

THEMATIC SECTION:  
CULTURAL STUDIES



## **Beyond the Academy: cultural studies and intercultural practices**

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**ABSTRACT – Beyond the Academy: cultural studies and intercultural practices.** The debates about the institutionalization of Cultural Studies and their political, ethical and epistemological dimensions were particularly important during the 1990s, when the field was undergoing a major transnational expansion encouraged by universities and publishers from England and the United States, which increasingly involved colleagues and institutions from various European, Asian and Latin American countries. Debates were often associated with the diversity of genealogies and intellectual traditions at play. Leaving aside the differences between those diverse intellectual traditions, this text focuses on some political, ethical, and epistemological dimensions of *doing cultural studies* beyond the academy, or inside and outside academia.

**Keywords: Cultural Studies. Intercultural Practices. Intercultural Collaboration.**

**RESUMEN – Más allá de la Academia: estudios culturales y prácticas interculturales.** Los debates sobre la institucionalización de los Estudios Culturales y sus dimensiones políticas, éticas y epistemológicas fueron particularmente importantes durante la década de 1990, cuando el campo pasaba por una importante expansión transnacional impulsada por universidades y editoriales de Estados Unidos e Inglaterra, que crecientemente involucró a colegas e instituciones de diversos países europeos, asiáticos y latinoamericanos. Los debates se asociaban a menudo a la diversidad de genealogías y tradiciones intelectuales en juego. Dejando en segundo plano las diferencias entre esas diversas tradiciones intelectuales, este texto se centra en algunas dimensiones políticas, éticas y epistemológicas de *hacer estudios culturales* más allá de la academia, o bien dentro y fuera de la academia.

**Palabras-clave: Estudios Culturales. Prácticas Interculturales. Vinculación Social Universitaria.**

## Introduction

The debates on the institutionalization of Cultural Studies and its political, ethical and epistemological dimensions were particularly important during the 1990s. As at that time, Cultural Studies were experiencing a significant transnational expansion, encouraged by universities and publishers from England and the United States, which increasingly involved colleagues and institutions from several European, Asian and Latin American countries, these debates were often associated to the diversity of genealogies and intellectual traditions at stake. Although, these differences are relevant to understand important political, ethical and epistemological aspects, privileging this particular focus of attention often contributed to disturb the discussion on those significant dimensions.

As George Yudice (2002) properly pointed out, I had a certain degree of responsibility in driving the discussion towards these differences (Mato, 2000; 2003b), although I must say that, at the time, I also published a couple of articles highlighting the importance of convergences and transnational dialogues (Mato, 2001; 2003a). This opportunity is conducive to recognize the importance of Yudice's argument on this point. Discussing these differences was not irrelevant; however, focusing on them could make us lose sight of some important political, ethical and epistemological aspects.

What aroused Yudice's concern regarding my position was a lecture I gave at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference held in Birmingham, in June 2000. Considering that it was a plenary lecture, my intervention had a certain impact on the debates about the organization of the Cultural Studies Association. The critical focus of the argument I offered at that conference was precisely the institutionalization – and associated depoliticization – of Cultural Studies in the United States.

My concern was especially motivated by the positions of some Latin American colleagues who promptly adopted *Made in USA* representations of what they soon began to call *Latin American Cultural Studies*, largely ignoring the importance of certain clearly politicized intellectual traditions in culture and power, pre-existing in the Americas. For this reason, at that time, I repeatedly insisted on naming the field as *Latin American Intellectual Practices in Culture and Power*, as an alternative to the increasingly accepted name of *Latin American Cultural Studies*.

My positions had a special impact, because I proactively promoted that discussion in several scenarios, especially in the context of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), where I coordinated one of its sections, as well as in that of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), where I coordinated one of its working groups. Incidentally, I also presented my ideas on this matter in this same scenario in 2004, when I was invited to offer one of the plenary lectures of the first *Brazilian Seminary of Cultural Studies in Education*, to which I significantly titled "*Latin American Intellectual Practices in Culture and*

*Power and the entrance in Latin America of the Cultural Studies idea,”* a revised version of that lecture was published the following year in the book *Cultura, Poder e Educação: um debate sobre estudos culturais em educação*, organized by Rosa Maria Hessel Silveira (Mato, 2005).

This time, I will try to ignore the differences between Latin American and other intellectual traditions and focus especially on some political, ethical and epistemological dimensions of *doing cultural studies* beyond the academy, or both inside and outside the academy.

