INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

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I. INTRODUCTION

A Short History of Latin American Studies

The history of Latin American studies as a distinct academic field dates from the 1940s, although there is obviously a rich tradition of scholarly research on the region that goes back centuries. From an institutional perspective, the conferences of the International Congress of Americanists (ICA, *Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*), organised faithfully since 1875, represent a key tradition of Latin American studies globally.[1] The first ICA conference was held in Nancy, France, by the *Société Américaine de France*, with the objective to "contribuer au progrès des études ethnographiques, linguistiques et historiques relatives aux deux Amériques, spécialement pour les temps antérieurs à Christophe Colomb, et de mettre en rapport les personnes qui s'intéressent à ces etudes" (ICA 2009).

While the very first focus of institutionalised Latin American studies was clearly anthropological, archaeological and linguistic, the growth of social sciences from the beginning of the twentieth century also left its mark on the academic analysis of Latin America. The expansion becomes even more obvious when we look at Latin American studies now and a hundred years ago.

In the Cold War context following the Second World War, the United States, in particular, began to promote new area and regional studies approaches. The programmes were first planned better to understand the 'enemy' and then to educate experts to study regions, cultures, politics and economies in the Soviet Union, Europe and Latin America. The imminent

need and interest of the American superpower undoubtedly underpinned such programmes to begin, but it did not take long for academic interests to prevail. Later, most notably during the 1960s, some European universities followed suit, casting traditional regional studies into a novel area studies mould.

Another important element was the 1960s wave of cultural studies in some British universities, in particular (including the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, better known as the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies), and in Germany. The post-1968 structural university reforms in France also had an impact on the concept of cultural studies. In Latin America, some departments or programmes of philosophy (schools of 'Pensamiento Latinoamericano') included a more consciously Latin American regional aspect in their programmes (Zea 1976; Marini 2005). Most centres of Latin American studies in Europe, the United States and Latin America today belong to this academic 'tribe' of cultural and regional studies, which could also be called area and cultural studies.

There is a difference between area studies and regional studies, and we should understand the distinction. As an inter-discipline, regional studies has always been related to the concept and analysis of *territory*, while area studies has had a bearing not only on the concept of territory but also on the notions of *culture* and *civilisation*. The first tradition (regional studies, territorial studies, regional planning, etc.) focuses mainly on the geographical region, and the methods, concepts and procedures follow from the research objective: a region is defined in territorial terms. Normally, regional studies includes interdisciplinary research on themes such as urban or rural development, municipal organisation and finance, distribution of population, migrations, sustainable regional development, human ecology, etc. While a great variety of research material is used, the data mainly comes from economics, geography, history, sociology, political science, demography, urban studies and ecology.

And yet, 'region' can be understood also as something beyond purely territorial, as a more historical and cultural idea. For example, in Latin American studies, the object of analysis is a huge and heterogeneous region, which can also be conceived as a civilisation or a sum total of cultures. The concept of 'area' is thus probably more relevant than 'region' (although the difference is minimal), and Latin American studies can be defined as area and cultural studies, where the subject matter focuses on the unifying cultural attributes or comparative perspective, that is, variation-finding comparison, or encompassing comparison, as noted by Charles Tilly (1984:82-84).

To clarify this perspective, it is useful to look at the conceptual and spatial frameworks. Regional studies are liable to take the nation state as a unit of analysis, and the regions under study are inside this classical entity of modernity. In area studies, the region is not only the space inside the nation state, but it also includes the idea of culture(s) and civilisation(s) – something that goes further than just national cultural elements. There are sufficient supranational unifying components, which can be constructed as a kind of continental culture. Take, for example, European studies, African studies, Latin American and North American studies. In these cultural studies traditions, region, space and territory are always something more than national. The research questions, too, tend to gravitate toward comparative aspects, such as how different regions or countries, inside a continental or supranational culture, are different or similar. The interest of the researcher is, then, to explain that which is common or particular for a region or culture larger than a state or nation. This obviously requires a research angle which looks beyond themes defined strictly in terms of national sovereignty – and, like regional studies, area and cultural studies are *per se* interdisciplinary.

It is also relevant to define Latin American studies more practically. We can argue, for example, that the analysis of the production of Mario Vargas Llosa through literary or linguistic theories and methods should not necessarily be labelled strictly under Latin American studies. Such analysis belongs to literature studies. But if the literary production of Vargas Llosa is used and contextualised as part of interdisciplinary materials to explain, say, Peruvian politics or environmental problems, then we are in fact speaking about Latin American studies. Even if such disciplinary definitions may sound too harsh for many scholars who define themselves as Latin Americanists, it is crucial how one articulates the research questions and how the cultural and regional point of view is composed.

II. STRUCTURALISM, DEPENDENCY, POSTMODERNISM AND SUBALTERN STUDIES

A major element in Latin American studies in the area and cultural studies context is the historical, economic and sociological tradition which started principally at the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA, CEPAL) during the 1950s.[2] Cepalist structuralism, often connected to the person of Raúl Prebisch, radicalised during the 1960s into the Dependency School, which has been globally the most significant and best-known Latin American theory of social sciences.[3] Dependency theory emerged in Latin America as a response to modernisation theory from a

Third World perspective that challenged the intellectual hegemony of the North American modernisation school. Structuralist import substitution industrialisation (ISI) and ECLAC policies of the early 1960s had in many ways failed in Latin America, and there was a need for a new model to explain development/underdevelopment with something better than ECLAC's ISI politics of industrialising developing countries through protectionism (Blomström & Hettne 1985; Kay 1989; Lehmann 1990). Immanuel Wallerstein's formulation of the world-system approach and modern globalisation studies (1979; 1983) similarly owe a great deal to the Latin American Dependency School.

