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Who needs cultural studies in Colombia?

Eduardo Restrepo

Instituto de Estudios Sociales y Culturales PENSAR, Universidad Javeriana, Bogota, Colombia

ABSTRACT

This article begins with a genealogy of the intellectual landscape in which Cultural Studies arose in Colombia and goes on to describe the specific institutionalization process of a field that today includes seven master's programmes, in addition to proposing a series of factors that have enabled the boom of postgraduate programmes in Cultural Studies in the country. Subsequently, a cartography of five identifiable trends in the field is presented, defining their configurations and tensions. The article closes with a pessimistic tone, arguing for whom cultural studies are needed today in Colombia.

KEYWORDS Master's degree in cultural studies; Colombia; institutionalization of Cultural studies; corporate university; citizenship culture

I don't think one can talk about global cultural studies. There are many people who work within the universe of *cultural studies*, but they do so in very different ways, generating additional differences at its heart.

Stuart Hall ([2007] 2011, p. 13).

Introduction

In a well-known introduction to a collective book, Stuart Hall ([1996]) asks in the title the question 'Who needs "identity"?' With this question, Hall sought to interrupt a naive appeal to the concept of identity by showing its analytical and political limitations, without ignoring the disputes that had been marshaled in its name. The concept of identity, Hall argues in the introduction, should be used 'under erasure' and requires careful theoretical work and historical contextualization in order to distance it from the political erasure that stems from often simplistic approaches that naively celebrate or rule it out.

At least in Colombia, cultural studies has become a frequently used signifier of which it is pertinent to ask who needs it, in what ways is it mobilized, and with what implications. As with identity in the 1990s, the growing circulation in Colombia of a cultural studies signifier, associated with

CONTACT Eduardo Restrepo  eduardoa.restrepo@gmail.com

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increasingly lax and banal content, needs to be interrupted, so as not to ignore its possible relevance in certain types of interventions and disputes. As in Hall, this interruption is not encouraged by a pedantic academicism that seeks smooth and pure definitions from a manual, but by taking the trouble to see how this signifier is increasingly appealed to to maintain culturalist reductionisms and the same privileges as always. This signification of cultural studies, given its strong institutionalization, is not something we can afford to dismiss in Colombia today; it needs to be used 'under erasure'. It demands a series of discussions that can demonstrate what is at stake and for whom in particular. This chapter hopes to contribute to fuelling such discussions.

To address the question of who needs cultural studies in Colombia today, this chapter begins with a coarse approximation to some of the conversations and conditions of possibility that established the intellectual terrain for the emergence of the field. Then some milestones and aspects will be presented of the institutionalization process of Cultural Studies in Colombia, which today extends to seven master's programmes, five of which are located in Bogotá. If we contrast this effervescent institutionalization of programmes deemed as Cultural Studies in Colombia with what happens in the rest of Latin American countries where you can count this type of programme on one hand, what seems to be a peculiarity of the Colombian academic establishment hardly fades from view.

In the third part of the essay, I will suggest a cartography of the five trends that, in my view, can be identified in the actually existing cultural studies of the country. Although biased, it facilitates an understanding of the contrasts between different ways of conceiving and doing cultural studies. Finally, in the conclusion, I close with some arguments about who needs cultural studies today in Colombia, taking into consideration the different places from which it is appropriated and the projects for which it is deployed.

Emergence

When thinking about cultural studies in Colombia, one cannot leave out the figure of Jesús Martín Barbero. Martín Barbero is usually considered one of the iconic authors of Latin American Cultural Studies, along with Néstor García Canclini, Beatriz Sarlo, and Nelly Richard. An interview in which Jesús Martín Barbero stated that cultural studies has been done in Latin America long before this label was coined in Great Britain (Martín Barbero 1996, 2008) is famous. With this approach, he was reacting to a very widespread and naturalized geopolitics of knowledge (Mato 2002) that assume that Latin America is mostly a space for the reception and consumption of theories, rather than a space for generating thought. These Eurocentric diffusionist models

reproduce the historicist assumption of 'first in Europe, then elsewhere' (Chakrabarty [2000] 2008, p. 32). This geopolitics and historicism have often accompanied narratives since the American academic establishment of 'Latin American Cultural Studies' (Richard 2001).

