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THE POLITICS OF NAMING
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(Inter)Cultural Studies in de-colonial code

This article explores the definitions, constructions, understandings and struggles around Cultural Studies as a whole in Latin America, giving particular attention to its central legacies and the differences among them. Its interest is to bring to the fore the ways in which the political and de-colonial afford perspectives that challenge and make tense the hegemonic academic enterprise as a whole, and drive efforts to (re)think Cultural Studies — or better called inter-Cultural Studies — as projects of intervention in which knowledge and thought are intertwined with transformation and the making of a radically distinct social world.

Keywords Cultural Studies; de-coloniality; inter-culturality; Latin America

Not that there’s one politics already inscribed in it. But there is something at stake in cultural studies, in a way that ... is not exactly true of many other very important intellectual and critical practices.

(Hall 1992, p. 278)

The politics of naming have always had great significance in Latin America. They are part of long-standing imperial-colonial practices and traditions, and political and cultural hegemony in lands invaded more than 500 years ago by foreigners who subordinated differences to map out an image according to their own heuristic code of naming (see Zavala 1992). ‘Latin’ America is, in fact, a clear example of this naming (Mignolo 2005), the reason why indigenous peoples prefer to refer to the region as Abya Yala, a term of the Cuna peoples that means ‘lands in full maturity’.

In this region of the world, ‘Cultural Studies’, include, and make up part of, the politics of naming; certainly with different historical burdens, but with established legacies and models that are frequently presented as all-encompassing.

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concealing the conflicts and differences within its naming as a programme, project and field.

With the recent boom of Cultural Studies programmes in Latin America and with the diversity present in the formulations and visions of these programmes and the projects they mark, the politics, significance and meaning of its naming become concerns for debate and reflection. It is in this context that we can engage the epithet of Stuart Hall, and ask about the politics and the political of Cultural Studies in Latin America today; that is, to question and consider what is at stake.

This article explores the definitions, constructions, understandings and struggles around Cultural Studies as a whole in Latin America, giving particular attention to its central legacies and the differences among them. To give a concrete context for this discussion, the article takes as its primary focus on the doctoral programme in Latin-American (inter)Cultural Studies at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Ecuador which began in 2002. Its interest is to bring to the fore the ways in which the political and de-colonial afford perspectives that challenge and make tense the hegemonic academic enterprise as a whole, and drive efforts to (re)think Cultural Studies—or better called inter-Cultural Studies—as projects of intervention in which knowledge and thought are intertwined with transformation and the making of a radically distinct social world.

The article is organized around three central questions:

- What are the legacies that gave rise to Cultural Studies in Latin America in general, and in the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in particular? And with what politics of naming, project(s), and perspectives of knowledge and of knowing?
- What does conceiving and constructing Cultural Studies as an inter-cultural, inter-epistemic project of de-colonial orientation involve?
- And, what are the practices, experiences and challenges that we have had in developing such an approach?

The legacies

Here, I will begin with four legacies that orient the ‘field’ of Cultural Studies in Latin America: two that come from places outside of Latin America and two that find their base in this region. In the case of the external legacies, I refer to the legacy and problem of scientific disciplinariness and the Birmingham school. The other legacies include, on the one hand, the studies about culture in Latin America and, on the other, the study and involvement with and in social struggles and epistemic/political movements.
The problem of scientific disciplinarity

The problem of scientific disciplinarity began in Europe and later spread to other parts of the world; imposed and reconstructed in the twentieth century as the model of modern Latin American universities. Here, I refer, on one hand, to the establishment of the natural sciences as the central framework and arbitrator of information considered objective or neutral. And, on the other hand, to the emergence of the social sciences in Europe (and later in the USA) at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries following this same ‘scientific’ model with a state-centric focus. It was within the academic disciplines of economics, sociology and political science that the social sciences were first organized in an attempt to strengthen the then hegemonic states (Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, and later the USA) and ensure their position as the organizers both of capitalist markets and of knowledge. In this disciplinary structure of the ‘sciences’, the humanities were set up not as areas of knowledge per se, but instead as something more ephemeral, as non-sciences built on and rooted in the cultural, mental and spiritual production of ‘civilized’ societies. This is to recall the ways that the humanities have helped strengthen nationalism through art and literature, for example, but also the ways they have served as an organizing base for the universals of modern reasoning and philosophical thought.

