.' In its international expansion, institutionalized social science adopted many such normative prescriptions as revealed in the formal programs through which it was integrated into the world's universities. It mattered little, in this view, that this arrangement only reached a small proportion of the social science constituency.

Among the social scientist's basic academic activities, publishing stands out. The control of the cognitive and institutional orientation in connection with publishing becomes evident with regard to thematic repertoires. These are key to insure a meaningful exchange within the academic world, although often communication with nonacademic audiences is more difficult. A frequent source of anxiety for the researcher is how to approach a lay audience, feeling vertigo in the confrontation with the general public. From the view constructed by academic social science of applied work in public agencies and NGOs, a prediction resulted that would confirm a matter-of-course state of affairs: scientists socialized into the academic value system would suffer the 'pain of psychological conflict' when presented with situations that required or encouraged them to behave in ways that violated the norms they had acquired in the university. These notably included the notion of distance from social reality, which has already been mentioned, powerfully presented by Max Weber in his celebrated work on 'science as a vocation' (1958 [1918]).

To avoid or free themselves of this ‘pain,’ it was ‘in the social scientist’s interest’ to conform to the ethos in which he or she had been socialized. By contrast with political pressures, moral dilemmas, and commercial temptations, the academic world offered intellectual and normative security, away from the entanglements of real life. From the viewpoint of academic ideology, the scientist in a development program or institution or in an NGO is an unhappy, anxious, and possibly awkward figure who is in constant conflict with political or commercial values and organizational structures. As a result of the academic researchers’ unique pattern of socialization, their personalities are depicted as impatient with organizational or political constraints: researchers are said to be quite independent and mindful of their individual integrity, hostile to authority structures, loyal to science, and disdainful of local organizational values. Such persons are supposed to pose a major problem for the smooth running of development or commercial organizations that demand disciplined behavior for the sake of the unilateral goals of the firm or the program at hand.¹

Development as the pathway to social action?

Since the aftermath of the Second World War we find arguments for the setting up of programs for the support of communities and countries considered to be underdeveloped, working on the transfer of resources, technology, and knowledge from the wealthy portion of the world to those lagging behind. In many ways the postwar years of ‘progress’ were the culmination of a modernization process started in the mid-19th century, by means of which a whole miscellany of cultures gave rise to the ‘happy world’ of modernity, conceived as a unique and homogeneous continuum.

A typical definition is found in The South Commission Report of 1990:

Development is a process which enables human beings to realize their potential, build self-confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment. It is a process which frees people from the fear of want and exploitation. It is a movement away from political, economic or social oppression. Through development, political independence acquires its true significance. And it is a process of growth, a movement essentially springing from within the society that is developing. ... The base for a nation’s development must be its own resources, both human and material, fully used to meet its own needs. ... Development has therefore to be an effort of, by, and for the people. True development has to be people-centered. (The South Commission, 1990: 10–11)

In societies in which many people have no access to adequate resources to meet their basic needs, there are strong cravings to dramatically improve the access to energy for power, cooking, heating, or cooling and transportation as elements of a development strategy. Development programs are not just technological but involve social values and practices and are often characterized by long-term path dependence as many elements are locked into the program and the system to which they are chained; thus, they are very difficult to shift. Western consumption behaviors and lifestyles have served as aspirations to the large proportion of the human population living in developing countries. Various Western ‘social practices’ spread during the second half of the last century as the population, income, consumption, and energy use grew exponentially. Every aspect of

daily life became affected by the underlying system of beliefs and practices. The daily shower, norms of cleanliness, the school run, the part-time job, sports, a myriad of ingredients cluster together, reinforcing each other, and engendering a lifestyle that turns out to be unsustainable.

The science of development has grown up in different continents at about the same time, across many cultures and at different levels related to the problems encountered, the differing schools of economic thought, and the models of society created by or for the developing countries (Pakdaman, 1994). It has been a powerful tool of social 'engineering' promising to solve the problems of poverty and stagnation, although the solution has always appeared to recede like the horizon just as one thought to be approaching it. This field of study has maintained an uneasy relationship with academic social science. At times it was considered part of the social science platform of theoretical construction, while on other occasions it was deemed to be an inferior kind of social thinking and action.

By the late 1970s when the *Zeitgeist* in dominant societies changed, the role of knowledge changed with it. In different countries specific agencies were created to support and stimulate research. The problems related to human and financial resources of science, including the science for development, acquired importance. This was a period when research and researchers enjoyed the greatest social prestige. It was no longer necessary to convince states or big industry of the relevance of research to them; the issue was now how to foster and use it for their own ends, among which economic gain was paramount.

