

On Values and Action: A statement by SSRC President Ira Katznelson

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On January 23, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) gathered with the executive directors of the social science associations with whom the organization has had a relationship since the Council's founding in 1923 as the globe's first national social science institution. Convening in Washington, DC, at the headquarters of the American Political Science Association, and joined by the director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, this was a long-scheduled meeting in a regular series convened by the SSRC that considers shared issues such as the transparency of research, forms of publication, and the voice of social science. Taking place in the immediate aftermath of the inauguration, massive protests, and the "alternative facts" controversy, much of the conversation focused on our role as guardians of scholarship and on effective means of engagement beyond the academy.

None of these organizations is partisan; certainly not the SSRC. Each, however, not least the SSRC, is committed to a series of central tenets. These include standards of inquiry and evidence, international collaboration, and values underpinning constitutional democracies devoted to the rule of law, individual rights, and the absence of religious tests for membership. Within this frame, the leaders of the learned societies and Council staff discussed the roles we should play when our essential obligations to scholarship and public affairs come under challenge.

By the end of last week, the dimensions of this question had grown. For the Council, the implications of President Trump's Executive Order on Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements hit home when a doctoral scholar at Stanford University, twice selected as an SSRC Fellow (awarded Council fellowships for dissertation preparation and field work

in her native Sudan), and the holder of a green card, was detained and handcuffed last Friday night at Kennedy Airport before her release. As the Association of American Universities and the presidents of many campuses, including Columbia, Johns Hopkins, the New School, and Stanford, have underscored, this approach to national security contravenes values democratic societies and the scholarly world hold dear.

The Council welcomes these statements and aligns with them. But remonstrations must be accompanied by concrete behavior. Within the framework of our organizational character, how should the SSRC act? For which activities should we enhance our resolve?

I believe the answer lies less with responses to day-to-day events and provocations than with intensifying each of the institution's primary purposes:

First is deepening the craft of social science. If we are to advance the abilities of scholars to deploy rigorous inquiry, cross intellectual frontiers, and advance human understanding, we must resist restrictions on the movement of colleagues and students across borders, and act to safeguard ever more vigorously the institutions and norms that advance reliability and protect the integrity of social research. These valuable bodies include the national statistical system, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, and other federal agencies undergirding our system of open, standards-based social knowledge, the foundation of democratic reason.

Second is the long-standing practice to summon national and international scholarship in the academy to serve civic

purposes. Especially in troubled times, the SSRC should ask how to best strengthen Council programs on peace building, the environment, patterns of racial inequality, digital culture, the place of religion in the public sphere, and other vexing subjects, and we must assiduously intensify our work under the program "Anxieties of Democracy." That program, which first took shape four years ago, is motivated by concern for how the core institutions of established democracies—elections, political parties, interest groups, social movements, and legislatures—address large problems in the public interest. The recent addition of a media project to its existing working groups on participation, institutions, climate, social policy, and national security is particularly timely.

Third is our focus on building the capacities of individual scholars and institutions in the United States and abroad to practice social science effectively. The Council has an array of fellowships and projects whose aim is to strengthen and democratize higher education, including efforts not only to educate better scholars, but to help scholars become better educators and thus pass to new generations both their craft and a deeper understanding of their commitments.

These pursuits offer both means and inspiration that we must seize in efforts to protect and enhance conditions for effective scholarship.

Fourth is the imperative of communication. The Council's voice in each of these respects must become more expansive and more vibrant.

Now in its tenth decade, the SSRC has witnessed fear-inducing economic hardship, global warfare, political despotism, and depredations based on race, class, and

Cómo entender el diálogo de saberes

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religion. Working across lines of party, demography, and geography, I am confident that we can augment our efforts to shield and deploy social science to prevent cruelty and imagine decent alternatives.

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Note

This statement first appeared on the website of the Social Science Research Council, <http://www.ssrc.org/pages/on-values-and-action-a-statement-by-ssrc-president-ira-katznelson/>. ■

El “diálogo de saberes” no solo es el tema central de nuestro próximo congreso de Lima sino que se suele invocar como propuesta ante cualquier encuentro de culturas o disciplinas distintas o cuando hay procesos que implican participación ciudadana. Y lo hacen tanto las comunidades subalternas y los académicos como no pocos organismos estatales y transnacionales. Por eso conviene preguntarse en qué consiste y para qué puede servir.¹

Se suele reconocer que la Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) de los años 60 y 70 –surgida en nuestro continente pero con aportes de otras partes del mundo– fue pionera en proponer un diálogo de saberes, en ese momento referido al encuentro entre un mundo académico en crisis y unos actores sociales que surgían con fuerza a nivel global, pero especialmente en los países en proceso de descolonización. La IAP tuvo indudables méritos como el cuestionamiento al positivismo en las ciencias sociales, a la ruptura entre objeto y sujeto, a la separación entre teoría y práctica y al vanguardismo de los ilustrados, incluidas las izquierdas. Otro aporte fue pluralizar la reconstrucción del pasado introduciéndole más voces, con lo que se alteraba la narrativa tradicional occidental en la que hablaba solo el saber experto. En esto la IAP anticipó posturas poscoloniales de reconocimiento y activa participación del subalterno. E incluso avanzó en la formulación de un nuevo paradigma en las ciencias sociales y en la pedagogía, al que luego se le sumará la articulación entre razón y sentimiento.

Pero la IAP no era un método uniforme y universal, sino que se adaptaba a los contextos locales y regionales. Es cierto que fue más militante y activista en sus primeras fases, pero fue más compleja y más participativa en su procedimiento

de lo que comúnmente se asume al ver solo sus resultados. En pocas palabras, era una forma de diálogo de saberes muy imaginativa y rica que va a tener muchas continuidades con propuestas construidas posteriormente. Con todo tenía rasgos de mesianismo pues el investigador externo terminaba siendo el protagonista que hablaba por las comunidades. Y en algunos casos pudo esencializar al pueblo como si éste fuera homogéneo, puro e incontaminado. Por esas vías se negaba la pretensión metodológica de respetar la diferencia y de hacer un diálogo de saberes verdaderamente horizontal.

Recientes reflexiones sobre las relaciones entre conocimiento y poder, así como sobre la proyección ética y política de la labor investigativa indican que, si bien se reconoce que el investigador externo tiene intereses emancipadores al impulsar el cambio social, no impone un modelo de sociedad, sino que debe acompañar a los subalternos en su búsqueda liberadora. Y esto lo hacen ellos a partir de conocimientos propios y con visibilidad creciente de investigadores surgidos de sus entrañas. Por eso hoy se habla de investigaciones colaborativas, que si bien no suprimen totalmente la asimetría de poder en el conocimiento, sí impulsan el diálogo de saberes en forma más radical, pues no se parte de que el académico posea la verdad, como tampoco el subalterno. Son encuentros de iguales pero distintos. Los intelectuales que surgen de las comunidades étnicas y de los movimientos sociales también poseen recursos cognitivos, aunque diferentes de los académicos, así se hayan formado en instituciones universitarias. Y los intelectuales académicos, que son también actores de los procesos emancipadores, igualmente cuentan con registros reflexivos de su experiencia.