The Dependency School puts emphasis on the political economy, historical sociology, world economy and world-system, explaining the problems of the poor or peripheral countries and regions mainly by external factors. The idea of dependency theories, against the modernisation school and the classic trickle-down effect, is that resources flow from a 'periphery' of poor and underdeveloped states to a 'core' of wealthy states, enriching the latter at the expense of the former. Dependency theories, together with political science and studies of militarism and democracy, remain a vigorous and seminal base for Latin American studies in spite of the discursive turn and the boom of postmodern and postcolonial studies since the 1980s and the subaltern perspectives of the 1990s.

These challenging and still fairly fashionable traditions have defined contemporary Latin American studies in many academic institutions, especially in the United States. The focal point has been a critical attitude toward Western cultural, racial and gendered interpretations of Latin American heterogeneity, and a critical analysis of globalisation and literature. As Castro-Gómez and Mendieta put it:

> 'Latinoamericanismo', 'Latinoamericanística' y 'Estudios Latinoamericanos' son términos utilizados a veces de manera sinónima, a veces de manera diferencial en la discusión poscolonial. Por lo general, ellos hacen referencia al conjunto de saberes académicos y conocimientos teóricos sobre América Latina producidos en universidades e instituciones científicas del primer mundo, y específicamente en algunos departamentos de literatura en los Estados Unidos. Pues aunque los 'Estudios Latinoamericanos' incluyen ciertamente la sociología, la politología, la historia, la antropología y últimamente también los estudios culturales, fue precisamente en los departamentos de lengua y literatura donde empezó a discutirse por primera vez el problema de la poscolonialidad. Esto no es extraño, si tenemos en cuenta tres factores: primero, que por lo menos a partir del Boom, la literatura sigue siendo considerada en los Estados Unidos (y también en Europa) como el producto cultural latinoamericano *par excellence*, aún a pesar de la gran popularidad que empiezan a tener otras mercancías de exportación como el arte (sobre todo la pintura), la

música (tango, salsa) y las telenovelas; segundo, que el tema de lo poscolonial encaja muy bien con el enorme desarrollo que ya desde los setenta venían mostrando los estudios de la literatura colonial hispanoamericana, principalmente la del siglo XVI; y tercero, que las teorías poscoloniales, como ya lo señalamos, muestran grandes afinidades con el estructuralismo (Barthes, Lacan), la deconstrucción (Derrida) o la genealogía (Nietzsche, Foucault), metodologías que ya habían sido institucionalizadas, es decir, incorporadas al análisis de textos en las facultades de literatura desde comienzos de los ochenta (1989:17-18).

III. MULTI-, INTER- AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY?

As the 'short history' of Latin American studies – written above only in a very concise manner – reveals, the essence of area studies as discipline is obviously multi- or interdisciplinary. However, the mainstream academic practices, structures, traditions and institutions are still relatively bound to the classical system of faculties, strict disciplinary rules and study tracks. While many of these have a long history dating to the Middle Ages, the 'ways of doing' are more than a hundred years old also in the 'young sciences', including the social sciences (Wallerstein 1996). Inter-disciplinary 'disciplines', such as area and cultural studies, are sometimes seen as competitors by the traditional disciplines, or get underestimated as not adequately academic. This is strange, because at the same time the need of interdisciplinarity is proclaimed and praised in academic speeches, evaluations and planning. Interdisciplinarians can gradually deal with this fairly common problem, when more non-disciplinary space is made available for specialists with generalist interests. The way to proceed is by promoting somewhat radical transdisciplinary thinking in present multi- and interdisciplinary schools, study tracks and institutions. To understand the pressing need, it is necessary briefly to define multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity.

Multidisciplinarity is commonly understood as a non-integrative mixture of disciplines: each of them retains its methodologies and assumptions without change or influences from other disciplines within the multidisciplinary research and relationship. The disciplines cooperate with one another but they do not mix. Multidisciplinarity is used successfully, for example, in big research projects analysing such vast issues as global warming, global urbanism, crisis of the welfare state, etc. These include a lot of team work, but the specialists contribute in the research project as experts of their own fields and disciplines. The expert gives his/her research input for the project, but the idea is not to work closely together with academics from another 'order', nor to learn about the other discipline

nor other ways of thinking. The expert of a multidisciplinary project deepens the knowledge of one aspect of the subject matter. He/she comes to the research group with his/her knowledge and discipline, and also leaves the group as a disciplinary expert. A multidisciplinary relationship in research cooperation or teamwork may, however, be mutual and cumulative, but normally not interactive (Augsburg 2009). A metaphor of multidisciplinarity could be a salad, where the tomato, cucumber and lettuce blend, but we can easily tell them apart.

Multidisciplinarity aims to cumulate information and knowledge on a given subject, problem or phenomenon. The idea is to assemble the best available information in a traditional academic way. In Figure 1, each chord (n) of the circle stands for one discipline. With three disciplines, we get to fill quite a bit of the circle (symbolising all existing knowledge), making a triangle. With more chords (disciplines), we have much more information, and, in the end, the accumulation of the chords fills the whole circle. On an ideal level, all the information (or 'scientific knowledge') of the world is gathered inside the circle.[4] The goal of a well-planned multidisciplinary group work is to solve the research problem in such cooperation, by using all available knowledge, but it is not their objective to create a new kind of knowledge or epistemology.