At various times social researchers have published books and articles on the subject of organizing development research facilities and administering development programs. In marked, if unsurprising, contrast to the academic narrative, most development writings display little interest in making points of general disciplinary interest or in using the theoretical social science literature for any other purpose than coming to concrete findings about recurring problems in and about the development program at hand and proffering some fairly plausible practical solutions to the problems in question.

With regard to the issue of whether development specialists publish technical reports (gray literature), do not publish at all, or publish in academic journals, many development experts have vigorously endorsed a free academic publishing policy and have argued for the bare minimum of internal in-house publications as a way to foster quality as a consequence of public exposure to peer criticism. The free flow of technical information, or at least the freest flow compatible with the kind of literature produced, was for a long time widely accepted if not universally acknowledged in intellectual circles as a net benefit to all parties (Chambers, 2007). Indeed, some of the best social literature emerging, for example, from Latin American social science has been on development theory and problems, as shown by ECLA publications on development and the critical responses of dependence theorists (Cardoso and Faletto, 1972; CEPAL, 1969).

Of course, the rank-and-file development researcher conflates a different menu of activities from that of his or her academic counterpart. Publishing in internationally refereed journals is not necessarily his or her target since the researcher addresses his or her work preferably to local audiences, policy- or decision-makers. Thus publishing is only one of the tasks, while there is an array of activities he or she engages in that fall

outside the range of recognized publishing activities (more related to academic performance evaluation), such as inventories of biotic resources, plant breeding and peasant/indigenous know-how, community forest management planning, biodiversity, social organization of production, cattle raising, water and soil conservation, as well as different dimensions of participatory research.

In terms of values distinguishing development from academic research, it has been argued that academic values cluster around disinterestedness, autonomy, spontaneity, and openness, while development values center on concrete development outcomes, organization, planning, and the control of social goals. In academic institutions, it might plausibly be said that the Mertonian values are publicly celebrated as part of the institutional essence, while in development organizations values are more often asserted tactically in terms of social usefulness, reminding the uninformed that research is, to a great extent, an uncertain business, not to be subjected to the accountability regimes of other social activities. On the other hand, a theory of ideal-type differences between institutional cultures is one thing, and a description of daily realities in complex institutional environments is quite another. Those in the practical business of managing research endeavors have tended to acknowledge the intractable problems of distinguishing between these contexts.

Note that by the 1960s academic social scientists² were already producing extended quasi-empirical studies of ‘development research,’ which defined research agendas and methodological approaches also from within the academic world itself (Cardoso, 1980; Cooper, 1973; Faletto, 1979; Herrera, 1971; Pavitt, 1984; Seers, 1963; Stavenhagen, 1975). Although development and dependency approaches are usually identified with Chile and Brazil in Latin America, it is useful to remember that they were dominant theoretical views found in Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere too. Thus it may be instructive to mention two academic hubs as examples of this: SPRU and IDS in Sussex, UK (Jolly, 2008), and CENDES in Venezuela (Darwich, 2005).

Despite a common origin in the social sciences, the academic and development research communities remained largely separate.³ Curiously, the persistent concern with socialization so repeatedly found in academic writings is not present in the development literature. Indeed, there are important and pervasive strands that portray the daily realities of development work in ways that make the academically predicated role-conflict highly problematic. In government programs and in nongovernmental institutions, development social scientists may not be fully free since they are usually ‘officers’ in bureaucratic organizations. Often, however, they feel free from heavy teaching loads and from their academic colleagues’ lack of interest in research for social and economic change. They may also express a sociopolitical and/or moral satisfaction from participating in the improvement of the social conditions of people.

Freedom in the academic context is linked to the notion of autonomy, historically a highly appreciated feature in the academic narrative. What does autonomy mean, however, for a social scientist? It does not mean much – in the past or now – if you cannot get the time or the funds to do the research you want to do.⁴ The issue whether a development researcher has little time and freedom (autonomy) to define his or her own research has been discussed since an early stage. The literature around participatory research illustrates the kinds of arguments and debates social commitment fostered,

involving different ideas of autonomy and social responsibility (Chambers, 2008; Fals Borda, 1978).

