

ESHHS Conference. July 12-14, 2017, in collaboration with SISS. University of Bari Aldo Moro

Report: Mauro Vallejo

Between July 12 and 14, a new edition of the *Annual Conference of the European Society for the History of the Human Sciences* was held at the University of Bari Aldo Moro, in this opportunity in collaboration with the *Italian Society for the History of Science (Società Italiana Di Storia della Scienza, SISS)*. During three days in which the overwhelming heat invited to seek refuge in the classrooms, researchers from different latitudes made presentations and debated about their more recent investigations of the past of the human sciences.

The initial activity of the Conference was the plenary lecture given by Annette Mülberger (Università Autònoma de Barcelona) on the use of psychological tests in Spain before and after the Civil War. In her dynamic and well-documented exposition, Mülberger was particularly concerned, on the one hand, with the cautions historians should observe when they carry on researches on 'practices' such as psychological tests. For example, she noted that a reconsideration of the material conditions of pedagogical work is essential in order to understand what kind of psychological measurements might or might not be carried out in one particular context. To highlight her statements, she explained that a set of factors made it almost impossible to apply tests in most Spanish schools at the beginning of the 20th century: the lack of scientific training of teachers, their very low salaries, lack of pedagogical inputs, etc. . On the other hand, she pointed out the absolute necessity of starting from a good knowledge of the way in which the social actors cataloged as 'scientific' certain knowledge or practice. Before describing past initiatives as 'bad science', it is helpful to identify the definition of science shared by certain social actors, and to analyze the ideological or political connections of certain scientific practices.

The second plenary lecture was given by Francesco Paolo de Ceglia (University of Bari Aldo Moro), and was dedicated to the use of wax models in anatomical teaching during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Using valuable images, the speaker explored different dimensions of wax modeling. For example, he revealed the significant divergences between the male and female models made and used in Florence until 19th century. While women were often placed in gestures associated with ecstasy, pleasure, or self-abandonment, men were placed in gestures that had to do with pain, resistance, or death. On the other hand, he proposed a very suggestive hypothesis, referring to the composition or hierarchy of the models of each genre. The woman's body appeared as the set of tissues and structures that surrounded the uterus. The latter was the center and guiding nucleus of the whole anatomical building. On the contrary, in male models the heart played that role.

The third plenary lecture was given by Maria Conforti (University of Rome), who spoke on the surgical practices applied to women in the late nineteenth century, at the Golden age of anesthesia. Through a very informed presentation, Conforti highlighted how misguided is the stereotype according to which the surgeons possessed inferior knowledge and expertise than learned physicians. On the

contrary, her dissertation had the objective to indicate the closeness with the female body that from a very early time had surgeons, midwives and other health agents.

We could argue that, almost by chance, the three plenary lectures illuminated the three axes that prevailed in the manifold papers presented, that is to say, they made visible the central topics of the debates that would take place during those three days: the dimension of the practices, the participation of the body in the history of the human sciences, and the actuality of approaches with a gender perspective. In fact, it would not be risky to distribute most of the papers in one of those 3 places. Although the multiplicity of themes brought by the researchers attending the Conference, the variety of geographic contexts analyzed, and the heterogeneity of interpretive frameworks used, may make impossible any strict and simple classification of the presentations, we believe that the topics highlighted in plenary lectures can be helpful to conjecture some underlying invariants, and therefore to highlight very productive lines of research that today are carried out in this field of studies.

In the first place, papers related to the stratum of practices, especially in the area of the history of psychology, practically abounded: practices related to the application of measurement tools, graphology, etc. Within this group we could remind, for example, the talk given by David Horn, who carried out a comparative analysis of graphology treatises of Crépieux-Jamin and Lombroso, especially to emphasize that in each case the graphological test was inserted in a very different intellectual project. We can also refer to the talk given by Oscar Montero Pich about the way in which the Woodworth test was adapted and modified in Barcelona in the 1930s, to be applied to prison inmates. In the same direction can be located the work of Mariagrazia Proietto on the practices carried out by the first Psychotechnicians in early twentieth century Italy. But it is also possible to place in the realm of 'practices' those actions that are often neglected, and which were properly studied during the Conference. It is possible to place there, for example, everything related to the practices of translation or dissemination carried out in such a way as to guarantee the widespread circulation of a theory, an author or a vocabulary. The same should be noted about contrary practices: censorship or prohibition. I remember in this respect the work of Olga Artemeva on what psychological texts were translated or not in Russia before and after the government of Stalin. Equally valuable was the presentation of Alice Graziadei on the practices that intervened in the diffusion and translation of the work of Maria Montessori in different languages.

In the second place, during the conference it was possible to know multiple investigations referring, in one way or another, to the topic of corporality. In this respect, we can mention the work of Christian Allesch on the importance of the distinction between the physical or material body and the living body in the tradition of German phenomenology. Secondly, a few lines should be devoted to the work of Marcelo Valenzuela Cáceres, who shared some advances in his research on medical and criminological discourses on male homosexuality in Chile at the beginning of the 20th century. Third, Lorenzo Leporiere lectured on the multiplicity of bodies that appear in descriptions of mediums and spiritualists such as Eusapia Palladino or Florence Cook. Finally, Mauro Vallejo made a presentation on the many receptions (from doctors, writers and spiritualists) that had in

Buenos Aires the discovery of X-rays, that implement that would very soon transform the body's image into medical field.

With regard to the last topic, related to the gender perspective, it should be emphasized that at this Annual Conference there were several activities entirely devoted to it. Among the works presented, we can mention that of Federica Favino about the strategies implemented by some Italian scientists in the middle of the nineteenth century to achieve recognition in a male-dominated academic world. Mònica Balltandre, on the other hand, offered an analysis of the two great hypotheses (pathology or rebellion) that up to the present have dominated the historical studies on the facts of diabolical possession in women since the Middle Ages. Andrea Graus, on the other hand, concentrated on the fate of the mystical women in the nineteenth century, who when sent to justice could be defined either as sick or as liars.

We have mentioned only a small selection of the papers presented during the 3 days of intense work. As in previous editions, what characterized the Annual Conference was, on the one hand, the confluence of researchers from different latitudes, and on the other, the putting into dialogue of divergent ways of carrying out the historical work. The Conference is an ideal place to deepen the dialogue between different lines of research: history of professions, history of ideas, history of kinship between theories and practical devices, social history of science, etc. Thanks to the excellent work carried out by the organizing committee, the activities took place at the scheduled times, and this punctuality helped to make the breaks (dedicated to refreshments or lunch) fulfill their purpose: sometimes they were used to continue the debates initiated in the classrooms, and sometimes to perform informal contacts and friendly talks.