Before subsuming the extensive work of Jesús Martín Barbero in a label such as Latin American Cultural Studies, it is relevant to highlight that his conceptualization of culture as closely related to power relationships is close to the concept of culture-as-power and power-as-culture associated with cultural studies (Hall [2007] 2011). For Jesús Martín Barbero, between culture and politics there are constitutive mediations, since culture not only has to do with signifying practices but, and for this reason, with the maintenance and dispute of social relations and the exercise of power: '[...] the political is precisely an acceptance of the opacity of the social in terms of a conflicting and changing reality, an acknowledgement made through the growth of the mediations network and the struggle for the construction of the meaning of social coexistence' (Martín Barbero 1987, p. 224). This conceptualization of culture and his great sensitivity to popular culture makes Jesús Martín Barbero a particularly important reference for those who, inside and outside Latin America, are interested in the field of cultural studies. However, his work and career transcend, and in many respects question, academic and decontextualized visions of this field (Martín Barbero 2010, p. 146–148).

The contributions of Jesús Martín Barbero were crucial in shaping an area in communication studies that was more interested in mediations as cultural facts than in the media itself. Hence the title of his famous book *From Media to Mediations* (Martín Barbero 1987). These types of inquiries about the relationship between communication and culture did not translate in the eighties or the first half of the nineties into the creation of programmes, publications, or events in Colombia that explicitly invoked the label of Cultural Studies.

A genealogy of the emergence of Cultural Studies in Colombia, in addition to referencing Jesús Martín Barbero, should importantly point out the different facets of critical thought that were expressed in the constitution of social sciences associated with social transformation processes. Indeed, if one considers a political vocation to be a fundamental feature of cultural studies, in Colombia a concern for articulating knowledge from the social sciences and political intervention constitutes a heterogeneous and broad precedent (Bocarejo 2011). Between the sixties and eighties, many initiatives were imagined and deployed around the discussions and practices of militancy and a commitment to different subalternized sectors and classes. Conceptions of an autochthonous science, socially engaged science, militant labour, and solidarity actions are some of the expressions that guided much of the work of students, teachers, and professionals in those days

from different approaches and tensions within the social sciences (Caviedes 2002).

Orlando Fals Borda's name and Participatory Action Research label have had the most visibility to date but are far from being unique. Rather than an isolated voice, Fals Borda belonged to a generation of sociologists, anthropologists, and historians who, from different countries in Latin America, questioned the what for, from where, and for whom social sciences were practiced within our contexts and realities (Fals Borda 1970, Stavenhagen 1971, Vasco 2002). The premises of value neutrality and objectivity were widely denounced as excuses for the cynical distancing promoted by certain metropolitan models of the social sciences that ended up serving the reproduction of social inequality.

Obviously, theoretical language, the scope of criticism, the historical moment, and what is at stake have changed substantially between the sixties and eighties and the time in which the institutionalization of Cultural Studies occurred in 2000s. However, we cannot fail to ignore these trajectories of critical thought and political intervention that resonate, but also have tensions with what is today outlined as a cultural studies-led political vocation (Aparicio 2011, 2012).

Another reference point in the genealogy of the emergence of the institutionalization of Cultural Studies in Colombia were the debates in the social sciences during the 1990s that facilitated an intellectual environment that was sensitive to such theories as post-structuralism and transdisciplinary fields such as subaltern studies, postcolonial studies and, of course, cultural studies. In anthropology, for example, these debates were tied together around the discussion known as 'anthropology in modernity'. Driven by the Colombian Institute of Anthropology (ICAN), modernist anthropology introduced in the mid-1990s a series of theoretical and political criticisms of the more conventional conceptions of anthropology in Colombia that had been ensnared in academicist or salvationist rhetoric and practices of indigenism (Restrepo, Rojas and Saade 2017, p. 30–33).

Institutionally consolidated since the 1940s, Anthropology in Colombia had been predominantly constituted as 'Indiology', not only in those scientific approaches that found in indigenous communities a paradigmatic object, but also in the most critical approaches that collaborated in myriad ways in the name of 'indigenous struggles'. Although they contrasted in their appeal to theoretical models, the first group to functional structuralism and particularism, and the second to Marxist and critical perspectives, both frequently operated from essentialist and idealizing assumptions of radical alterity coded as indigenous cultures, peoples, or nationalities. Their categories of territory and identity often tended toward othering and exoticizing people marked as indigenous, while their methodological strategies, whether ethnographic or engaged-militant-solidarized, frequently levelled heterogeneities,

power relationships, departures, and impurities within these cultures, peoples, or nationalities in the name of tradition, authenticity, and ancestry (Uribe and Restrepo 1997).

By the mid-1990s, modernist anthropology disrupted this common sense within the discipline by appealing to questioning not only Anthropology itself but also categories and debates from contemporary social theory. In particular, authors associated with cultural studies such as Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Néstor García Canclini, and Jesús Martín Barbero were frequently referred to for theoretical elaborations on identity, culture, hegemony, and social movements. Anthropologists who have been considered, rightly or not, to be part of cultural studies (Arturo Escobar, Joanne Rappaport, Peter Wade, or Michel Taussig, among others) were also references in the theoretical patchwork of the anthropology of modernity.