Perhaps the greatest specificity of development as a knowledge field is the powerful action-idea that lies at the root of this notion: the idea that wealth can be generalized to everyone on our unequal planet and that, therefore, injustice can be seen as a merely temporary state of affairs, independent of the realization that the gap between North and South and rich and poor is continually widening (Rist, 2008). Nevertheless, despite its differences with the academic social science ideology, the development problem remains inscribed in the very core of the Western imagination, as it is linked to the notions of progress, growth, and an inexhaustible use of resources. Both academic social science and development studies share the imprint of Western thinking, and despite their achievements, their shortcomings and failings increasingly suffocate many areas of social science today.

The construction of a non-hegemonic social science in an expanded world of social knowledge

As the 20th century progressed, a new player joined the social science field, social science in the non-Western world, with an increasingly stronger presence and voice. Earlier in the century, there were some efforts to criticize the monolithic version of Western 'universal' social science, with views that were clouded by the effects of the Cold War. Ever since Joseph Needham 'discovered' Chinese science during the Second World War, for example, he devoted himself to writing his colossal series of books on Chinese science and civilization (*Science and Civilization in China*, 1954–2008), which built a bridge of monumental proportions between the cultural history of one-quarter of the human race and the larger world outside Chinese civilization.

Another interesting figure was Martin Bernal, who contributed to raising important issues for scholarly consideration in the trilogy of *Black Athena* (1987–2006). Criticizing what he saw as the racist 'Aryan' theory of Greek origins prevalent from the early 19th century, he proposed a 'revised ancient model' that accepted some Indo-European input, but held that about half the linguistic and mythic components of Hellenic culture came from African and Asiatic introductions since the early second millennium BC.

A third important author was Edward Said, a founding intellectual of postcolonialist currents. Fascinated by how the people of the Western world perceive the peoples of and the things from a different culture, particularly the East, and by the effects of society, politics, and power upon literature, Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) had a huge influence in undermining prejudiced views and promoting a broader understanding of a diverse cultural world.

The three were controversial figures whose ideas were rejected, misinterpreted, rendered invisible in the political struggles of their time, but despite all this, they became highly influential in promoting a broader view of humankind. Two of the three were European, but their geographical origin in the West should not per se disqualify their significance; origin and validity are separate issues.

Recently the 2010 *World Social Science Report* (WSSR) offered a broad overview of social science in the world, analyzing the dynamics of social science, its geography, and the institutional, material, and social structures that influence its production and

circulation. It also examined some of the major gaps that reduce social science's ability to analyze trends in human societies and effectively face global challenges. Clearly a report of this kind could not cover everything in a single volume. Important dimensions remained practically ignored, as is the case of the capacity of social science to interpret the realities of the heterogeneous sociocultural fragments of the kaleidoscope that makes up the world.

Today there are significant research communities in many more countries than the old well-known crowd. Everywhere individuals are critically rethinking the relationships between knowledge and power, contributing to change the architecture of world science and scientific influence. The prestige of social theories developed in Europe and North America are being undermined, and intellectual thoughts from different regions are invigorated while at the same time anomalies of Western social science concepts, theories, and *a priori* demarcations are being exposed. More mature and ubiquitous social scientists begin to ask questions more often and systematically about social categories and thought traditions that until the recent past were taken as foundational or others that were ignored or relegated under the weight of canonical forms of social scientific knowledge created in the West. With the exploration of different concepts and methodological approaches, the multiple human commitments involved in the production and application of knowledge become visible. In the process, the West is finally coming to take its place in the world as one more special cultural variety and not the standard bearer.⁵

Increasing numbers of scientists criticize that Western theories pretend universal validity although they often do not adequately interpret phenomena in other cultural contexts. More people also question that in pretending to interpret reality through Western ideological lenses, many theories produced by social science in the rest of the world fail to fully understand what happens. As the idea of social science widened with its growing diffusion it also underwent deeper changes. An emphasis on the permeability of science to the external world has become more common through the market funding opportunities and demands from civil society. Far from being isolated, social science has come to be perceived as being closely enmeshed with the economic, political, and social processes. This implies a whole new series of possibilities and limitations. In the last quarter of the 20th century there was an explosion of studies about scientific activity in different countries. Never before had national and international social science been so stimulated, nor had such large numbers of social researchers participated in scientific production and communication. An appeal to context became increasingly attractive by sharpening the sensitivity to newly discovered sociocultural phenomena, while work in the interactional mode illuminated cognitive differences between and among competing social and cultural orders.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as we saw above, the dependency approach had offered an opportunity to critically examine the hegemony of the theory of modernization and of its outgrowth development theory. This was a time when Latin American social and 'hard' scientists began to challenge the Western epistemological bases of theorizing by critically recognizing the economic and social reality of Latin America. The 1990s, in turn, witnessed the explorations by East Asian social scientists keen to reconsider the validity of social theories based on European or North American sources in terms of the Asian rich and variegated colonial and postcolonial experience. While classic social science in