This model of discipline is what structures universities; it is also the model that guides the study of and the thinking about the world. As a transdisciplinary – and according to some an anti-disciplinary field – Cultural Studies has opened up spaces that question, challenge and go beyond this model, something that the Gulbenkian Commission made clear a couple of decades ago in its critique of the structural and institutional discipline of the social sciences (see Wallerstein 1996).

How can we relate these debates and this legacy of Cultural Studies to a Latin American context? As I have argued elsewhere (Walsh 2007), in Latin America or Abya Yala, the field of social sciences has been part of the neo-liberal, imperial and globalizing tendencies of capitalism and modernity. These are tendencies that supplant local history with monolithic, mono-cultural and ‘universal’ theoretical formulations that proclaim western scientific knowledge as central, denying or relegating to a non-knowledge status, all knowledge based on place and produced from different cultural and social rationales. This hierarchy makes certain basic assumptions about universality, neutrality and the non-place of hegemonic scientific knowledge; it establishes the superiority of western logo-centricism as the only rationality capable of organizing the world.

As I have mentioned, these are the suppositions taken to be true that have organized and oriented the hegemonic social sciences from their beginning. Since the 1990s we are witnessing, in Latin America, a strengthening of these suppositions as part of neo-liberal globalization and its extension into the fields of science and knowledge. With this strengthening (evident in universities
across the region), the Cartesian schism between the self, doing and knowing and between science and human practice remains firm. The western-
Eurocentric canon is repositioning itself as the main framework of theoretic interpretation; the erasing of place (including the importance of experiences based on place) is taken on without questioning. The consequences, as Arturo Escobar (2005) argues, can be felt, on one hand, with regard to the asymmetries brought on by globalization (where place and tradition will be local, and space, capital and history will be global), and, on the other hand, with regard to the concepts of knowledge, culture, nature, politics and economy and their interrelationships.

In recent years, some global debate has centred on science and specialized academic knowledge in general, and especially on the social sciences and the dominant political, cultural and social positions taken in their theorizations. Nevertheless, it appears that these debates have had almost no impact on Latin-American thinking and social science. Unlike the initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s that intended to construct endemic and critical social sciences, promote South–South dialogues and promote a thinking and praxis of Latin America from within, more recently, the region has regressed to the liberal paradigms of the nineteenth century, including the meta-narratives of modernity and progress, and to a position of no involvement (Lander 2000a). But, as Santos argues, there is also evidence in the region of a new scientific rationality that ‘denies the rational character of all forms of knowledge that are not based on epistemological principles and their methodological rules’ (de Sousa Santos 1987, pp. 10–11).

The problem in Latin America, as such, does not lie in simply opening, rethinking or restructuring the social sciences as some studies have suggested, but better yet by questioning their very basis. It is to say, to refute the suppositions that place the production of knowledge only in academia, between academics and within scientificity, and the established paradigms and canons. It is also to refute the concepts of rationality that govern the so-called ‘expert’ knowledge, a knowledge that works to negate and detract from practices, skills and agents that do not fit inside the hegemonic and dominant rationality. Such refutation does not involve a wholesale rejection of this rationality, but exposes its colonial and imperial intentions and disputes its position as singular. This causes us to also question the supposed universality of scientific knowledge that governs the social sciences, to the extent that it does not capture the diversity and wealth of social experiences or the epistemological and counter-hegemonic alternatives that come from these experiences. As I argue later, it is this refutation and questioning that we consider central to the thinking and construction of Cultural Studies as an inter-cultural, inter-epistemological project of de-colonial focus. But before arriving at this, our second question, we will analyze the other legacies present in Cultural Studies and important to our project.
The Birmingham School Project

Cultural Studies received both its name and its legacy as a political project and practice of intervention from the School of Contemporary Cultural Studies, established in Birmingham in the 1950s. Without going into a complete, in-depth analysis, I can highlight here some of its most important contributions. One of them is the rethinking of the relationship between politics and culture. I refer to the proposals of E. P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams who worked to rethink Marxism in relation to culture, thereby highlighting four principle perspectives:

- Class is a social and cultural formation, and culture nothing more than ‘lived’ experience.
- The study of culture as a human activity provides opportunities for social change.
- Culture is one of the main battlegrounds for hegemony.
- Vindicating organic and emancipatory elements in popular cultures and identifying with oppressed classes/groups are the foundations of a different political educational project.