ICAN created a book collection entitled *Antropología en la modernidad* [*Anthropology in Modernity*]. The objective of this collection was to position on the country's anthropological stage a series of discussions, approaches, problems, and authors as intellectual inputs for an anthropological current capable of critically addressing the most dissimilar cultural problems of contemporary societies. The State, development, modernity, multiculturalism, identity, capital, memory politics, and social movements were some of the topics addressed in the books in the collection (See Uribe and Restrepo 1997, Sotomayor 1998, Escobar 1999, Gnecco and Zambrano 2000, Gros 2000).

Without a doubt, a relevant reference for the positioning of the Cultural Studies label within the academic establishment in Colombia can be traced to the realization of three colloquiums organized toward the end of the 1990s by the National University's CES and the then recently created Ministry of Culture, two of them in the Luis Ángel Arango Library and the third in the Universidad Nacional campus in Medellín. These colloquiums were held within the framework of the international and interdisciplinary Cultural Studies on Latin America programme, proposed by Carlos Rincón to the CES in 1997, and from which three books resulted: *Cultura, política y modernidad* [*Culture, Politics, and Modernity*] (1998), *Cultura, medios y sociedad* [*Culture, Media, and Society*] (1998), and *Cultura y globalización* [*Culture and Globalization*] (1999). With broad participation from attendees and speakers such as Hugo Achugar, Fabio López de la Roche, German Muñoz, Carlos Monsivais, Ana María Ochoa, Zandra Pedraza, Nelly Richard, William Rowe, Beatriz Sarlo, and José Fernando Serrano, among others, these colloquiums contributed to positioning in the country's academic and governmental agenda discussions and authors that are still today commonly enunciated within the field of Cultural Studies.

By 2001, the Ministry of Culture published a collection entitled *Cuadernos de nación*, lending continuity to thematic and theoretical approaches to the

relationship between nation and culture in tune with Cultural Studies. Six booklets were published: *Imagaries of the Nation* (coordinated by Jesús Marín Barbero), *Light Narratives and Memories of the Nation* (coordinated by Omar Rincón), *Anglo-Saxon Perspectives on the Nation Debate* (coordinated by Erna von der Walde), *Music in Transition* (coordinated by Ana María Ochoa and Alejandra Cragolini), and *Nation and Contemporary Society and Beauty, Soccer, and Popular Religiosity* (coordinated by Ingrid Bolívar, Germán Ferro, and Andrés Dávila). Among the authors found in the *Cuadernos de nación*, in addition to the texts by the coordinators, are Hugo Achugar, Julio Arias, Roger Bartra, Homi Bhabha, Néstor García Canclini, Carlos Monsiváis, Renato Ortiz, Beatriz Sarlo and Zigmunt Bauman.

Another debate within the social sciences that is relevant to a genealogy of the emergence of Cultural Studies in Colombia was expressed in a series of events and publications carried out in the late 1990s by the Pensar Institute (Instituto Pensar) of the Universidad Javeriana. On the one hand, there was a series of events organized by the Pensar Institute between 1998 and 2002: 'The Restructuring of the Social Sciences in Andean countries' (October 13–15 of 1999), the 'First International Workshops on Cultural Studies: the Social Construction of Culture' (August 15–18 of 2000), a 'Specialization in Latin American Cultural Studies' (May 4–June 24, 2001),¹ the 'International Seminar on Critical Theories and Social Emancipation in the New World Order' (April–May 2001) and the 'National Symposium on 19th Century Colombia: Culture and Modernity' (August 28–30, 2002). These events enjoyed broad participation and brought together for the first time at the Universidad Javeriana names associated with contemporary critical social theory in general and with cultural studies in particular (Zoad 2011, Camelo 2016, Valderrama, and Roche 2017).²

