

Workshop “Reversing the Gaze - Retribalization”

Is Methodology the Only Way?

The purpose of this half-day workshop is to explore the merits of focusing the discussion of theoretical and conceptual issues in the social sciences and humanities on the kinds of methodological challenges it implies. The discomfort felt by scholars from the Rest of the World – or those who engage in non-European regions from critical perspectives – towards the pursuit of knowledge in academia has led to the emergence and consolidation of perspectives questioning the ideological nature of science. Often, it is not clear whether such critical perspectives imply a rejection of science, or simply a plea for the consideration of other ways of grounding it.

While these perspectives have represented refreshing new ways of approaching knowledge, much of their persuasive power has rested on their appeal to ideology. Ambiguous notions such as “racism” or “colonial” both bring structural issues to light while at the same time, they invite us to relate in a normative way with whatever might be at stake. The challenge here is to ascertain the extent to which it would be reasonable to argue that there are criteria lying beyond values and norms which would enable researchers to claim validity to their statements. Put simply, is “racism” what makes a particular claim invalid, or the quality of the reasoning behind the statements?



If this is an awful mess . . . then would something less messy make a mess of describing it?

“Look at the picture above, and at the question posed by the caption. This book is about that caption, and about what happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse and messy. The answer, I will argue, is that it tends to make a mess of it. This is because simple clear descriptions don’t work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess. So the book is an attempt to

imagine what it might be to remake social science in ways better equipped to deal with mess, confusion and relative disorder.

No doubt some things in the world can indeed be made clear and definite. Income distributions, global CO2 emissions, the boundaries of nation states, and terms of trade, these are the kinds of provisionally stable realities that social and natural science deal with more or less effectively. But alongside such phenomena the world is also textured in quite different ways. My argument is that academic methods of inquiry don't really catch these. So what are the textures they are missing out on?

If we start to make a list then it quickly becomes clear that it is potentially endless. Pains and pleasures, hopes and horrors, intuitions and apprehensions, losses and redemptions, mundanities and visions, angels and demons, things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change shape or don't have much form at all, unpredictabilities, these are just a few of the phenomena that are hardly caught by social science methods. It may be, of course, that they don't belong to social science at all. But perhaps they do, or partly do, or should do. That, at any rate, is what I want to suggest. Parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not, or if they are then this is because they have been distorted into clarity. This is the problem I try to tackle. If much of the world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't really have much of a pattern at all, then where does this

leave social science? How might we catch some of the realities we are currently missing? Can we know them well? Should we know them? Is 'knowing' the metaphor that we need? And if it isn't, then how might we relate to them? These are the issues that I open up in this book. I don't have a single response to these questions. The book is intended as an opening rather than a closing. In any case, if much of reality is ephemeral and elusive, then we cannot expect single answers. If the world is complex and messy, then at least some of the time we're going to have to give up on simplicities. But one thing is sure: if we want to think about the messes of reality at all then we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate, and to know in new ways. We will need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science.”
(John Law 2004: After Method – Mess in Social Science Research. Routledge. Abdington, p.2)

The workshop will provide a platform for discussing the potential for shifting the debate away from epistemological issues – the nature of knowledge – to methodological issues, i.e. the validation of claims.

Monday, 17th April 2023

1 pm – 5 pm, Seminar room: 00.002, 21 Rheinsprung, Gesellschaftswissenschaften

For those who would like to attend online, here is the Zoom Link:

Elisio Macamo is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Workshop: the only way?

Time: Apr 17, 2023, 01:00 PM Zurich

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://unibas.zoom.us/j/68821467326?pwd=a0lsOXRYWlDajJWM2hVSGJqVnVoUT09>

Meeting ID: 688 2146 7326

Passcode: 725709

Keynote: Prof. Rose Marie Beck – The language of methodology

Short inputs

Elísio Macamo – The methods of methodology;

Michael Aeby – The context of method;

Patrício Langa – The frontiers of methods.

Discussion with inputs from doctoral and postdoctoral researchers