19th-century Europe had reflected European social changes, now Asian, African, and Latin American social scientists are rethinking social theories based on emergent phenomena in those global regions. Although the research groups are not as large or as powerful in resources, they might come to challenge the strong influence of the West. Tensions between different viewpoints could lead to rethinking social science and social knowledge at large.

Theories such as *comparative research* (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003), the *indigenization of knowledge* (Hill, 1995), *subaltern knowledge* (Chakrabarty, 2000), *coloniality of power* (Quijano, 1997), *Southern theory* (Connell, 2007), *cognitive and moral relativism* (Lukes, 2008), *multiculturalism* (Inglis, 1995), *different meanings of internationalization of the social sciences* (Kuhn and Weidemann, 2010), and similar approaches inquire into the social arrangements that inspire particular cultural orders or into the epistemologies that help to sustain particular social orders.

On the other hand, whether these critical approaches seriously question hegemonic science and whether they help building a non-hegemonic one is not at all clear. While *academic imperialism* waned with the end of the colonial system, we have seen that a subdued although penetrating version of the academic hegemony of the West persisted in several forms after the Cold War and in what is already presented as the era of globalization. There are not yet sufficiently deep contributions to the theoretical dimension, especially in the construction of models by which world knowledge and globalization are conceived. One must admit the relative institutional weakness of social research outside the West.

One of the reasons for this is that frequently social science in postcolonial contexts has dissociated itself from the nonformal and noninstitutional epistemological foundations of popular wisdom. If social science was ever related to other knowledge forms, it was only to learn *about* them but never to learn *from* them (Kumaran, 2013). This attitude was part and parcel of the basic devices to keep the present knowledge system in place, discarding popular consciousness, customs, and mores as being unscientific, 'contrary to progress,' always confined to the 'barbarian' and uncivilized pole. *Eurocentrism* and *orientalism* are cultural and epistemic logics interconnected with capitalist imperialism and embedded in the social disciplines to make of the North Atlantic world the central point of a narrative for the analysis of the development of modernity, silencing its imperial experience and its violence.

Nationalism, on the other hand, and particularly *methodological nationalism* in connection to social science in postcolonial countries, has been a conscious embracing of place/territory for creating a set of orientations wherefrom to confront colonial discourses in social science. Identification with a place/territory allowed 'national' intellectuals in different countries to build intellectual solidarities against the dominant colonial/postcolonial knowledge (Patel, 2013). Nationalist modernist projects were started by the new modern states using among other things higher education to create the new India, Brazil, Korea, Argentina, Egypt, Taiwan, etc. Social knowledge came to discuss and represent the social change occurring within a particular nation and territory, the nation-state, allowing the institutionalization of a particularistic problem agenda in a new manner. An assessment of how modernity changed the institutions (kinship, family, caste, and religion) characteristic of a particular country was done through cultural mediations in the

implementation of hybrid policies that modernized and de-modernized at the same time (Lomnitz, 1998). Through the selective and partial appropriation of the ideology of modernity by specific social actors and political regimes, social knowledge also participated in the social planning of the new societies.

However, the new 'national' social sciences structured themselves within the frame of so-called international social science, increasing the latter's importance. In a certain sense, science in the South has always been international, from its very inception, because it was adopted from its European cradle through a process of transfers and implantation in new territories previously considered to have been without science (Vessuri, 2013). International science, including social science, tended to be associated with activities distributed over more than one country, which perhaps received their equipment and funding from several countries, or both; in such cases, collaboration used to occur fundamentally between nation-states, and national groups of researchers would work together with the support and under the protection of their governments. The whole process remained largely compatible with the ideology of scientific nationalism (Wagner, 2008). International and national science came to be seen as two sides of the same coin in which the one reproduced the other, exhibiting a good measure of isomorphism.