Figure 1. Disciplines (n) and knowledge

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n=3	n=4	n=6	n >100
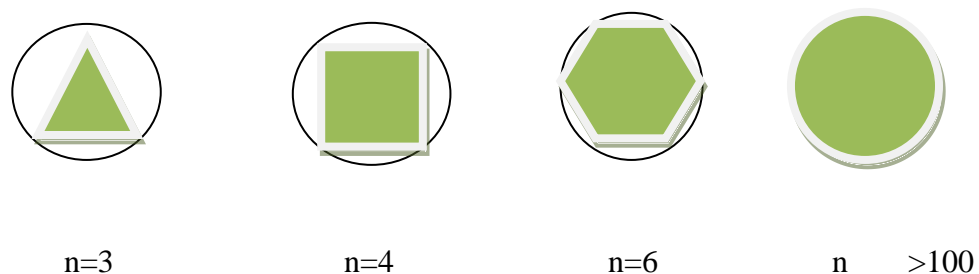
In interdisciplinary research, the practices and assumptions of each discipline involved are consciously blended, and the disciplines are themselves engaged in a relationship. The concept was originally applied in educational and training pedagogies to describe studies that use methods and insights of several established disciplines or traditional fields of study. Today, interdisciplinary is used in projects where researchers from two or more disciplines pool their approaches and modify them so that they are better used to solve the research problem. In study programmes, interdisciplinarity often signifies team-taught courses where students are

required to understand a given subject in terms of multiple traditional disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity therefore requires an attitude and willingness to learn from another discipline, a familiar approach from an interdisciplinary democratic learning culture (see below). The metaphor of inter-disciplinarity could be pancake batter: once the sugar, milk, butter and flour are mixed, the observer cannot tell the ingredients apart, but sees the blend as it is.

In territorial terms, interdisciplinarity is situated on the border or in the twilight zones of the disciplines (Figure 2), and this is where its vigour springs from. Interdisciplinarity is useful in finding gaps and unknown spaces of knowledge, often between the disciplines. Today, this is also known as innovativeness.

Figure 2. Disciplines and the space of interdisciplinarity
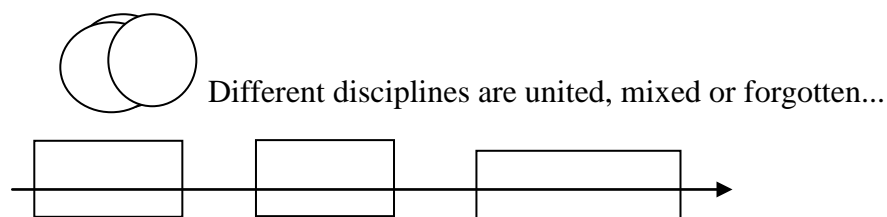

Interdisciplinarity
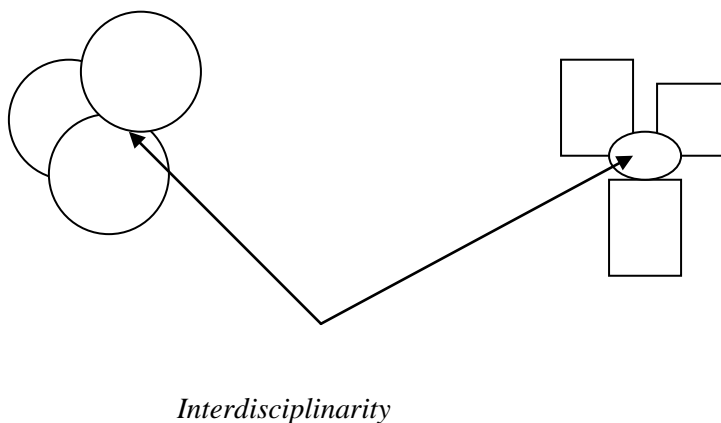
In comparison with multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity strives to integrate sciences and disciplines. And yet, in many practical ways, the two concepts are used almost as synonymous. Both embrace academic cooperation, problem-solving teamwork and disciplinary structures (Mikkeli & Pakkasvirta 2007; Klein 1996). A parallel is available in the concept of 'international'. Let us assume that the nation state is an academic discipline. In international cooperation, nation states will normally act in accordance with their specific national interests or perspectives. Historically, they have never been overly keen to be part of something completely communal or international, since this could have led to their disappearance.[5] International cooperation rather seeks compromises between different 'specialists' (nations, participants, representatives, etc.) in a way which serves to strengthen the national instead of the *inter*national. Take the Olympic Games and the organisation of the United Nations: both are international *per se* and clearly the most important arenas

for nation states to prove their exceptionalism, compounded by a vast array of national symbolism. So, while the international feeds the national on the level of the nation state, the interdisciplinary can similarly buttress the disciplines in the academia. Or, at the very least, the disciplines will survive in interdisciplinary cooperation and integration.

The third concept, transdisciplinarity, challenges such forms of integration, quite as the national is challenged and weakened by the transna-tional. This is not saying that interdisciplinarity and international-ism are not valuable concepts and practices in building bridges between different spaces, academic traditions and research. In a fruitful interdiscipli-nary integration, specialists listen to one another, no matter which disci-pline they come from. It is equally important to stress that multidisciplinary teamwork of specialists can often be the best strategy in tackling big complicated questions. There is no ranking order between multi-, inter- or transdisciplinarity. They are each useful in different situations.

Nevertheless, transdisciplinarity is particularly interesting because of its academic and institutional radicalism. Transdisciplinarity signifies a unity of knowledge beyond disciplines, testing the identity of the researcher and the whole construct of traditional disciplinary thinking. Equally, transdisciplinarity solves some problems caused by a certain isomorphism of academic and cultural cooperation. And this cooperation is normally based on those very academic traditions. Transdisciplinarity aims to address the dynamics engendered by the action of several levels of 'reality' at once (Nicolescu 2008). Consequently, a transdisciplinary research attitude proposes an active 'forgetfulness' of the disciplines, an approach where the researcher's position to the common object traverses the traditional epistemological standpoints (Figure 3). For example, interdisciplinary conferences, such as Latin American Studies conferences, normally have sessions and workshops built around the disciplinary thematic, but it might be more interesting to address the area studies epistemology from a more transdisciplinary perspective.