### **About *Doing Cultural Studies***

I think we should begin by emphasizing that the expression *doing cultural studies* does not belong to me. I borrowed it from Stuart Hall, who used it in a conversation we had during the *Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference*, which I think is good to remember.

Although at that time I had only read some Stuart Hall texts, a few years before I had the opportunity to learn about his political-intellectual biography, thanks to his own accounts of some crucial nodes of his life. This happened during the dinners we shared for a week, within the framework of the symposium organized by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in Mijas, Spain, in June 1994. It was then that, night after night, I had the privilege of hearing his stories about the importance of feminist and anti-nuclear movements in his life, of his experience in the *New Left Review*, as well as his reflections on Gramsci and the idea of the organic intellectual, among other topics. When I again had the pleasure of meeting Stuart, at the conference in Birmingham, I thought it would be particularly valuable to include his article in a collective book that I was beginning to prepare. So, one night, again while we were having dinner, I invited him to participate in that book with an essay on Cultural Studies and the importance of practice. Then, Stuart had an answer as surprising as it was inspiring for me. And he replied: “*Look, Daniel, I am not writing on Cultural Studies any more, I am dedicated to doing Cultural Studies*”. Of course, I immediately asked him what he was doing in that regard, and he told me that he was involved in a public debate on race and racism in Great Britain” (Mato, 2014, p. 203).

This anecdote can be a useful starting point to deepen the concept of *doing cultural studies*, as Stuart understood it. First, it is interesting to note that his comment about the participation in the public debate on race and racism in Great Britain, by June 2000, was related to his participation in the Runnymede Trust/Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. At that time, Runnymede presented itself as “the UK’s leading independent race equality think tank, dedicated to generate intelligence for a multi-ethnic Britain through research, network building, leading debate, and policy engagement” (Mato, 2014, p. 203). The fact is that, in January 1988, the Runnymede Commission established a commission of 23 members aiming to analyze “[...] the current situation of multiethnic Britain and proposing ways to combat racial discrimina-

tion and social situations of disadvantage in order to shape a vibrant society in Great Britain, sure of itself and at ease with the richness of its diversity.” The commission published its findings and recommendations in October 2000, in the Parekh Report (named after the last name of the commission president). This report was read and considered by the Forum of Racial Relations of the Ministry of Interior, as well as by a Parliamentary Group on Race and Community meeting. Additionally, it was considered by countless local authorities, several local organizations and many councils on race and equity. The recommendations of the report were also incorporated into training programs in schools and were the subject of many lectures, seminars and symposia of higher education<sup>1</sup>.

The report provoked mostly positive reactions, although it was also subject to some negative critique in the media. Stuart responded to these critiques in a column published in *The Guardian* newspaper on October 15<sup>2</sup>, 2000, which is a clear example of his personal and active commitment to public debate.

Remembering Stuart’s words that night during dinner in Birmingham, I see how his participation and commitment in the Runnymede Commission clearly demonstrated what he meant by *doing cultural studies*. This is consistent with the practice throughout his life of active intervention in countless extremely significant social issues. He did it in paper and ink in some cases and, in others, with his presence and action, as, for example, with his public opposition to Thatcherism – as he had done previously with Stalinism and other forms of dogmatic Marxism – and as he did through his active participation in the *Open University*, focusing on representations, race, migration and colonialism, and the black artistic movement.

This articulation in context between *writing* and *doing* in other ways (since writing is one way of *doing*) is, in my opinion, a prominent aspect of his way of understanding the intellectual practice. In fact, in several of his texts he reflects on this idea, but very particularly in the final paragraph of *Cultural studies and their theoretical legacies*, by pointing out that:

I come back to the critical distinctions between intellectual work and academic work: they overlap, they abut with 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 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, 1996, p. 274-275).

It is necessary to emphasize that in the same article, a few pages before the just quoted words, Stuart Hall explicitly stressed that he did not hold an anti-theoretical position. He specifically stated the following:

I'm extremely anxious that you should not decode what I'm saying as an anti-theoretical discourse. It is not anti-theory, but it does have something to do with the conditions and problems of developing intellectual and theoretical work as a political practice. It is an extremely difficult road, not resolving the tensions between those two requirements, but living with them (Hall, 1996, p. 268).

### **Cultural Studies as Intercultural Practices**

Stuart Hall's life experience and arguments are useful for deepening reflections on the political, ethical and epistemological dimensions of *doing cultural studies* beyond the academy.