However, we cannot do without analytic categories simply because of their Eurocentric colonial genealogy, if they are robust enough. Despite its shortcomings, the national science idea remains a valid site for defining identities and making politics. While we clearly need a multidimensional strategy to displace hegemonic science in the construction of a truly universal science, the notion of national science remains significant, not so much as a site for creating 'particularities' but rather for the intervention of a more locally diversified, context-sensitive approach that displaces hegemonic knowledge. The current world expansion of social science means an enormous increase in the number of graduate and postgraduate students. The sheer growth in the size of the social science community makes it inevitable to find a great variety of visions and perspectives. The 'same' phenomenon may be perceived and valued differently in various societies, with the implication that responses to change are adapted to context. The axiom 'context matters' is clearly at work here.

In the global setting mainstream social science is deeply involved in instrumentalized rational operations by states, corporations, and NGOs. In this new setting, consultancy work represents a dominant mode of knowledge production, particularly in non-Western countries, supported by mixed funding, which promotes interdisciplinary research and is sensitive to market demands. Consultancy work unduly politicizes knowledge production and lowers institutional and individual quality. The conditions of applying instrumental social science to non-Western societies need to be revised. There are already attempts in the most disparate fields, starting from indigenous objects that have been privileged through their appropriation by Western social science (as in the case of biopiracy). By examining the modalities of choice with regard to these objects, the logic presiding the delimitation of their boundaries, and the logical and methodological forms intervening in the collection and treatment of the data, we may reveal how Western social science has omitted dimensions that might be reinterpreted extending the explanatory power of the phenomena studied, distorted, taken up only partially in a fragmented way, amputated. The resultant completed, reconstituted objects would be a way to begin to

reconfigure the field of social science aiming at a better, more relevant, and truly universal scope.

The persistent disparities in research capacities and knowledge fragmentation in the world at large are the result of the dominance of hegemonic science that has strengthened and reinforced the control of the existing big players. There are huge differences in funding for higher education and research that increase the gap. The predominance of quantitative evaluation methods, particularly as concerns bibliometrics and university rankings, deepens the divide. In addition, the brain drain and professional migration, even though they are present everywhere, have deleterious effects on weaker countries. These and other issues are highlighted by the WSSR 2010. This report also considers theoretical and epistemological problems like the meaning and limits of the internationalization of social science knowledge and whether or not it contributes to improving the quality and relevance of social science, as well as the multiplication of disciplines and their presumed lack of collaboration that might undermine their ability to respond to today's problems. The report, however, hardly touches on the many attempts at exploration of the social on different epistemological and theoretical foundations. This is a pending task.

Conclusion

What kinds of frameworks are needed to create an international social science that may include in its analysis the recognition and debate of the conflictive and contradictory processes of domination–subordination that have organized its differential epistemes and silenced so many others in the world? We have to go beyond the universal/particular and the global/national. Of vital importance is to assert the need of combining place (and not only that of the nation-state) with multiple voices in the process of becoming organically interconnected. A current challenge is to create an intellectual infrastructure that may recognize this complex matrix when promoting the many voices of infra-local and supra-national traditions with their own cultural works, epistemologies and theoretical frameworks, cultures of science and reflection languages, as well as sites of production and the transmission of knowledge.

Social scientists have begun in greater numbers to conceptualize the new order in many ways. Some have called it *global modernity* (Albrow, 1997), others '*entanglements of power*' (Sharp et al., 2000), *sociology beyond society* (Urry, 2000), *world anthropologies* (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006), and still others have called it *cosmopolitanism* (Beck, 2006; Held, 2010). Some speak of *diversities*, (Bennett et al., 2001) or of *diverse sociological traditions* (Patel, 2010) for what it suggests of dispersal, difference, de-homogenizing, or of 'cross-cultural comparisons' (Turnbull, 2003). Since we cannot forget the power dimension, it is obvious that it is not the case that all the 'others,' the different ones, are in a same line and are equal in reciprocal terms. They remain in mutual relationships among themselves organized by the conditions of that mutuality. These conditions are structured at various levels of a space/time dynamic matrix. The separation and autonomy characteristic of academic science that initially was a barrier against the threats of the instrumental pretensions of powerful stakeholders will be increasingly challenged by the consequences of knowledge policy upon the scientific endeavor.

It would seem that so far the variants of criticism of world hegemonic science based on the universalization of the Western model of science have remained largely within the premises of this science model and are not, therefore, true criticisms, but only variants of that science model. However, in the process of creating the science of humankind, social science might change significantly. Some of those changes are already under way.