Figure 3. Transdisciplinarity

Different disciplines are united, mixed or forgotten...

… or the focus of the study passes through different disciplines, defined only by the research question.

To give another example, we assume that theories, methods and strategies of feminist interdisciplinary studies are useful for those working with themes of gender, as indeed they are. However, a genuinely transdisciplinary attitude and praxis suggests that it would be more important to learn about other 'disciplines' and not to stay with the people and ideas one is already familiar with. It might prove interesting if gender studies specialists discussed, for example, with researchers of intergovernmental frontiers – and vice versa. Such dialogue could provide fresh transdisciplinary perspectives to different ways of understanding the concept of 'frontier', not only from the perspective of a discipline, but also from within the concept of 'frontier' itself. After all, both 'disciplines' (feminist studies, international politics) map the frontiers, one from the angle of the private, the other from the angle of the public. In other words, many approaches of feminist studies have been transdisciplinary, but at the same time there has been a tendency to create an *interdisciplinary discipline* of gender or feminist studies. A similar trend has been evident also in area and cultural studies and in the history of science in general. This signifies that if we want transdisciplinarity to be taken seriously, the concept needs to be introduced more effectively into academic structures and cooperation.

In this sense, transdisciplinary standpoints are radically distinct from interdisciplinary positions. Interdisciplinarity, like multidisciplinarity, concerns the transfer of methods from one discipline to another, allowing research to spill over disciplinary boundaries while at the same time staying within the framework of disciplinary research. In the most sophisticated (and extremist) way,[6] transdisciplinarity can also refer to the objective of a total understanding of the *present* world, which according to transdisciplinarians[7] cannot be accomplished in the framework of historically-bound disciplinary or interdisciplinary research.

Another way of conceiving inter- and transdisciplinarity is to rethink the relation of discipline, method and research materials (data). The research process always includes these elements, and the disciplines regularly have their own methods, favoured by the traditions, schools, guides and masters of the discipline. However, these methods and the most common research materials of the discipline are not the property of the discipline, but can be freely used by all researchers according to the academic principle of common ownership of knowledge (see Figure 4). An inter- or transdisciplinary researcher can select his/her ways of using methods (x, y, z) and research materials (m1, m2, m3). The starting points can be defined by disciplinary principles (A, B, C), but the researcher can

also combine various discipline–method–data routes, while in a traditional disciplinary case the route would be: A → x → m1; B → y → m2, etc.

Figure 4. Disciplines, methods and data
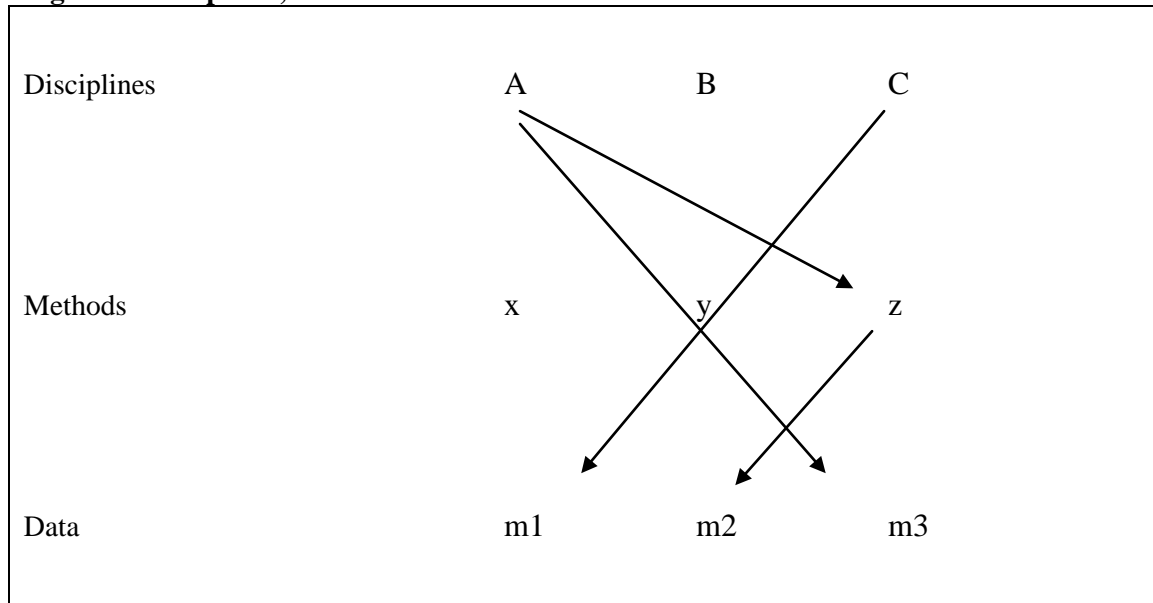
Consequently, the methods and data are just guides and tools, which do not define nor direct the research in a strictly disciplinary way. The interdisciplinary researcher thus selects 'freely' the most valid methods and data for his research question. This is not determined by the disciplinary premise, but the researcher will rather accept different epistemological standpoints. No method can be the path to 'truth'. They are just techniques to information, and the information is always in relation to the method. Accordingly, in most cases of complex social science research questions a multi-methodological approach yields the most reliable results.

It is also obvious that trans- and interdisciplinarity are not new methods, disciplines or 'theories without discipline'. They are research strategies, standpoints and epistemological frameworks. In a best case, inter- and transdisciplinarity signify the art of bringing into the research arena new and unconventional research questions, different hypotheses and heterodox or even controversial perspectives. The interdisciplinary utopia (Cerutti Guldberg & Pakkasvirta 2009) also stands for a multidimensional and holistic understanding of knowledge, in the same way as the most extreme form of transdisciplinarity.[8] Likewise, interdisciplinarity is more than tactics to go around or look inside the disciplines. True interdisciplinarity traverses various paradigms, but with an unassuming attitude of trying to learn more. Next I will give some methodological approaches for interdisciplinary research framework.