In addition to these events, the Pensar Institute spearheaded a series of publications in the *New Cartographies* collection, which includes book collections such as: *Thinking (from) the Interstices* (ed. Santiago Castro-Gómez, Oscar Guardiola and Carmen Millán de Benavides. Bogotá: JSCA, 1999); *The Restructuring of Social Sciences in Latin America* (ed. Santiago Castro-Gómez. Bogotá: CEJA, 2000); *Cultural Maps for Latin America: Hybrid Cultures, Non-Simultaneity, Peripheral Modernity* (ed. Sarah de Mojica, Bogotá, JSCA, 2001); *Challenges of Transdisciplinarity* (eds. Alberto Flórez-Malagón and Carmen Millán de Benavides, Bogotá: CEJA, 2002); *Constellations and Networks: Critical and Cultural Literature in Turbulent Times* (ed. Sarah de Mojica, Bogotá: CEJA, 2002); *Thinking (in) Gender. Theory and Practice for a New Mapping of the Body* (eds. Carmen Millán de Benavides and Ángela María Estrada, Bogotá: CEJA, 2003); *19th Century Thinking: Culture, Biopolitics and Modernity in Colombia* (ed. Santiago Castro-Gómez, Bogotá -Pittsburg, ILLA 2004).

By questioning the theoretical-methodological limitations of some disciplines born of divisions in intellectual work in the late nineteenth and first

half of the twentieth century in order to account for the cultural and social phenomena associated with the complex transformations of the contemporary world, these events and publications advocated for a restructuring of the social sciences. This questioning largely goes back to the concepts in the book *Open the Social Sciences* by Immanuel Wallerstein *et al.* (1996). For the authors of this book, what they call Cultural Studies is a broad field that ought to cancel the current disciplinary distinctions that arose with the division of intellectual work and the academic establishment in the nineteenth century and in which the economic and political transformations of the world system during the second half of the twentieth century would lead to many of the premises and conditions of their existence being questioned.

In this debate advanced by the Instituto Pensar, then, the traces of what would be named Cultural Studies in Colombia have a philosophical imprint that includes questioning the disciplinary enclosures of the social sciences along with an appeal to a Latin American tradition in terms of postcolonial theory.

In the group of academics who led these events and publications from the Pensar Institute was Santiago Castro-Gómez, the most relevant and constant figure in the institutionalization of Cultural Studies. In an interview published in the *Tabula Rasa* journal, Castro-Gómez talks about his intellectual career which began with his education in philosophy at the Santo Tomas University in the eighties, where he focused on Latin American philosophy. He then indicates the relevance of his postgraduate studies in the beginning of the nineties in Germany where, under the theme of 'postmodernity on the periphery' and what was already back then called the 'cultural turn in theory', he was introduced to a series of authors associated with Latin American Cultural Studies. In this context, the influence of Edward Said's work was substantial in what would be his first book, *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana [Critique of Latin American Reason]*. 'My conclusion [of the book] is that, like the Orientalism Said speaks of, Latin Americanism is nothing more than a "colonial discourse"' (Castro Gómez 2009, p. 381).

In a more recent interview, Santiago Castro-Gómez narrates this trajectory in the following terms:

My first introduction to Cultural Studies was not at the Javeriana, not even in Colombia, it was in Germany while doing my master's studies in philosophy in the city of Tübingen. *That was my first contact with what at that time was not yet called Cultural Studies, it was more like cultural theory from Latin America.* We are talking about the works of Grunner, Yudice, Garcia-Canclini, Oppenheim, etc. [...] It was together with a couple of professors in Germany and one friend in particular who is Erna von der Walde, who was my first contact. I'm talking here about in or around 1993. [This was the] reflection from which my book *Critique of Latin American Reason* came (cited in Valderama and Roche 2017, p. 17; emphasis is the authors').³

In the configuration of an intellectual terrain conducive to the emergence and positioning of the significance of Cultural Studies in Colombia, the contributions of two journals cannot fail to be noted: *Nómadas* of the Universidad Central and *Tabula Rasa* of the Universidad Colegio Mayor de Cundinamarca. Both journals have promoted positioning contemporary and transdisciplinary theoretical approaches in addressing issues that, rightly or not, are often associated with Cultural Studies.⁴

The first issue of *Nómadas* appeared in 1994, and from then until now, this journal has been a relevant stage for intellectual exercise; the last twenty-five years of the country's academic establishment is recorded in the pages of the *Nómadas* journal. With its fifty published issues, readers have encountered themes and approaches that appeared or were positioned in the second half of the nineties and during the new millennium. Articles that are identified as having been written from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and the decolonial turn are published along with some written from the disciplines of the social and human sciences to think about problems such as modernity, identities, gender, youth, knowledge, conflicts, the university and research, among others. Many of these contributions are the result of investigative work carried out within the Universidad Central: first by the DIUC (Universidad Central Department of Research) and then by the IESCO-UC (Universidad Central Institute of Contemporary Social Studies). Others are contributions of different academic figures from the country and abroad, with more than a few of them being central to their respective fields on which their articles are based.