A second contribution is the project and the perspective, taken by Stuart Hall, clearly framed within the political vocation of Cultural Studies. In this project and perspective we can highlight four especially pertinent themes.

- The tension between politics and theories.
- The historic and still colonial relationship between culture, race and power.
- The regimen of representation.
- The concept, practice and possibility of articulation.

The tension between politics and theories was a permanent consideration of Hall’s, both in his individual work and in his contributions to the Birmingham project.

I come back to the deadly seriousness of intellectual work. It is a deadly serious matter. I come back to the critical distinction between intellectual work and academic work: they overlap, they abut one another, they feed off one another, the one provides you with the means to do the other. But they are not the same thing. I come back to the difficulty of instituting a genuine cultural and critical practice, which intended to produce some kind of organic intellectual political work, which does not try to inscribe itself in the overarching metanarrative of achieved knowledges, within the institutions. I come back to theory and politics, the politics of theory. Not theory as the will to truth, but theory as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges, which have to be debated in a dialogical way. But also as a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect.
Finally, a practice which understands the need for intellectual modesty. I do think there is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics. (Hall 1992, p. 286)

His claim that ‘movements provoke theoretical moments and historical conjunctures insist on theories: they are real moments in the evolution of theory’ (Hall 1992, p. 283), helped provide an understanding of the project of Cultural Studies as based not on theory itself, but instead on the processes of theorization from political struggles and practices. His further claim that, the ‘only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency’ (Hall 1992, p. 280), opens a reflexive methodology that makes us critically ask: what theory do we seek, and of whom and for whom. Also it encourages us to ask: what is the relationship between the theoretical option and social, cultural and epistemological struggles?

For those of us in the Andean region, and also in other parts of Abya Yala-Latin America, this perspective is of key importance. To recognize that ancestral, socio-political movements (most particularly indigenous and Afro-descendant movements), also produce theory – making them not only socio-political movements, but also epistemological movements – is to turn upside down their consideration within academia as little more than mere objects of study. In this sense, the legacy of Hall is useful.

The second theme of Hall – the historical and still colonial relationship between culture, race, and power – offers us other clues. Early in his work in Birmingham, Hall began to clearly express his differences with Thompson, Hoggart and Williams. Hall moved toward positions rooted not only in Marxist critiques (including of their Eurocentric roots), but also in the recognition of subjectivities that were historically subordinated by power, especially those of gender and racialization. By doing so, he expanded Cultural Studies to struggles that had been hidden or denied, struggling himself with feminism and to confront the problem of race, racialization, and racism and lived colonial horizons, that formed (and form) part of his own ‘politics of “location” and place of thinking’ (see Hall 2007, pp. 269–291). As he said:

Being brought up by colonial education, I got to know England from the inside. But I am not and will never be ‘English’. I intimately know both places, but I am not completely from either ... In a curious way, post-colonialism prepared me to live in ... a diasporic relationship with identity.

(Kuan-Hsing 1996, p. 492)

The work of Hall in the field of representation is a third useful theme. By illustrating the way that the practices of representation construct and
contribute to the stereotyping and continued subjugation of African
descendants, for example, within a supposedly naturalized structure and
regime of truth, Hall allows us to go beyond the discourses of Barthes and
Foucault. He also gives credence to the need to place racialization at the centre
of the structures of power by considering it a part of such structures (see Hall
1997).

The final theme I wish to highlight is that of articulation. Without going
into a full analysis of the complex concept and its practice, what I wish to bring
to the fore here is the distance that Hall takes from post-modernist principles
and their anti-essentialist discourse. By assuming articulation as a political-
intellectual and also epistemological force, Hall points out the need to conceive
and build alliances and struggle for points of convergence and encounter, as
tension filled as they may be. This is to head toward what women of colour in
the USA have referred to as ‘inter-sectionality’ (see Lugones 2008).