IV. CRITICAL REALISM AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Theoretically and methodologically, one of the basic problems of an interdisciplinary research attitude, such as Latin American studies, is the relation between the research question, disciplinary traditions, methods and empirical materials. Consequently, the research question should receive even more attention than in strictly disciplinary approaches, and a serious interdisciplinary researcher should contemplate very carefully the meaning of empirical and theoretical discussions in both social sciences and humanities (Mikkeli & Pakkasvirta 2007).

One more theoretical tool for an interdisciplinary research process comes from critical realism (CR). This is an ontologically realist and epistemologically relativist research attitude, in which causal relationships, too, are irreducible to empirical 'constant conjunctions' (Bhaskar 1986; Töttö 2005:232−284). Relationships between events are neither sufficient nor necessary to establish a causal relationship. For the research process, the implication of CR's approach is that 'science' should be understood as an ongoing process in which the researcher improves the concept he/she uses to understand the mechanisms under study. It should not be, contrary to the claims of the strictest empiricists, about the identification of a coincidence between a postulated independent variable and dependent variable.

Critical realism argues that the realist strategy or model of science is equally applicable to both physical and human worlds. It is also important to understand that human agency is made possible by social structures that themselves require the reproduction of certain actions and preconditions. Further, the human beings living these social structures are capable of consciously reflecting upon, and changing, the actions that produce them – a practice that is in part facilitated by social scientific research.

On a practical level, this kind of research attitude seeks to develop hermeneutic iconic models or establish how and why different 'stories' or visions are developed in special cases. Only after such modelling can the critical analysis of a given phenomenon be done. Critical realism and modern conflict resolution theories share methodologically some common ideas with the traditional Popperian concept of falsification (Patomäki 2002:145−148; Burton 1972:150−163; Miall 2007:4−17). This could also be described as a legal process where all the different arguments are presented from different angles and by different actors in order to reach the 'truth' or 'reality' behind the case. The researcher is thus able to compare different actors' arguments, visions and beliefs and to make a different and fresh (and hopefully more explicatory) hypothesis. This requires first the construction of rational-choice models of the cases analysed, which are

then converted into iconic models. It is also a genuine interdisciplinary way of carrying out research, because interdisciplinarity is seen as a method of trying to understand different epistemological, methodological and practical angles (Mikkeli & Pakkasvirta 2007:85–90).

As Patomäki points out, the process of building iconic models of causal complexes is hermeneutic in a double sense. Accordingly, an "iconic model – a picture of the rational components of a causal complex – includes existential hypothesis, stipulations of internal relations and action possibilities, descriptive statements and causal hypothesis". The researcher's task is to identify these correctly and to try to "tell well-endorsed explanatory stories" (Patomäki 2002:123).

From a more general area and cultural studies point of view, the CR approach means that different disciplinary perspectives could be used genuinely and together, not just like floating ideas or a mixture of different academic traditions. This also presupposes and implies an improvement in the political arena, such as possibilities for a democratic and genuinely interdisciplinary learning culture, which aims to steer clear of, for example, cultural stereotypes. Methodologically, the research moves from an analysis of world society to applied social science, at the same time developing practical interdisciplinary research techniques.

I'm aware that the combination of interdisciplinarity and critical realism, introduced only briefly above, is quite an ambitious theoretical framework to be applied in area and cultural studies. Nevertheless, I find it imperative that the researcher reveals the ontological starting points and necessary epistemological mechanisms behind his/her practical study.

V. CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING CULTURE

Critical realism seeks to learn from different disciplinary perspectives, research questions and ways of using methods and research materials. Interdisciplinary scholars and pedagogues, such as Paolo Freire (2007) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002) have consciously promoted the idea of a democratic learning culture. The approach is closely linked to the hermeneutic ability to understand different ways of doing things (and doing research).

In practice, a democratic learning culture suggests that the researcher not only listens to an academic from a different research tradition but also respects and strives to understand the paradigmatic and methodologically different 'other'. I have been negotiating such an interdisciplinary research attitude in analysing an international conflict between Argentina and Uruguay, caused by the building of a colossal Finnish-owned pulp mill by

the Uruguay River on the border between the two nations (Pakkasvirta 2008; 2010). This project underlined the import of disciplinary dialogue, that an engineer or lawyer listens to the political scientist, folklorist or environmentalist, and vice versa. All knowledge has value, and serious 'interdisciplinarians' need to contemplate this idea sincerely. At the same time, an interdisciplinary attitude carries pedagogical implications, too: who 'teaches', how and why? It is also a question of local and global power relations – ideological, cultural and political – in the context of area and cultural studies (Teivainen 2003).

An interdisciplinary alteration of viewpoints, and an effort to imagine and analyse the world even upside down, helps the researcher in creating interesting and different hypotheses. However, one has to be very careful not to forget the best of the scientific tradition. An old joke helps us to appreciate the dramatic effect of the change of perspective, and it also warns us about the problems, if the different points of view do not discuss in an 'interdisciplinary' way:

> A motorcyclist is driving fast on a highway. Suddenly, something hits the driver's[9] helmet. The motorcyclist brakes and stops, and walks back to see what happened. Lying on the ground is a sparrow without any sign of life. Shocked by the accident, the motorcyclist takes the bird and drives home, where the sparrow is laid in a birdcage with some water and bread. For hours the motorcyclist keeps a vigil over the injured bird, but has to go to work in the end. Meanwhile, the bird wakes up, looks around, and sees the bars around the cage and the bread and water. "Oh shit", the bird cries out, "I killed that motorcyclist woman!"