*Practicing cultural studies* beyond the academy implies establishing relationships with other social agents. In this case, I use the adjective *others* to highlight the relevance of the differences between what, in purely operational terms, we could understand as various institutional cultures, that of the academy and of those *outside it*. In the field of Cultural Studies, *otherness* is often related to specific people or organizations of social groups, defined in terms of socioeconomic strata, occupation, ethnicity, gender, generation, among other social markers.

It is in this sense that I consider it useful to reflect on our practices in terms of *intercultural practices*, as well as in terms of building *intercultural collaborative* relationships.

### **There is No *Universal* Knowledge; Intercultural Collaboration is Essential**

That *there is no universal knowledge* and that, therefore, *the intercultural collaboration is essential* may be obvious to many of us. However, this is not the case for many policy makers and administrators of science and higher education institutions, as well as for not a few colleagues in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and even less for the so-called Experimental and Natural Sciences. In addition, in most institutional contexts in which hegemonic representations of the idea of *science* are produced, scientific policies are formulated and applied, and/or scientific teaching and research are carried out – references to two types of knowledge, of which only one would have *universal* validity, while the other (diverse in its interior) would not, are frequent and have a significant impact on our academic work.

The idea of thinking about the production and validity of knowledge as divided into two worlds – one of which has *universal* truths while the other only offers *local* truths – is as old as the belief in the superior-

ity of *Western civilization*, which is usually considered to generate and own a supposedly *universal* knowledge. The so-called *Western knowledge* is not universal, but a product of the so-called *Western culture*, of its worldview. In that sense, it is *local*. Furthermore, this supposed *Western knowledge* does not include knowledge of all the components of that *civilization*, since it is, in fact, a hegemonic representation that subordinated or silenced many social groups within it.

In other words, those responsible for formulating scientific and higher education policies, such as the administrators of the institutions in this *sector*, often believe that the *scientific* knowledge and associated research procedures would be true and applicable at any time and in any place. Considering this worldview, in contrast to the supposed *universal* validity of scientific knowledge, the other type of knowledge production, normally characterized as *ethnic* or *local*, would not have such *universal* validity.

### **All Knowledge bears the Marks of the Institutional and Social Context in which it is Produced**

As we know, the idea that *science* constitutes a kind of *universal* validity knowledge is directly associated with the historical process that began with the military and commercial expansion of some European monarchies and commercial corporations, which carried their worldviews and their legal, economic and political institutions on the rest of the planet. This European expansion has led to the establishment of relations between peoples that for some centuries have had a colonial character. The rupture of colonial relations and the foundation of the republics did not completely end the forms of subordination of American indigenous peoples, nor of the numerous contingents of African population brought to America in slavery conditions and their descendants. The hierarchical relationships between two types of knowledge, one supposedly universal and the other local, are part of these dynamics. The disqualification of the ways of producing knowledge and accumulating its results from indigenous peoples and descendants of enslaved African populations is part of the colonial heritage.

This process has been marked, among other features, by the adoption of the constitutive belief of the natural sciences, by the social sciences, about the objectivity of scientific knowledge and the neutrality of the values of researchers. This belief leads us to ignore how our context of action and our subjectivity are constitutive of our investigations. The claim of objectivity involves closing our eyes to some forms of subjectivity that necessarily affect the problem approach, the formulation of research questions, the establishment of an analytical perspective and the type of relationships we establish with those social actors whose practices *we study*. Being aware of this makes it impossible to pretend to be *objective*, even less in the so-called social sciences. The significance of all research depends on some simple but crucial questions that we must ask ourselves: *where* do we do the research, *why* do we do it, *for*

*what* and *how* do we think the results can serve. However, we do not always ask ourselves these questions. On the contrary, research generally takes place somewhat compulsively, without thinking much about these fundamental issues. In a way, the answers to these questions are *data* that preexist the investigation with the *spontaneity* of a belief, so that the topics and perspectives seem to come *naturally*. Therefore, these types of questions are not formulated, they operate as what Bachelard (1976) called *epistemological obstacles*, they obstruct questions. In general, there is no conscious reflection about these starting certainties/beliefs regarding the points of view of the journals in which one aspires to publish, or those of the institutions that grant research funds, or the criteria that ensure stability and promotion in the so-called *careers* of a researcher or university professor.

