INTRODUCTION
CONVIVIALITY IN UNEQUAL SOCIETIES

A Proposal for Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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Conviviality emerged in the 1970s as a theoretical and practical programme with the book *Tools for Conviviality*, by Ivan Illich (1973). From the 2000s on its use has spread throughout various disciplines and themes, resulting in a quite polysemic understanding of the notion. On the one hand, there is much debate about how it should be understood and applied. On the other hand, it has served different purposes, both theoretical and practical, normative and analytical. In general, one could fairly say that it appears more as a platform for new interdisciplinary approaches in cultural studies, humanities and social sciences rather than as a given canon linked to an already established tradition.

The present dossier can be read as an overview of exemplary uses of the notion of conviviality in current debates following the creation of a new centre for advanced studies in Latin America around such a notion (Mecila, 2017). We refer to the Maria Sibylla Merian Centre Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America, constituted by seven institutions, three from Germany (FU Berlin, Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Universität zu Köln), four in Latin America (USP, Colmex, Cebrap, IdICHS/La Plata), and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Far from being exhaustive, this dossier claims that the variety of uses of conviviality presented here may well illustrate the rationale for building up an intellectual environment for interdisciplinary collaboration around this notion.

There are not many examples of intellectual institutions that have tried to bring together Latin American social experiences and to translate them into theoretical terms. The most prominent case is that of the Economic Commission for Latin America (later to expand its denomination so as to include "and the Caribbean"), ECLAC (or CEPAL, in Spanish and Portuguese), created in 1948 by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Under the intellectual leadership of Raúl Prebisch, for at least three decades, from the late 1940s to the late 1970s, ECLAC has

been the focal point of a theoretical reflection on social and economic development elaborated in Latin America. ECLAC's approaches went far beyond Latin America itself, not only in terms of its influence in the debates, but also in their theoretical reach. Both supporters and critics were obliged to refer to the simultaneous theoretical elaboration and institutional building that characterized the activity of ECLAC.

It is very rare that an institution comes to play such a major role in the intellectual and institutional history of any region, like ECLAC did. That was the time when modernization theory was a virtually unchallenged paradigm, in a way that would rather allow for such a broad forced theoretical convergence. Today it is much more likely that such effort will be carried on by a network of institutions and scholars, rather than just one institution. This network may also reflect the variety of experiences and the variety of ways in which such experiences may be put together and elaborated in Latin America. It may also include new cooperation formats in order to overcome regional, generational, ethnic and gender hierarchies which characterize conventional forms of knowledge production and circulation.

Our impression is that the lack of such institution or network of institutions remained, even after the decline of the authoritarian regimes in Latin America in the 1980s. Mecila represents a singular opportunity to contribute to this institution building, so urgently needed.

For the rather very open purposes of the Mecila Project, conviviality is the name of constellations structured by inequality and difference. This means that conflict, violence, and domination in their many forms are, from the beginning, structuring features of conviviality, since they de facto accompany inequality and difference. In the sense of the Mecila project, conviviality is much less a given starting point than the name of the results that may emerge from looking at reality from this perspective. It is a way of looking at the various disciplinary perspectives from a point of view that makes inequality and difference the structuring elements of existing patterns of coexistence. That is why conviviality may also be understood as a tool for empirical as well as for theoretical inquiries to overcoming obstacles that emerge from rigid categorizations and even conceptual ontologizations in current debates.

Therefore, to say that conviviality is understood in the context of the Mecila Project as a result rather than a given starting point is also to say that its meaning will be the result of the many inquiries made in such an intellectual environment. It is meant to be a permanent work in progress. That is also why it does not assume any previously given normative directive, even if it does not prevent normative conceptions of "conviviality" to be present.