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Notes

1. An example of the kind of perception of the stratification and hierarchy induced by the academic community and its powerful values is the Chilean arrangement of traditional prestigious universities compared with public institutes of technological research (IPTs in the Spanish acronym), even though the latter fulfill important socioeconomic functions in society (Mullin et al., 2000). University scientists are better appreciated socially than their counterparts in the public institutes of technology. The negative social perception of the technology institutes has contributed to reinforcing the vicious circle in which the valuable IPTs have functioned.
2. We include economics within the social sciences, in a common package separate from the natural and formal sciences.
3. Jolly (2008) recounts the threats to IDS's existence when the institute was classed as a Quango (a Quasi nongovernment organization) under the Thatcher government in 1979.
4. In many Latin American countries it is still common to find university teachers who are paid by the hour: a teacher who needs to shift from one institution to another to complete his or her weekly salary, with a few hours per contract, and no employment stability. See for example, Aponte-Hernández (2008) and Ezcurra (2011). In such conditions, an individual is far from the academic autonomy and freedom defended in the academic myth.
5. It is perhaps a curious paradox that this argument retakes Seers's (1963) criticism of dominant economics as taught in universities more than 50 years ago, which is based on phenomena in 'developed' countries (the 'special case') that he showed to be generally inapplicable to the 'underdeveloped' countries of the time (which were the 'general case') (Rist, 2008). He was disputing the claim of economics to universal validity. Today, the struggle for a universal social science lingers on, but since then there has been a lot of experimentation and new schools that make us more optimistic.

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Résumé

La relation entre la science sociale et la société fait actuellement l'objet de discussions actives dans le cadre des processus de fabrication de l'identité sociale dans le monde dans son ensemble. Dans cet article, nous explorons comment, dans différents contextes, de puissantes institutions telles que les universités, disciplines, états, et plus récemment, un éventail divers de mouvements sociaux, ont des difficultés à définir des principes pour déterminer quels détenteurs de connaissances devraient être inclus dans la science sociale, et à quelles conditions. L'analyse débute par un passage en revue du discours dominant sur la science sociale académique et avance des hypothèses sur certains des facteurs qui l'influencent, qui dépendent des relations et des identités sociales construites sur ces bases dans le contexte d'une institution puissante comme l'université. L'article fait ensuite référence à la communauté de pratiques qui a grandi autour des notions et initiatives de développement visant l'intervention sociale depuis le début du vingtième siècle, principalement dans des institutions gouvernementales et non gouvernementales. Enfin, l'analyse identifie l'énorme expansion mondiale de la science sociale au cours des dernières décennies et ses implications à l'ère de la globalisation. Compte tenu des asymétries et inégalités qui persistent, cet article s'interroge sur les alternatives possibles dans la manière de pratiquer la recherche. Il suggère qu'il est nécessaire de bâtir un cadre comparatif à même de stimuler les interconnexions organiques entre de multiples voix et de soutenir une diversité d'approches.

Mots-clés

Discours, Sud global, hégémonie, homogénéisation, science sociale, universalisme

Resumen

La relación entre ciencias sociales y sociedad se encuentra hoy en discusión en los procesos de construcción de identidades sociales en el mundo. En este trabajo analizamos cómo, en diferentes contextos, instituciones poderosas como universidades, disciplinas,

estados, y más recientemente, una variada gama de movimientos sociales, luchan por definir los principios por los que determinar cuáles portadores de conocimientos incluir, y bajo qué términos, dentro de las ciencias sociales. El análisis comienza con la revisión del discurso dominante sobre las ciencias sociales académicas y especula sobre algunos de los factores que lo influyen, que están supeditados a las relaciones sociales y las identidades construidas a su alrededor en el establecimiento de una institución poderosa como la universidad. A continuación se refiere a la comunidad de práctica que creció alrededor del pensamiento y de las prácticas de desarrollo desde comienzos del siglo veinte, principalmente en instituciones gubernamentales y no gubernamentales, en busca de la intervención social. Por último, el análisis identifica la enorme expansión mundial de las ciencias sociales en las últimas décadas y sus implicancias en la era de la globalización. En vista de las persistentes asimetrías y desigualdades, este trabajo se interroga sobre la posibilidad de caminos alternativos en la práctica de la investigación. Sugiere la necesidad de un marco comparativo que fomente las interconexiones orgánicas entre las múltiples voces y alimente una diversidad de enfoques.

Palabras clave

Discurso, Hemisferio Sur, hegemonía, homogeneización, ciencias sociales, universalismo