Thus, the results of many of the investigations carried out are marked by an illusion of naive objectivism, according to which (and to ensure this objectivism) it is advisable to maintain a certain distance from the social processes under study. This *distance* factor is the origin of an important difference between *scientific* knowledge and what we can produce by working beyond the academy, co-producing knowledge through the development of many forms of collaboration with other social agents. Of course, we should not assume that producing knowledge such as this would necessarily make it *more truthful*, it is only a different kind of knowledge than that produced from closed *scientific* methods.

The problem is that, in one way or another, all knowledge – at least in the fields that usually refer to as the humanities and social sciences, considered *scientific* or of any other type – is marked by the social and institutional contexts in which it is produced. That is why the interpretation of the results of any form of knowledge production must be done considering these conditions of production. There is no *universal* knowledge, none is; definitely not, at least in the fields mentioned. All knowledge is relative to the conditions in which it is produced. That is why the exchange and collaboration between different forms of knowledge are indispensable. In some cases, we may find that this knowledge is complementary; in others, however, they may conflict with each other. Intercultural collaboration in the production of knowledge is not a panacea. But, if there are conflicts of knowledge, it is better to identify, analyze and find ways to treat them. However, this is not what usually happens in our universities.

### **Science and Higher Education Policies and the Exclusion of Other Forms of Knowledge**

Since the 1980s, science and higher education policies throughout the world have shown the hegemony of certain corporate and (neo)liberal discourses that seek to increasingly control intellectual practices in terms of the so-called *productivity*, measured according to particular indicators, such as the number of patents and/or citations in peer-reviewed journals.

The agents that promote these discourses and policies have established systems, usually called *research incentives*, depending on which funds are granted. These systems reinforce some ideas of *research* and *knowledge*, labeled as *scientific*, that respond to corporate values and follow the model of experimental sciences.

However, when we consider these research incentive systems from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences, the problem is what types of knowledge production tend to be supported and what are the consequences for those intellectual practices that do not produce types of knowledge considered legitimate by these incentive systems. Thus, ways of producing knowledge that are not oriented from the beginning to produce patents and/or articles to be accepted by academic journals are excluded from this model. Such modes would be, for example, those in which intellectuals participate in many types of social processes, directly communicating with other social agents, contributing to their specific type of knowledge, whether they are professionals of the human and social sciences, and/or other agents involved in the production of different forms of knowledge.

These research incentive systems tend to promote the dissociation of academic practices from their relationships with the practices of other social agents outside the academy. They tend to delegitimize intellectual practices that are not oriented towards the production of patents and/or peer-reviewed publications. These public policies tend to dissociate intellectual work from political and ethical reflection. A lot must be said about the dangers coming from the dissociation between knowledge production and ethical-political reflection, especially regarding some fields of science. For now, it seems enough to briefly suggest some questions that are so eloquent that even if briefly mentioned are particularly disturbing. Thus, it is suggestive to ask about the role that physics played in the development of the atomic bomb, or the role that biology and chemistry play in the development of biological and chemical weapons. The production of knowledge disconnected from an ethical and political reflection can be simply perverse, even disastrous. This must always be considered.

It seems that those who promote these incentive systems that only consider publications in peer-reviewed journals and patented developments (a particular type of research *product* that can hardly come from the humanities and social sciences) do not understand that both research questions and the ways of data production ultimately depend on epistemological options that are associated to worldviews and ethical-political positions. These positions, among other things, mark the types of relationships we develop with the social actors we interact with, especially – but not only – with those outside the academic field. The ethical and political positions are constitutive of the epistemological basis and of the theoretical orientation of our research, as well as of their questions and methods.

Neither the research questions nor the methods could be the same if we seek *to write* supposedly *objective* research, that if, instead, we seek



to produce useful knowledge for the interests of any social agent outside the academic world. The answers to the questions of why and how to investigate about a certain issue determine what we investigate and condition the types of relationships we build with other social actors. It is essential to ask ourselves: Why do we intend to carry out an investigation? How and with whom do we intend to do it? Associated with these questions, there are important challenges and decisions to be taken, for example, if the research project will end in an academic publication, or in *something* else, such as in an educational program, in a video production, in a museum exhibition or other type of public space, in a program of communicative action, in a social organization experience, etc. The choice of what kind of *thing* to produce also depends on how such a *thing* could circulate and/or be useful, for whom. It is necessary to ask: What could be the appropriations, applications and/or consequences, not only of the results, but also of the very experiences of research. With whom to investigate? For whom? How?