For our project in the Andes, these four themes developed within the
context of the Birmingham School in general, and specifically in the work of
Stuart Hall inside as well as outside of the school, continue to be important and
stimulating references, especially for their critical and political positions and
perspectives and their commitment to position Cultural Studies as a practice
and project of intervention.

Studies about culture in Latin America

A third legacy comes from the studies undertaken about culture, something
that, some argue, has always been done in Latin America (see Martín Barbero
1997). Here we can make reference to the cultural works of Inca Garcilaso de
la Vega and Guamán Poma and the literary contributions of Bello, Sarmiento
and Martí, the latter who portended to speak ‘for the people’ and gave base to
the forging of national identities. Also of reference are Vasconcelos, Zea and
Roig with their philosophy of Latin-American culture, and Mariátegui and
Giberto Freyre with their interpretation of popular culture as a national
contribution. Similarly, Ángel Rama, Antonio Cornejo Polar and Néstor
García Canclini are more contemporary intellectuals in this legacy because of
their pioneering work theorizing about culture in intermediate epistemological
spaces.

We can also highlight the intellectuals that, in their own fields, especially
in the 1980s and 1990s, helped to develop the relationship between culture
and the Latin-American paradigm of peripheral post-modernity. Here of
important mention are Joaquín Brunner and the sociology of culture, Jesus
Martín Barbero in communication, Renato Ortiz in cultural industries, Nelly
Richard and Beatriz Sarlo in cultural criticism, Roberto Schwartz and Silvano
Santiago in cultural philosophy and literature, among many others.

All of these contributions doubtlessly represent lines of study about culture
that have been and are still central to Latin-American knowledge. However,
this legacy remains, by itself, limited both by its academic and disciplinary
roots and its making of culture an object of study, but also by its locus and
place of politics and enunciation: a generally white or white/mestizo academia.
While not ignoring this contribution, we start in our project of (inter)Cultural
Studies from a different legacy. This is the legacy of past and present struggles,
of political practices of consciousness raising and of the agency or historic
initiative of social movements. It is this legacy that, for us, gives roots to a
critical perspective and a project of Cultural Studies otherwise, a perspective
and a project that promote the inter-epistemic and the inter-cultural as
methodological and political positions intended to consider a thinking from,
between and with instead of the study about. It is to this legacy that I turn now.

Social struggles and political-epistemological movements

The last legacy – the central legacy for our project – is that which places
central focus on the structural problem of the colonial–imperial relationships
of power, a problem particularly brought to the fore in Latin America-Abyá
Yala in the social movement struggles that began to emerge with force in the
1960s and 1970s and that were associated with increased political,
epistemological and ethical consciousness. I refer generally to the socialist
utopia and the structural heterogeneity of Aníbal Quijano, the liberation
philosophy of Enrique Dussel and Franz Hinkelammert, the Pedagogy of the
Oppressed of Paulo Freire, the participatory action research of Orlando Fals
Borda, the theory of cultural control of Bonfil Batalla and of internal
colonialism of Pablo González Casanova and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and the
projects of de-colonial thought of the Antillean intellectuals Frantz Fanon and
Aimé Césaire, of Zapata Olivella and Quintín Lame in Colombia, of the
Bolivian indigenous thinker Fausto Reinaga, of the Afro-Ecuadorian Juan
García, among many others. It is this legacy – founded by committed
intellectuals of diverse backgrounds – of struggle, questioning, critical thought
and social intervention, which plots a different course and draws a different
map in which the cultural is intimately linked with the political, the social and
the economic, with ethics and epistemology. It is in this mapping focused on
transformation and de-colonization that we can include the contemporary
collective project of modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality in which a growing
number of intellectuals in Latin America and elsewhere are now involved.

Central to our map and to our project of (inter)Cultural Studies are the
knowledge and perspectives developed in social-political struggle outside the
academy. This is particularly key in a region like the Andes where, since
the 1990s, indigenous and Afro-descendent movements have put forth,
through their struggles, historical frames of reference that go beyond ethnic
identities, uphold inter-culturalism as a political project and propose radically
different concepts, knowledge and social models. Thinking from and with
these struggles, their frames of reference and their de-colonial proposals of
knowledge, thought, action and intervention offer us, together with the above, a legacy and an important path to (re)think Cultural Studies – or better stated, inter-Cultural Studies – as a political project in Latin America, open to – and in dialogue with – other projects that aim to build more just worlds.