In its pages have appeared the texts of authors who have been professors of the master's programmes in Cultural Studies in Colombia, such as Ochy Curiel, María Teresa Garzón, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Fabio López de la Roche, German Muñoz, Zandra Pedraza, Eduardo Restrepo, Gabriel Restrepo, Víctor Manuel Rodríguez, and Erna von der Walde, among many others. In addition, there are several published articles of figures in Latin American Cultural Studies such as Jesús Martín Barbero, Ana María Ochoa, Alejandro Grimson, and Rossana Reguillo, as well as DIUC researchers (now IESCO) such as Humberto Cubides, Manuel Roberto Escobar, Gisela Daza, Dairo Sánchez, José Fernando Serrano, and Mónica Zuleta.

For its part, the first issue of *Tabula Rasa* appeared in 2003. Since then, in the 33 issues published, *Tabula Rasa* has been the journal with the most translations, interviews, and articles explicitly related to cultural studies. *Tabula Rasa* has also been the most important setting for positioning authors and texts referencing the decolonial turn, central to what has been imagined as one of the pillars of Cultural Studies. Many of the professors and graduates of the master's programmes in Cultural Studies in the country have published the results of their research or different reflections on its characteristics and practice in *Tabula Rasa*. This has meant that the

journal has positioned themes and authors from, and references to, cultural studies, offering dissimilar inputs for teaching and researching in this field.

Institutionalization

The institutionalization of postgraduate Cultural Studies began with a specialization programme at the Universidad Javeriana in 2002, which would give rise to the master's in 2007. In 2004, the master's at Universidad Nacional began, in 2008 at Universidad de los Andes, in 2016 at the Universidad Católica in Pereira (the first one outside Bogotá), in 2017 at the Universidad del Bosque and, finally, this year, the first cohort of the master's at the Universidad Tecnológica opened in Pereira.⁵ For its part, Universidad de los Llanos in Villavicencio is internally processing the creation of a new master's degree in Cultural Studies, which is expected to begin classes shortly. Add to these in-person programmes, the opening of the first online master's degree at the Universidad Javeriana.

This means that today in Colombia there are seven master's in Cultural Studies, without counting other programmes that are, or imagine themselves to be, very close to Cultural Studies, such as the master's in Contemporary Social Problems at the IESCO-Universidad Central, the master's in Social Studies at the Universidad del Rosario, or the master's in Intercultural Studies at the Universidad del Cauca, among many others (Table 1).

Referencing the growing number of master's in Cultural Studies in Colombia could give the impression that the process of creating these programmes has been easy. Nothing is further from reality, at least for the majority. A recounting, for example, of the twists and turns of the creation of programmes such as the specialization at the Javeriana or the master's at the Universidad Nacional merits its own article (See López and Robledo 2003, Arias and Torres 2010, Zoad 2011, Valderrama and Roche 2017).

For the purposes of this text, it suffices to point out two major sources of these impasses. On the one hand are the bureaucratic obstacles and inertia entailing years-long delays, the demand of oceans of forms, meetings, and protocols to follow in order to satisfy sometimes convoluted whims before

Table 1. Master's degrees that are called cultural studies.

University	Program Name	Inauguration
Javeriana	Specialization in Cultural Studies	2002
	Master's in Cultural Studies	2007
	Online Master's in Latin American Cultural Studies	2019
Nacional	Master's in Cultural Studies	2005
Los Andes	Master's in Cultural Studies	2008
Católica de Pereira	Master's in Cultural Studies	2016
El Bosque	Master's in Social & Cultural Studies	2017
Tecnológica de Pereira	Master's in Contemporary Cultural and Narrative Studies	2019

these programmes could finally be approved. On the other, the ignorance and disciplinary patriotisms of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political scientists, and literary scholars with some sway in the spheres of university decision-making delayed or belittled the birth of these programmes, which have often been read as a threat or affront to their established disciplinary certainties, long-since implanted and settled in the academic establishment.

Now, what can be rightly considered an upsurge in the institutionalization around the label of Cultural Studies was a response to at least three favourable factors. One of the most decisive has been the transformation of the university system in Colombia, until the 1990s predominantly composed of disciplinary undergraduate programmes, toward one in which postgraduate degrees (master's and doctorates) began to have more weight and in which interdisciplinary proposals acquired a great deal of strength.⁶ Interdisciplinarity is a narrative that, together with those of 'internationalization' and 'quality', have spellbound the university's bureaucracy. Not only is it an empty signifier that legitimizes certain transformations that are resorted to in the most dissimilar of ways, but because, in the context of structural adjustment and the neoliberalization of the university, interdisciplinarity is read by bureaucracy as a form of economic efficiency.