The change of perspective can prove dramatic. It also reveals differences between common and academic knowledge. In our daily lives we often compare and change perspectives and our reasoning automatically, without thinking about it profoundly. In reading the newspaper, for example, we compare different points of view in articles, news and letters to the editor and in the columns of different writers. But in academic research we easily follow the same methodology, theory, paradigms, materials, and disciplinary rules that we are used to and educated in. This kind of academic attitude, not bothering with the idea of changing perspectives, is rather common in mainstream research, whether in economics, political science, sociology, geography or history. But in a genuine interdisciplinary study, we should strive to adopt more multidimensional perspectives and use the 'interdisciplinary imagination' as a tool to understand the variety of ways in which knowledge is created and constructed.

Similarly, the use of different scholarly traditions and methodologies is integrated into the idea of an interdisciplinary and democratic learning

culture. Let us imagine a technical engineer who has to start to clean a forest. He has learned everything about using the chainsaw. He also knows the technological properties of his equipment. Nevertheless, he cannot clean the forest rationally if he does not have information from other disciplines such as biology-based forestry. He has to know what to cut and how. In other words, he has to know something about the plants and trees and the forest as a whole, as a complicated 'interdisciplinary' system. To give another, more concrete example: the conflict between Uruguay and Argentina over the pulp mill speaks volumes about problems brought about by the lack of an interdisciplinary attitude. The engineers, economists, consultants and lawyers contracted by the pulp company based their analysis on the impact of the factory mainly on legal, commercial, technical and Uruguayan government's points of view. They were not able to analyse Argentinean politics and recent economic crisis, the complicated cultural issues on the river zone or, indeed, the history of Uruguayan-Argentinean relations. On the other hand, many activists opposing the pulp mill were not able to discuss with those who had conducted studies of the mill's ecological impact but rather took their arguments from rumours of cancer and other ailments caused by modern pulp mills (Pakkasvirta 2008; 2010).

VI. QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE?

As described above, the combination of interdisciplinarity and critical realism is based on the epistemologically relativist research attitude. This poses challenges for the analysis of data and research materials. During the 1950s and 1960s, students of social sciences were educated to find causal relationships by using empirical materials and quantitative methods. The methodological models applied in, for example, neo-classical economics were adopted without major critique in politology, psychology and sociology, even if there were obvious difficulties to explain complicated social phenomena and relations through methods of natural sciences or mathematical analysis. Society and human relations do not exist in a vacuum, as orthodox liberal economy presupposed. In short, the problem was, as later in the neoliberal paradox of the 1990s, how to explain the reality with too narrow a perspective. The worst answer of neo-classical economics was to confirm that if the world did not function according to the theory, the world – not the theory – had to be changed (Patomäki 2009:431−442).

Empirical and quantitative studies in social sciences were challenged from the 1970s on by critical theory, social constructivism, postmodernism and the revitalisation of classical hermeneutic methods. The significance of

language, in particular, was in vogue in social and political analysis, even to the extent that some academics constructed their analysis around the presumption that everything could be reduced to linguistic relations. The 'discursive turn' confronted the basis of quantitative research (Angus 1998). The critical argument was that quantitative analysis was built on the assumption of the researcher drawing on different scales to explain the social world, but social phenomena were much more complicated than that and beyond such scales. While it is possible to count the population or money, to analyse the quantity of nuclear arms, to measure the size of the cities and slums, most aspects of social life are not quantifiable or scaled.

However, the boom of qualitative and discursive research raised new problems. Do we only have linguistic significances, and can these alone explain the human world? The most extremist social constructivism can lead to contradictory and paradoxical research settings, and, in the worst case, to ambiguous or even arbitrary deductions and judgements. The research process cannot be a collection, comparison and analysis of casual texts, which only reflect the opinions, values and points of view of the researcher who selected these materials. With a strict and practical use of sophisticated qualitative methods it is possible to avoid the worst traps of the arbitrariness, but often studies that superficially describe social relations by subjectively selected texts justify themselves by explaining that they are based on 'qualitative' analysis. Paradoxically, this raises the similar problem which caused the critique against quantitative analysis: that it does not explain anything about the complex human world and life (Patomäki 2002:47−67).

Since the 'positivist quantitative corpus' (basics of quantitative analysis and scientific causalities) has faded from many academic study tracks or programmes, the students often find themselves in a situation where 'anything goes but nothing helps'. The simple solution is to combine both quantitative and qualitative methods in social sciences and humanities, and to do this in an imaginative yet also strictly academic and interdisciplinary way.

The selected sources and the nature of different research materials have always defined the academic disciplines. Researchers learn to use certain materials and analyse them in accordance with the traditions of their disciplines, which also determines research tactics and attitudes. Such academic manners and traditions are often based in the differences between qualitative and quantitative analysis (Becher & Trowler 2001). The distinction and dichotomy is nevertheless rather artificial and should be crossed, even more so in an interdisciplinary study. This also helps to combine different research strategies and tactics.

The Finnish sociologist Pertti Töttö has made interesting suggestions as to examining the relation of quantitative and qualitative (2000; 2005). He argues that we are mistaken to emphasise the difference between quantitative and qualitative, since research is seldom purely either. Textual materials are thought to be somehow qualitative, but we can ask what is genuinely qualitative about, for example, interviews which are recorded and then transcribed, or about a massive selection of press articles, text messages or digitalised telephone conversations. Töttö's synthesis is somewhat 'interdisciplinary': when 'testing' the theoretical and causal deductions, the difference of quantitative or qualitative disappears. The methods cannot be the principal object, the research materials are not the 'truth', and the numbers are not the results of the study. According to Töttö, the profound comprehension of the quantitative and qualitative is found in the justification of moderate realism against floppy empiricism and superficial social constructivism (see also Druckman 2005).