The avoidance of a previous normative starting point becomes evident in Sérgio Costa's essay that opens this dossier. After providing an encompassing review of current uses of the concept conviviality and other etymologically related terms in different disciplinary fields, it argues that the available studies — apart from a few exceptions — present a common blind spot: all of them neglect the nexus between conviviality and inequality. In order to overcome this deficit, the essay develops an analytical framework, according to which conviviality addresses the interactive core of relations both among humans and among human beings and non-human beings, including animals, spirits, and artefacts. Given the mutually co-constitutive character of conviviality and inequality, convivial configurations, comprehending interactions and their context of development, may build the unity of analysis for the study of conviviality. It is superfluous to mention that, in consonance with the disciplinary and theoretical openness characteristic of the Mecila project, the analytical approach to conviviality developed in the essay should not be seen as a sort of guide to be followed by individual and joint research projects associated to Mecila. It merely aims at highlighting the potentiality of applying the concept of conviviality to theoretical and empirical research.

Frank Adloff's contribution to this issue has the "Convivialist Manifesto" as its background and starting point. Launched in 2013, the manifesto expressed a positive vision of living together after the end of the Cold War and of the systemic rivalry and division belonging to that period. Such explicit normative starting point is combined in the text with the analytical concern about the logic of action that would go along with convivialism. Linked to a utopian ideal of self-government grounded on interdependence and cooperation, conviviality is seen in analytical terms as a telos of human coexistence that is anthropologically inscribed, as the structure of human orders of interaction. That is where and when Marcel Mauss's notion of the "gift" emerges as the pattern of moral and social interaction and of economic exchange. Due to its radical anti-utilitarianism and its attachment to a form of solidarity that presupposes mutual respect, Mauss's theory is seen as basis for the development of a social theory that would correspond to the normative ideals of convivialism. Such perspective is compatible, on the one side, with the projection in the future that Castoriadis called "imaginary", and, on the other, with Dewey's "experimental moments" characteristic of convivial associations.

The case examined by Gesine Müller is that of the nineteenth century Caribbean literatures. Following Ottmar Ette, the author looks for the particular content of literary potential for conviviality

that could be presented in such literatures in this complex phase of Caribbean colonialism. Since the institution of slavery occupies the central place in such societies, the question of having the right to call oneself a human being is decisive, not to mention the subsequent dispute about who may be called a citizen. The main challenge of the paper is in the question it raises: Can the representations of conviviality in these literatures allow for a new reading of established essentialist parameters regarding the nineteenth century, such as race and nation? To explore this possibility, the author examines the presence of convivial representations in Caribbean literatures in two ways: as normative attempts and as forms of knowledge. The result is that a convivial perspective allows one to see that boundaries are being challenged in a way that makes shadow zones in normative forms of cultural representation visible. That is why Müller also sees the discourses of "Caribeanidad" as early forms of debates that today take conviviality as their key notion.

Karen Graubart's article examines the production and management of *convivencia* in Iberian kingdoms, focusing on the articulation of sameness and difference between dominant and subordinate populations. She presents such articulation as one between day to day life and its juridical and jurisdictional regulations. This allows the different ways of producing identity to emerge in their internal and mutual bond relatively to the dominant and subordinate own juridical positions among the general population. At first sight, her approach may follow a solid and a consolidated trend in present historiography, in which law and jurisdictional instances are seen as arenas of negotiation and/or contestation. But the peculiar and most interesting way that she found to express such processes is exactly the use of *convivencia* as the main theoretical and empirical reference. This allows her not only to articulate history and law in an original way, but also the various contexts proper to a colonial and global project.

Conviviality in the sense of the Mecila Project intends to be an open conceptual framework and not a concept. This is also what the present dossier wants to stress with its variety of uses of conviviality, with its multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. Conviviality as understood in the terms of the Mecila project aims at being a constructive tool and not a previously established methodology. Conviviality means to accept to entering in a kind of conversation — even a risky one, as in Appadurai's (2018) version of dialogue. It also means that inequality and difference are the structuring features found in current discussions in the different disciplines and fields of research encompassed by the Mecila project.

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