The legacies and politics of naming

As has been argued elsewhere (see Walsh 2003a), it may be problematic to call ‘Cultural Studies’ these efforts to think about culture politically, as a place of differences and of social struggles, and as a place to uncover the ties between power and epistemological, social and cultural practices and productions. Nevertheless, in the desire to name and identify a rubric whose significance does not come from a local or regional singularity, but instead from the conundrum of the whole – a way to articulate critical work in the Andes with other places – that we began, in the late 1990s, to use the term ‘Cultural Studies’ at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. This naming was part of a larger discussion held with a number of Latin-American intellectuals and most particularly Santiago Castro-Gómez at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, in the interest of bringing together new critical and political, intellectual projects of Cultural Studies in the Andean region and in Latin America.

It is with this politics of naming that we can – in the case of Ecuador – highlight four important elements or points that have a direct relationship with the legacies described earlier: the trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary (aspects) of the contemporary geopolitics of knowledge, past and present struggles of social movements – understood also as epistemological and political movements – the political vocation of Cultural Studies, and the continuous tension between politics and theory.

The project of Cultural Studies that we have been constructing – reflected since 2002 in the Doctorate in Latin American Cultural Studies – seeks to cross, transcend and go beyond the limits that traditionally have seen culture as an object of study. It is to recognize the subjectivity and historicity that is always present in the cultural from a perspective of knowledge that strives to create bridges of convergence between; between political-intellectual projects inside and outside the university, and between and among critical thought and knowledges, their rationalities and geopolitical placements, making central the intimate connection of the cultural with the economic, the political, the social and the epistemic.

Of course, such a perspective has provoked conflict, debate, and tension in the local, national and regional academic arenas, most especially with proponents of the disciplinary structure, whether it is in the humanities or
the social sciences, and those who continue to think of culture as little more than an object of study. As I explain in the next section, our project sets out to do something different.

Cultural Studies as an inter-cultural, inter-epistemological Project with de-colonial orientation

Cultural Studies, in our project, is constructed and understood as more than a field of ‘study’. It is broadly understood as a formation, a field of possibility and expression. And it is constructed as a space of encounter between disciplines and intellectual, political and ethical projects that seek to combat what Alberto Moreiras called the impoverishment of thought driven by divisions (disciplinary, epistemological, geographic, etc.) and the socio-political-cultural fragmentation that increasingly makes social change and intervention appear to be divided forces (Moreiras 2001).

As such, Cultural Studies is conceived as a place of plural-, inter-, trans-and in-disciplinary (or undisciplined) critical thinking that takes as major concern the intimate relationships between culture, knowledge, politics and economics mentioned earlier, and that sees the problems of the region as both local and global. It is a space from which to search for ways of thinking, knowing, comprehending, feeling and acting that permit us to intervene and influence: a field that makes possible convergence and articulation, particularly between efforts, practices, knowledge and projects that focus on more global justice, on differences (epistemic, ontological, existential, of gender, ethnicity, class, race, nation, among others) constructed as inequalities within the framework of neo-liberal capitalism. It is a place that seeks answers, encourages intervention and engenders projects and proposals.

It is in this frame of understanding and practice in our Ph.D. programme in Latin-American Cultural Studies at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, that this broad description-definition continues to take on more concrete characteristics. Here I can identify three that stand out: the inter-cultural, the inter-epistemic and the de-colonial.

The inter-cultural has been — and still is — a central axis in the struggles and processes of social change in the Andean region. Its critical meaning was first affirmed near the end of the 1980s in the Ecuadorian indigenous movement’s political project. Here inter-culturality was positioned as an ideological principal grounded in the urgent need for a radical transformation of social structures, institutions and relationships, not only for indigenous peoples but also for society as a whole. Since then, inter-culturality has marked a social, political, ethical project and process that is also epistemological; a project and a process that seek to re-found the bases of the nation and national culture, understood as homogenous and mono-cultural. Such call for
re-founding does not to simply add diversity to what is already established, but rather to rethink, rebuild and inter-culturalize the nation and national culture, and with in the terrains of knowledge, politics and life-based visions.