Since there were almost no postgraduate degrees in the social sciences until the mid-1990s, academic and professional training was largely administered in undergraduate programmes. In addition to qualitative and quantitative research courses, theses were demanding and writing them took several years. In Anthropology or Sociology, for example, theses entailed substantial periods in the field, while in History, theses demanded dedicated archival work. Many of the theses that were afforded distinction by thesis committees were published as books and are today still references in the social sciences in the country.

With the argument that one cannot investigate as an undergraduate and by contrasting our robust undergraduate studies with those of the United States and Europe (which, with their very different traditions and academic establishment have never had strong undergraduate programmes), a transformation of the university system in the country was pushed through to create postgraduates by belittling and 'mediocritizing' our undergraduate programmes, all the while infantilizing students. This meant that universities in the late nineties and early two thousands were oriented toward the frantic creation of postgraduate degrees (specializations, master's and doctorates). It is in this unfortunate framework that Cultural Studies programmes appeared in Colombia.

The second factor that favoured the emergence of these postgraduate programmes in Cultural Studies has to do with the return of a generation of academics to the country who had studied abroad, some of whom brought with them references from transdisciplinary fields such as gender

studies, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and cultural studies. As driving forces or participants in the discussions that were taking place in the country at the Ministry of Culture, the CES of the Universidad Nacional, the ICAN, the DIUC, and the Pensar Institute, among others, these academics played an important role in the consolidation of an intellectual domain conducive to what would be the institutionalization of Cultural Studies. Some of them were even the promoters of the creation of postgraduate programmes in Cultural Studies and the authors of articles and books related to the field, as well as the first professors educating the pioneer cohorts of these postgraduate programmes.

Finally, a third factor is the political positioning of culture and the cultural since the mid-1990s in the governmental imaginary and the common wisdom of broad social sectors. In 1997, the Ministry of Culture was created, thus organizing a cultural sector that had been in the hands of an institute (Colcultura) belonging to the Ministry of Education. This meant that culture acquired greater centrality in public policies surrounding culture and the implementation of a national, provincial, and local network of entities and bureaucracies to embody them.

For its part, during the first administration of Antanas Mockus (1995–1998), the appeal to ‘citizenship culture’ was fundamental to government policies from the top of the Bogotá mayor’s office. Since then, appealing to citizenship culture has become a government strategy in many cities of the country and has managed to question the deeply held sense of coexistence and wellbeing of many Colombians. At present, and practically without any challenge, the citizenship culture market has considerably expanded, producing countless studies and experts, statistics and practices, with substantial investments of public and private funds. Few discourses have achieved such a degree of naturalization in as relatively short of a time as those promoted in the name of citizenship culture.

These are just two examples of the political positioning of culture and the cultural since the mid-1990s that produced an unusual interest and appreciation, as well as a sudden demand for individuals trained in the countless needs associated with the creation of cultural entities, programmes, and policies in the country. Culture began to embody new meanings, but above all it opened a hardly insignificant job spectrum. In the social imaginary, Anthropology has remained very much linked to indigenous populations. This is why the emerging fantasies and anxieties around the culture of bureaucrats in the academic and governmental establishment, as well as of individuals seeking postgraduate degrees, could be more expeditiously galvanized from master’s degrees that were enunciated as Cultural Studies rather than as Anthropology.

The combination of these three factors allows us to understand, then, why these programmes were created in three of the most visible universities and

in the country's capital. The institutionalization of Cultural Studies is done from *above*, that is, for postgraduates and from the *center* of the most privileged in the academic system. Therefore, as Axel Rojas points out, elitism and centralism are in its origin markings:

If we look at the process of the institutionalization of Cultural Studies in Colombia, we will see that it has been concentrated in the academic realm in the capital and in postgraduate programs, which could be leading to an elitization and centralization of cultural studies that, curiously, seems to contradict its own discourse. Seen from this perspective, it seems that it was about an interesting opportunity for universities, hustling to consolidate their postgraduate program offering and benefit institutionalism, in a market that responds favorably to imported labels and proven success and prestige in other latitudes; furthermore, the traditions and correlation of forces within higher education institutions are also decisive (2011, p. 84).

Even at the Universidad Nacional, the only public university in Bogotá that offers a master's in Cultural Studies, postgraduate courses are not easily accessible to the bulk of Colombians. Tuition fees, even at the Nacional, are unpayable for many, which has helped establish social class divisions in the majority of practitioners of cultural studies in the country. This class division in the institutionalization of Cultural Studies does not mean, of course, that the field must be hopelessly mired in the mechanisms that reproduce such privileges. Such mechanisms, of course, neither suppose a shutting down nor a guarantee for its possible evolutions. But neither are Cultural Studies practiced with impunity from these places of privilege and class divisions, as is evident in its more aestheticist, self-absorbed, and textualist derivations.