These dense epistemological and methodological debates on qualitative and quantitative research attitude open an interesting path to inter- and transdicplinary practices. The question of data and its analysis are in the core of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity alike.

VII. INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL?

Another interdisciplinary perspective on Latin American studies comes from the simultaneous analysis of internal and external factors. During the last fifty years, the weighty tradition of Cepalist structuralism and the dependency school has led to a macro analysis privileging external factors, such as economic dependency and the examination of global structural history and world-system.

At the same time, however, there are many interesting studies seeking to identify the impact of the external *with* the internal (Pakkasvirta 2005:122−138). This can be understood also as a genuine interdisciplinary research attitude. One classic example of such a research question is how the United Fruit Company (UFCo) was able to create in a few decades at the end of the nineteenth century a huge and influential exporting dynasty inside the sovereign nation states in Central America. How was it possible that a foreign-owned company could so easily win control over a significant part of, for example, Costa Rican national territory? The answer lies in a combination of external and internal explanations.

Historical studies of multinational companies have generally called attention, in an interdisciplinary way, to the importance of political power relations, economic and transnational aspects (Kepner and Soothill 1935;

Ellis 1983; Bourgois 1989; Macune 1989; Stewart 1991; García Burkhard 1992). It is indeed obvious that global needs, demands and power relations were at the core of multinational fruit business. Many internationally active businessmen saw the potential, and a way to get rich quick, of the Caribbean tropical coasts, especially with the newly introduced export product, banana. External factors behind the banana business are manifest, but a similarly manifest factor, though much less studied, lies in the *internal* political, cultural and territorial problems of the Central American republics at the beginning of the 1900s. Such nations as Costa Rica were nationally, territorially and mentally fragmented states, and it is this perspective that is more internal than external for the success of the *bananeras.*

The national Central American elites controlled export-oriented businesses such as coffee and cotton production and cattle-breeding. These were key economic and commercial enterprises along the Pacific coast and in the central valleys, controlled by liberal or conservative local elites. In countries such as Costa Rica, the Caribbean coast and lowlands were not understood as truly national territory. It could be claimed that there were 'two nations' inside contemporary Costa Rica.

The territorial and socio-cultural fragmentation of Central America has been analysed in a number of studies (Posas 1993). It has been amply proved how the people of the Pacific coasts and central valleys defined what was national. To make the matter even more focal, in most Central American states the majority of the population lived in the central valleys. Although officially within national territory, the Caribbean territories remained mentally outside the nation. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Hispanic population of the central valleys and the Pacific coast would quip: "a man who makes a trip to the Atlantic coast is a hero, but it he repeats the trip, he is a fool" (Bluttstein 1970:41). For them, the Caribbean signified, and still does, barbarity, Indians, Negroes, diseases, jungle and other frightening 'anti-national' elements.

The internal dualism and fragmentation of the national territory have not been given due attention in explaining the successes of the foreign companies by external factors. The Caribbean coast was, and surprisingly still remains an economic, cultural, mental and political periphery for the dominant Central American national elites. Accordingly, there was little interest to integrate the Caribbean to the nation. An economic reason for this indifference was simply that coffee, the main export product of the central valleys, was still quite a new way of making money. The elites wanted to secure coffee production as their own path to prosperity. Bananas were cultivated in the unknown jungles, inhabited by Africans, Indians and other foreigners (white men who owned the banana business).

The lands sold or rented to the foreigners and the United Fruit Company were not organic parts of the Central American republics. Behind these processes lay not only the racial prejudices, but also the historical construction of a spatially and culturally 'schizophrenic' nation.

The two most powerful political groups, liberals and conservatives, both saw the national and political community as comprising the Hispanic section only. The national, or 'own', project was to cultivate coffee, sugar and cotton, while the production of bananas and other tropical fruit by the Caribbean coast and the lowlands was a 'foreign' project. This was the internal explanation for the easy takeover of the banana production by the multinational companies. If the foreign companies had sought to control the production of, say, coffee, their chances of success would have been much more limited.

This internal explanation also helps to appreciate the ethnic and cultural problems of many Latin American countries. The indigenous and African elements of the 'national cultures' represented the genuine 'Other' of the nation in postcolonial terms. This is reflected also in the writing and periodization of Latin American national historiographies. The Pre-Colombian past is described somewhat briefly in mainstream Latin American national histories as 'Historias Patrias'. And only countries such as Mexico and Peru, which were able to present great indigenous civilisations as 'high cultures' of their past, comparable with ancient European cultures, have included an indigenous chapter in their national histories, even if in quite paternalist or picturesque ways.

In Latin American countries with heavy European migration, such as Argentina, the neglect of all non-European elements was more systematic. Such major nineteenth-century Argentinean liberal intellectuals as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi argued – from quite different standpoints − that a genuine national civilising process required definite and convincing signs of a republican institutionalisation. Their message was clear: eliminate every trace of nomadic cultures, eliminate all vestiges of indigenous peoples and gauchos, and eliminate the 'Bedouins of America' (Cicerchia 2004:670). Especially Sarmiento was an enthusiastic admirer of protestant English colonisation and 'efficiency'. To him, slow economic development and cultural deprivation stemmed from two sources: the Spanish legacy and miscegenation with indigenous peoples. He compared the results of Spanish and English colonisations. The difference in the development between Latin America and North America was, in the opinion of many Latin American liberal nationalists, the result of a difference of civilisation (Bravo 1994:487−500).

