S-117 – Science, modernization and colonialism in the age of decolonization

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Abstract:

This session explores the relationship between science, colonialism and anti-colonialism in the period after World War II, characterized by the launching of social modernization and economic development projects in the overseas territories of the European powers, the growth of colonial resistance and the decolonization process.

First of all, we intend to address interchanges between new technologies of colonial rule and the development of the natural and social sciences in the colonized territories. We seek to clarify to what extent the new political projects for the colonies are affiliated to scientific practices previously acquired in the metropole and how much those territories represent scientific laboratories for the colonial powers in areas such as sociology, anthropology, economics, agronomy or medicine. We also want to ascertain to what extent the action of colonial administrators and technicians in the field relates to the contributions of scientists coming from (or rooted in) the metropole. We are particularly interested in exploring the political and scientific initiative of colonial cadres in overseas scientific and policy institutes, usually as a result of the challenges posed to the authority of the imperial state by social and political instability and the emergence of anticolonial resistance.

Complementary, we want to address the relationship between those political projects and related sciences with the development of anticolonial resistance. We seek to explore how nationalist movements in the colonized territories often adopted vocabulary and scientific and political strategies derived from developmentalist and modernizing speeches, and frequently counted among its ranks with locals who studied in the metropole and with intellectuals and scientists originally co-opted by the colonial power for the same projects. We also intend to address the autochthonous challenges to the epistemic authority of the northern hemisphere over the southern hemisphere posed both by nativist theory or local social thought, and by traditional practices of economic, social or scientific nature.

Finally, we are interested in exploring the cross-links between colonialism and science in general. As colonialism became an epistemic problem for Western knowledge, we intend to investigate its
effects on the construction of concepts and discourses, as pointed out recently by postcolonial studies. We are also interested in exploring the intellectual traditions from the so-called peripheral countries which critically reflected on colonialism much before the 'postcolonial turn', especially in the fields of economics (ECLA) and social sciences. Our aim is thus to analyze alternative concepts from these traditions that addressed new forms of economic colonialism and the geopolitics of knowledge production, such as ‘underdevelopment’, 'dependence' and 'sociological reduction’.

**Keywords:** Science in colonial context – Anticolonial resistance – Economic development – Social modernization – Postcolonial Studies.

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