It is this understanding of the inter-cultural that is of interest. Concretely, we are interested in the spaces of agency, creation, innovation and encounter between and among different subjects, knowledges, practices and visions. Referring to our project of Cultural Studies as (inter)Cultural Studies, enables and encourages us to think from this region, from the struggles, practices and processes that question Eurocentric, colonial and imperial legacies, and work to transform and create radically different conditions for thinking, encountering, being and coexisting or co-living.

In a similar fashion, the inter-epistemic focuses on the need to question, interrupt and transgress the Euro-USA-centric epistemological frameworks that dominate Latin-American universities and even some Cultural Studies programmes. To think with knowledges produced in Latin America and the Caribbean (as well as in other ‘Souths’, including those located in the North) and by intellectuals who come not only from academia, but also from other projects, communities and social movements are, for us, a necessary and essential step, both in de-colonization and in creating other conditions of knowledge and understanding. Our project, thus, concerns itself with the work of inverting the geopolitics of knowledge, with placing attention on the historically subjugated and negated plurality of knowledge, logics and rationalities, and with the political-intellectual effort to create relationships, articulations and convergences between them.

The de-colonial element is intimately related to the two preceding points. Here our interest is, on one hand, to make evident the thoughts, practices and experiences that both in the past and in the present have endeavoured to challenge the colonial matrix of power and domination, and to exist in spite of it, in its exterior and interior.

By colonial matrix, we refer to the hierarchical system of racial-civilizational classification that has operated and operates at different levels of life, including social identities (the superiority of white, heterosexual males), ontological-existential contexts (the dehumanization of indigenous and black peoples), epistemic contexts (the positioning of Euro-centrism as the only perspective of knowledge, thereby disregarding other epistemic rationalities), and cosmological (the control and/or negation of the ancestral-spiritual-territorial-existential bases that govern the life-systems of ancestral peoples, most especially those of African Diaspora and of Abya Yala) (see Quijano 1999). At the centre or the heart of this matrix is capitalism as the only possible model of civilization; the imposed social classification, the idea of ‘humanity’, the perspective of knowledge and the prototype life-system that goes with it defines itself through this capitalistic-civilizational lens.
As Quijano argues, by defending the interests of social domination and the exploitation of work under the hegemony of capital, ‘the “racialization” and the “capitalization” of social relationships of these models of power, and the “eurocentralization” of its control, are in the very roots of our present problems of identity,’ in Latin America as countries, ‘nations’ and States (Quijano 2006). It is precisely because of this that we consider the de-colonial to be a fundamental perspective.

Within our project, the de-colonial does not seek to establish a new paradigm or line of thought but a critically-conscious understanding of the past and present that opens up and suggests questions, perspectives and paths to explore. As such, and on the other hand, we are interested in stimulating methodologies and pedagogies that, in the words of Jacqui Alexander (2005), cross the fictitious boundaries of exclusion and marginalization to contribute to the configuration of new ways of being and knowing rooted not in alterity itself, but in the principles of relation, complement and commitment. It is also to encourage other ways of reading, investigating and researching, of seeing, knowing, feeling, hearing and being, that challenge the singular reasoning of western modernity, make tense our own disciplinary frameworks of ‘study’ and interpretation, and persuade a questioning from and with radically distinct rationalities, knowledge, practices and civilizational-life-systems.

It is through these three pillars of the inter-cultural, the inter-epistemic and the de-colonial that we attempt to understand the processes, experiences and struggles that are occurring in Latin America and elsewhere. But it is also here that we endeavour to contribute to and learn from the complex relationships between culture-politics-economics, knowledge and power in the world today; to unlearn to relearn from and with perspectives otherwise.

Practices, experiences and challenges

In this last section, my interest is to share some of the particularities of our doctorate programme/project, now in its third cycle; its achievements and advancements; and the challenges that it faces in an academic context, increasingly characterized regionally and internationally, by disciplinarity, depolitization, de-subjectivation, apathy, competitive individualism and non-intervention.