The liberals of nineteenth century Latin America did find positive elements for the Hispanic nation from outside, but their disregard of non-European cultures is similar to the attitudes of coffee-growing liberals of Central America. The construction of the Nation could not be heterogeneous or multicultural. Such arguments serve further to heighten the need of an interdisciplinary analysis of external and internal factors, and opens also possibilities for even more radical transdisciplinary research attitude.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Interdisciplinary practices in Latin American Studies

The history of Latin American studies is, without doubt, multi- and interdisciplinary but less transdisciplinary. There are nevertheless a host of interesting possibilities and opportunities to develop area and cultural studies toward a more radical transdisciplinary approach. In this article, I have addressed several ways of systematising some aspects of Latin American studies. These include a request for a democratic learning culture, the use of critical realism in an interdisciplinary way, the combina-tion of internal–external analysis, and the rethinking of quantitative and qualitative analysis and data.

Especially, the opening of the approach of critical realism to inter- or transdiscplinary research practice is needed to combine unlike insights – or even contrasting hypothesis − from different disciplines, consistently along two dimensions: the theoretical-empirical and the meta-theoretical. Theoretical and empirical consistency means ability to combine various explanatory theories in such way that they do not contradict one another. Meta-theoretical consistency is an empirical skill to combine "research techniques, methodology, epistemology, aetiology (study of causality) and ontology such that the way knowledge is derived is consistent with the way the social world is thought to be" (Fleetwood 2008). One example, dis-cussed above, is to combine internal and external factors' analysis, or to combine quantitative and qualitative research tactics.

There are also some more practical issues to be raised. Inter-disciplinary programmes often arise from a shared conviction that the traditional disciplines are unable or even unwilling to address important academic problems. In area studies, the use of interdisciplinarity has a different history. The explanation of complex supra-regional politics and cultures has plainly required an interdisciplinary standpoint.

Interdisciplinary study programmes have also been seen as a remedy to the harmful effects of excessive disciplinary specialisation, but this does not apply to Latin American studies programmes nor to other area study programmes. Interdisciplinarity in area studies has been quite indebted to the empirical field studies of the disciplinary specialists. Without specialists, interdisciplinary Latin Americanists – or any 'interdisciplinarians' − would have little information and few specialised case studies to guide the formulation of research questions. In practice, interdisciplinary and disciplinary collaboration in Latin American issues often results in new ideas and valuable information flows between the participants. Both disciplinarian and interdisciplinarian Latin Americanists have normally been able to share knowledge and work together. The regional focus helps to cross the disciplinary boundaries and leads the research out of the most one-dimensional approaches.

In more institutional terms, interdisciplinary Latin American studies programmes have faced problems if they have not been given sufficient structural autonomy. For example, interdisciplinary posts often come with responsibilities in a traditional discipline, too. And often it is the representatives of the traditional discipline who make the hiring decisions, which means that the most interdisciplinarily-merited candidate is not necessarily nominated. Interdisciplinarity may also be punished in allocating research funding. Although identified as a special merit in the call for funding applications, the research proposals are usually evaluated by distinguished disciplinary scholars inclined to favour strictly disciplenary proposals.

As the traditional budgetary practices at most universities channel resources through the disciplines, many interdisciplinary research areas feel a strong need to become disciplines themselves. Institutional and disciplinary independence allows more freedom for recruitment and for interdisciplinary research, but it can also begin to create disciplinary tendencies inside interdisciplinarity, leading to a never-ending list of definitions what is accepted as interdisciplinary or to an artificial interdisciplinarisation of excellent disciplinary research proposals.

Latin American studies programmes do not need to create a discipline, but Latin Americanists do have to learn to survive as interdisciplinarians. And, if there is success in interdisciplinary development, that could open regional and cultural studies towards a groundbreaking transdisciplinary imagination and innovativeness.

NOTES

[1] Other significant international Latin American Studies conferences are organised by the Latin American Studies Association (LASA; since 1968), the *Federación Internacional de Estudios de América Latina y el Caribe* (FIEALC; since 1978) and the *Consejo Europeo de Investigaciones Sociales de América Latina* (CEISAL; since 1996).

[2] The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) the Spanish acronym, CEPAL (*Comisión Económica para América Latina*) − was established by UN's Economic and Social Council in February 1948 and began to function that same year. The scope of the Commission's work was later broadened to include the countries of the Caribbean, and in 1984, the Economic Council decided to change its name to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); the Spanish acronym, CEPAL, remains unchanged (ECLAC 2010).

[3] Perhaps, to speak about the dependency 'school' is exaggerated. Theoretical and practical approaches of the representatives of the 'school' (such as Fernando Cardoso, Theotonio Dos Santos and Aníbal Quijano) have been quite different.

[4] This kind of collecting of all human information and knowledge approaches the extremist transdisciplinary idea of the 'Fundamental Theory of Human Sciences', explained below.

[5] The nationalist problems of the European Union project are a case in point, although there are signs, too, of stronger federalism.

[6] There are some transdisciplinary networking efforts for 'systematical orders for all human sciences' (sources for networking and structuring of their results). This kind of 'Bio-psycho-social' framework orientation serves to develop the 'Fundamental Theory of Human Sciences' and for transdisciplinary consensus (http://homepage.uibk.ac.at/~c720126/humanethologie/ws/medicus/block1/4BQ_E.pdf, see also Riedl 1984).

[7] See, for example, International Center for Transdisciplinary Research (CIRET) (1994).

[8] I do not want to enter into the discussions which emphasise the uniqueness of the huge potential of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinary research is not antagonistic but complementary to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research, even though it may have more clearly defined goals.

[9] This is also an interesting linguistic and gender issue. For example, in the Finnish language you can tell the joke and use personal pronouns without revealing the gender of the motorcyclist. In the English language, you need to come up with alternative solutions to mask the gender. This is another perspective to the change of viewpoints.

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