Trends

To understand who needs cultural studies in Colombia today, it is relevant to carry out a mapping, even if provisionally, partially, and incompletely, of how *actually existing Cultural Studies* have been imagined and embodied in the country. In this regard, from a schematic view, there are five major trends, identifiable either in explicit assertions and pronouncements, or by what is at stake in the work of practitioners of cultural studies in Colombia.

This mapping of the field into five trends should be read as an analytical proposal that underlines the largest contrasts, leaving aside an examination of their blending and confluence. Thus, although some authors, research, or institutionalization processes can be associated with a trend, in general these trends mix in different ways within a single author, investigation, or process. This does not mean, of course, that the mapping proposed here is not relevant for understanding the particular configuration of the field and its tensions.

Like any other cartography or description, the presentation of these five trends of actual existing Cultural Studies in Colombia today is not a disinterested one. It goes without saying that my own identification with one of the tendencies can have the effect of obliterating complexities and nuances that could be endorsed by the other four. I hope, however, that I can show that there are existing differences in the field and that these differences matter depending on what one intends to do.

A first trend considers Cultural Studies to be comparable to (interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary) studies *about* culture. In this trend, Cultural Studies would be a heterogeneous and plural field of study whose object would be culture, but unlike what is done in disciplinary fields such as Anthropology or Sociology, it is the very interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity that defines Cultural Studies. From this perspective, it is argued that interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity (depending on the parlance) is part of what defines these Cultural Studies. It emphasizes that Cultural Studies is an open field, without restrictions of any kind.

From this trend, visual, gender, and communication studies tend to be conducted as if they were by default cultural studies, as well as certain discourse analyses and more or less elaborate textual hermeneutics. The political, when it appears, is often limited to a dimension of the experience of individuals and collectivities with 'non-normative' sexualities or experiences. In addition to an aesthetic or textualist emphasis, the investigations and authors that resonate with this trend make use of introspective exercises of personal experiences that they usually (erratically) call self-ethnography. Although not exclusively, in the Universidad de los Andes, research from this leaning is more frequent, given the stamp of discourse analysis on the master's.

A second trend is defined by an overlapping of Cultural Studies with high contemporary cultural/political theory. Names such as Deleuze, Foucault, Negri, Agamben, Zizek, Derrida, Haraway, Butler, or Lazzarato and certain categories, such as governmentality, biopolitics, fault lines, modest witness, or apparatuses of capture are often invoked in this trend. There is great emphasis on conceptual cerebration and their empirical approaches are assumed as illustrations of a concept derived from one of these renowned authors. The idea of transdisciplinarity is often appealed to as overcoming the disciplines, which are imagined as obsolete relics of a nineteenth-century academic establishment. Cultural Studies are identified as that transdisciplinary field that allows us to adequately address culture in times of globalization.

Practitioners of this type of Cultural Studies tend to operate at high levels of abstraction; they get really excited about high theory. They thus evoke a certain resemblance to philosophical styles of approximation where exercises in winding commentary and detailed footnotes appear in their eyes as 'the theory'. The empirical approaches or the appeal to social practices are

subsumed to a place of proving their valued conceptual games, consisting of displays of intertextuality between authors and theories, which generally result in the coining of a new concept or in showing the inadequacies of some theoretical approaches.

This tendency usually emphasizes the political nature of Cultural Studies, although in practice they understand the political as studying certain themes (where examining relationships of power and resistance are central) and the supposed 'critical perspective' with which the work is advanced. A blunt illuminism and what could be called a theoretical avant-garde strongly feed this trend, where the political tends to be a self-pleasing gesture with no firmer footing in the world. The Universidad Javeriana is particularly plagued by these exercises, especially since many of its professors defend an idea of academic labour that passes over contemptuous empirical and contextual anchors that, in light of their imagination of what 'theory' is, appear to them to be the entelechies of a naive disciplinary positivism or as the evident proof of an absence of theoretical rigour, a crude appeal to description and subjectivity which has no greater place in their conception of Cultural Studies.