Without a doubt, one of the unique characteristics of the programme/project is its students: all mid-career professionals mainly from the Andean region and from such diverse fields as the social sciences, humanities, the arts, philosophy, communication, education and law. The connection that the majority of the students have with social and cultural movements and/or processes, along with their dedication to teaching or similar work, helps to contribute to dynamic debate and discussion not always seen in academia and
post-graduate programmes. Similarly, the faculty of the programme stand out for being internationally renowned intellectuals, and, the majority, for their commitment to struggles of social transformation, critical thinking and the project of the doctorate itself.

The curriculum offering is based on courses and seminars that seek to foment thinking from Latin American and with its intellectuals – in all of their diversity – comprehend, confront and affect the problems and realities of the region, which are not only local but global. The pedagogical–methodological perspective aforementioned works to stimulate processes of collective thought and allow the participants to think from related formations, experiences and research topics and to think with the differences – disciplinary, geographical, epistemic and subjective – thereby fracturing individualism by dialoguing, transgressing and inter-crossing boundaries.

Trans-disciplinarity, as such, is a fundamental position and process in our project. The fact that the graduate students come from an array of different backgrounds provides a plurality in which the methodological–pedagogical practice becomes the challenge of collectively thinking, crossing disciplinary backgrounds and creating new positions and perspectives, conceived and formed in a trans-disciplinary way. The majority of courses, seminars and professors, also assume that this is a necessary challenge in today’s world when no single discipline – and no single intellectual – is capable alone of analyzing, comprehending or transforming social reality.

Nevertheless, trans-disciplinary gains continue to be a point of criticism and contention, especially given the present trend to re-discipline the Latin-American university. As Edgardo Lander has argued (2000a), this tendency reflects the neo-liberalization of higher education, as well as the increasing conservatism of intellectuals, including those that previously identified as – or to continue to identify themselves as – progressives and/or leftists. To establish oneself in a discipline or presume truth through a discipline, a common practice today, is to reinstall the geopolitics of knowing. This, in turn, strengthens Euro-USA-centrism as ‘the place’ of theory and knowledge. As such, the subject of dispute is not simply the trans-disciplinary aspect of Cultural Studies but also its ‘indisciplinary’ nature, that is, the effort – central to our project – to include points of view that come from Latin America and thinkers who are not always connected to academia (see Walsh et al. 2002).

Our interest is not, as some claim, to facilitate the agendas or cultural agency of subaltern groups or social movements, promote activism or simply include other knowledge forms, but instead to build a different political-intellectual project – a political-intellectual project otherwise. Such project gives centrality to the need to learn to think from, together and with Latin-American reality and its actors, thereby stimulating convergences, articulations and inter-culturalizations that aim at creating an academia that is committed to life itself. Such a perspective does not eliminate or deny knowledge conceived in Europe or North America – usually named as ‘universal’ – or its
proponents and thinkers. Instead, it incorporates such knowledge as part of a broader canon and worldview that seeks pluriversality, recognizing the importance of places and loci of enunciation.

For our project, all of this serves to highlight the doubly complicated situation that is still in flux. On one hand, there is the negative association with trans-disciplinarity and the academic suppositions that accompany it, particularly in the area of research; this requires that our theses be doubly rigorous. And, on the other hand, there is the geopolitical limitation not only of disciplines but also of academic disciplining. To argue, as we do, that knowledge and thought are also produced outside of universities and, in dialogue with Hall, that political movements also produce and provoke theoretic moments and movements, is to question and challenge the academic logic and the authority of a universal and singular reasoning and science. We will, through such questioning and challenges, always be marginalized, placed on the fringe, under a microscope, criticized and disputed.

Because of this, the challenges that we have encountered have been many. On one hand, there are those challenges that many face in the Latin-American academic context: the real difficulties of financing, infrastructure and research support. On the other hand, are the challenges that come with the traditional academic disciplinary structure, its de-politization and de-subjectification. Here the challenge is to transgress the established norms of neutrality, distance and objectivity. It is also to confront the standards that give little relevance to historically subjugated groups, practices and knowledges, and to the interlinking of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality with the structures and models of power and knowledge. It is to make evident past and present struggles that give real meaning to the arguments of heterogeneity, de-coloniality and inter-culturality. Here the criticism and dispute comes from many sides: from those who describe these efforts as too politicized (and, as such, supposedly less ‘academic’), uni-paradigmatic (supposedly limited to only one ‘line of thought’), fundamentalist (supposedly exclusionary of those subjects not marked by the colonial wound) and as obsessed with conflict (and therefore far from the tradition of ‘culture’, its letters and object of study).