### **Intercultural Collaboration, Obstacles and Challenges**

Scientism and academicism bring to the academy two types of problems. First, they prevent non-academic intellectual practices from being properly appreciated and, therefore, from being properly articulated in the field of higher education and academic research. Second, they affect the relevance and social legitimacy of science and higher education, since they lead to the loss of opportunities for exchange, learning and participation in some social dynamics.

A potentially effective way to counteract this process is to question the prevailing *common sense* of what is believed to be characteristic of the *intellectual* figure. Formatted by the modern hegemony of academic institutionalism and publishing industries, the representation of the *intellectual* concept is today closely associated with writing and publishing. In response to this reductive *writing-centric* representation of the *intellectual*, I think it is necessary to recognize the many ways in which intellectual practices take place and develop. It is important to recognize that intellectual practices respond to diverse opportunities, needs, and demands of particular social agents in specific contexts. Moreover, diverse intellectual practices developed in different contexts necessarily produce distinct types of knowledge. This diversity is not negative, but positive, if we know how to value it and to collaborate on it. On the other hand, a certain institutionality seems to preform at us to think only about teaching in school or university spaces and/or academic research, neglecting many opportunities for direct intervention in many contemporary social processes, of which, wanted or not, we are part (Mato, 2003b).

I think it is necessary and important to reevaluate the relationships that universities and scientific institutions have with different social sectors. There are already other university models and other teaching-learning modes currently under development in many *local*

universities. Other innovative forms are being developed under the heading of *new type*, or *two-way Extension* programs, or also *dialogic*, in several Latin American countries (Mato, 2013). Other advances in this regard are driven by several universities and other institutions of higher education created by indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples' organizations and/or wisdom persons. In some cases, these advances are developed from specific programs within universities and other types of *conventional* higher education institutions. In others, they are carried out based on consortia and joint programs of universities with indigenous, Afro-descendants, peasants, women, youth, settlers, and/or several other social sectors organizations grouped according to their own interests. This has been happening for decades, not only in Latin America, but in several regions of the world (Mato, 2016). Meanwhile, in most countries, public policies focus primarily, if not exclusively, on cooperation schemes only with companies.

These types of collaboration experiences with other social actors, in addition to relating diverse traditions of knowledge production, offer useful opportunities to articulate three areas of university life that usually operate institutionally apart: teaching, research and extension. Additionally, these types of experiences are serving to reconceptualize the idea of *extension*, criticizing and going beyond conventional unidirectional modalities. We need to learn to develop and practice useful forms of *intercultural* collaboration. My participation in many initiatives of the diverse types mentioned before (especially those promoted by indigenous and Afro-descendant communities and organizations) lead me to conclude that this type of collaboration contributes to the development of new knowledge and social transformations.

Of course, I do not naively believe that intercultural *collaboration* is a panacea. In my opinion, the most difficult problems to solve when building concrete experiences of intercultural collaboration are those related to *translation*. Let me emphasize that I am not simply referring to the challenges of translating words and ideas from one language to another. I am speaking rather of translating world visions, values, sensibilities, temporalities, affective senses, which constitute the main challenges in any intercultural *communication* experience. These are issues that we must address very carefully in each case and context.

On the other hand, as we know, power relations exist and are ubiquitous. Difficulties and conflicts also are a regular part of these innovative experiences. However, the specific research that I have been developing on the subject, based on the experiences of approximately 300 university teams in Argentina, indicates that the most difficult intercultural communication difficulties are not those that arise between academic and non-academic agents, but those within the academy, as well as those related to science and higher education agencies. Universities are not homogeneous institutions; on the contrary, like any other complex organization, they are diverse, heterogeneous. Different types of actors coexist and contend within them, with their own worldviews,

values and interests. These differences can not only be sources of problems, but also of opportunities. We must learn to identify them, to recognize them, to work from them (Mato, 2012; 2013; 2017; 2018a; 2018b)<sup>3</sup>.

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## Notes

- 1 Véase: <<http://www.runnymedetrust.org>>. Accesado el: 30 junio 2018.
- 2 Véase: <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/oct/15/britishidentitycomment>>. Accesado el: 30 junio 2018.
- 3 This article is part of the Thematic Section, *Cultural Studies*, organized by Maria Lúcia Castagna Wortmann (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), Luís Henrique Sacchi dos Santos (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), Iara Tatiana Bonin (Universidade Luterana do Brasil) and Daniela Ripoll (Universidade Luterana do Brasil).

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