These challenges – together with the tensions, criticisms and disputes that they mark – often times make the path more difficult. Still, and at the same time, they allow us to clarify the distinctive and unique aspects of our project and its motivations to continue with its course of construction, insurgency and struggle. Our concern here is not so much with the institutionalizing of Cultural Studies. Better yet, and in a much broader fashion, we are concerned with epistemic inter-culturalization, with the de-colonialization and pluriversalization of the ‘university’, and with a thinking from the South(s). To place these concerns, as argued here, within a perspective and a politics of naming: ‘(inter)Cultural Studies in de-colonial code,’ is to open, not close, paths.
Conclusion

In concluding the reflections I have presented here, it is useful to return to a fundamental point touched by Stuart Hall: ‘intervention’. In particular and with Hall, I refer to the will to intervene in and transform the world, an intervention that does not simply relate to social and political contexts and fields, but also to epistemology and theory. That is to an intervention and transformation in and a de-colonization of the frameworks and logics of our thinking, knowing and comprehending. To commit oneself in mind, body and spirit as Frantz Fanon argued.

To consider Cultural Studies today a project of political vocation and intervention is to position – and at the same time build – our work on the borders of and the boundaries between university and society. It is to seriously reflect on whom we read and with whom we want and/or need to dialogue and think, to understand the very limits or our knowledge. And precisely because of this, it is to act on our own situation, establishing contacts and exchanges of different kinds in a pedagogical—methodological zeal to think from and think with, in what I have elsewhere called a critical inter-culturality and de-colonial pedagogy (Walsh 2009).

In universities and societies that are increasingly characterized by non-intervention, auto-complacency, individualism and apathy, intervention represents, suggests and promotes a position and practice of involvement, action and complicity. To take on such a position and practice and to make it an integral part of our political-intellectual project is to find not only ethical meaning in work on culture and power, but also to give this work some heart. That is to say, to focus on the ever-greater need and urgency of life. To call these Cultural Studies or critical (inter)Cultural Studies is only one of our options, and part of the politics of naming.

Notes

1 In this sense, it expands and makes much more concrete reflections opened in an earlier article of mine: ‘Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge: Decolonial Thought and Cultural Studies ‘‘Others’’ in the Andes’ (2007).

2 These discussions can be found in the previously mentioned publication, the Report from the Gulbenkian Commission, Open the Social Sciences. The can also be seen earlier in some European authors such as Foucault and Bourdieu, and Latin American authors like Stavenhagen, González Casanova and Quijano among others. For more recent debates from the perspective of modernity/coloniality, see Castro-Gómez (2000), Lander (2000a and 2000b), Walsh et al. (2002).

3 Nonetheless, and as Lander (2000b) argues, this theoretical production still exists in the universal meta-narratives of modernity and progress; hardly
considered were the ‘enormous implications of the plurality of histories, cultures, subjects that are typical of Latin America’ (p. 521), as well as the knowledge of the these subjects and cultures and their intellectual production. This is because the central locus of attention was in the economy as a place of domination, passing over other spheres, particularly of race as a basis of social classification as well as of nation-state.

4 As Mignolo (2005) argues, ‘expert’ knowledge acts as a base not only for epistemology and ‘science’, but also of political-economic philosophy, including the concepts of ‘democracy’, ‘liberty’ and their connection with ‘development’ and ‘progress’, that are all linked to the market.

5 For an in-depth discussion of this problem of disciplinarity and its relation to studies about culture, see Catherine Walsh, ‘Qué saber, qué hacer y cómo ver? Los desafíos, predicamentos disciplinares, políticos y éticos de los estudios (inter)culturales desde América andina’, in Walsh (2003b).

6 This perspective is also present in the project of the Consejo Regional Indígena de Cauca-CRIC, see CRIC, ¿Qué pasaría si la escuela...? 30 años de construcción de una educación propia (2004).

Notes on contributor

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