A third tendency is characterized by the consideration that Cultural Studies is a criticism of the Eurocentric academic establishment, as well as an un-discipline (or anti-discipline) and intervention of subalternized sectors such as indigenous and Afro-descendant people. In this sense, Cultural Studies is considered a political project that is not limited to bland academic exercises, and which seeks to emerge in the 'real world', in 'reality', where communities or subaltern individuals or sectors are located. In this trend, Cultural Studies are often conceived of as *Intercultural Studies*. Thus, the questioning of Eurocentrism and the place of the 'hegemonic' academic establishment that has blocked 'other epistemologies', 'other worlds', and 'other ontologies' is central to this trend in Cultural Studies. Although in some respects they conceptually feed on postcolonial theory and subaltern studies, the impact of conceptualizations associated with the decolonial turn (also known as the decolonial option or the modernity/coloniality group, among others) is much more visible.

Some of the graduates of the Doctorate in Latin American Cultural Studies at the Universidad Andina in Quito who teach courses in different master's programmes in Colombia, are the proponents of this trend. The concepts with which they operate (modernity/coloniality, decoloniality, coloniality of power, zero-point hybris, interculturality, transmodernity, othered epistemologies, among many others) and the authors whom they repeatedly refer to (Quijano, Dussel, Mignolo, Grosfoguel, and Walsh), as well as certain rhetorical strategies deployed from a series of pure and contrasting moral and epistemic dichotomies, operate as clear markings of the exercises advanced within this trend. Although it should be noted that many of those who

identify with the decolonial turn are outside the field of Cultural Studies, this does not mean that there is not a significant number of people who do so while achieving some influence and visibility within the field. In the Universidad Nacional, the Javeriana, and the Universidad Católica of Pereira there are professors who passionately embody this trend and, consequently, the production of such courses, events, and theses can be traced to them.

The fourth trend argues that Cultural Studies assume *specificity*, so they are not equivalent to studies *about* culture. This specificity within the field implies that, although Cultural Studies has been (and is expected to be) many things, not just anything is Cultural Studies. From this perspective, specificity in Cultural Studies is not provided by a given theme, author, or technique, but by a *style of intellectual work* characterized by an emphasis on the exercise of radical contextualism in its approaches and its interest in the mundane, unrest, and the heterogeneity of the concrete from empirically oriented studies.

This style of intellectual work does not have a goal of theorizing for its sake or the production of abstract knowledge, but of better understanding and conceptualization of the concrete to enable and catalyze situated and eviscerating political interventions on the part of a complex and contradictory us in the world (understanding the academic establishment as part of the world, but not as *the* world). Political intervention, from this perspective, is not defined by salvationist rhetoric on behalf of subalternized others, nor does it assume the certainties of illuminist positions that tell the 'stupid' or 'ignorant' people how to understand and what they should do to transform their lot. It offers neither solutions nor appeals to reductionistic certainties or aesthetic closures, but rather it further problematizes and complicates the world; it does not rest in the subalternizing or othering guarantees of self-absorbed complaint, but catalyzes personal discomforts seeking articulation with the forces and disputes of dissimilar subjects, beyond the writing of thoughtful texts.

In this trend, Cultural Studies is an intellectual and political project inspired by Stuart Hall, not because he considers that Cultural Studies is limited to mythological narratives about the 'Birmingham School', but because his work is a pertinent reference point for the analytical and political edge that Cultural Studies can involve. Professors and graduates of the Universidad Javeriana have driven this trend the most in the field of Cultural Studies in Colombia, but they are not the only ones. At the Universidad Católica of Pereira, the Universidad Nacional, and even at the Universidad de los Andes, imprints of this trend can also be traced.

In recent years, a fifth trend has been positioned that appeals to sensory and emotional experiences which are enunciated as alternatives to the narrow academism that, from this perspective, prevails in the university establishment. Experimentation with, and distancing from, the dominant

academic protocols such as writing and publications strongly mark this trend in the field of Cultural Studies in Colombia. What for some might appear as a lack of the most elementary academic rigour or even basic argumentative intelligibility is part of what, for its proponents, constitutes the novel ways of knowing, experiencing and expressing one's situated individuality, experientially and emotionally.

Sensitivity and the visual, which seek to break the epistemic obstacles of phallogocentrism and the authoritarian limitations of the scriptural, are approached with digital narratives and corporeal cartographies to enable other ways of knowing and aesthetically experiencing the world. From this point of view, it is often argued that from these 'proposals' and 'turns' derives a political, transdisciplinary, and transgressive character. The Universidad Javeriana, especially, but also the Universidad de los Andes seem to be the programmes where this aspect of Cultural Studies has most permeated.

In terms of theses alone, the field of Cultural Studies in Colombia has almost three hundred. Many are quite good, subscribing to one or more of the trends indicated. There are also more than a few theses that can easily be considered deficient, not only in the criteria deriving from any of the indicated trends, but also in the basic expectations of a postgraduate thesis. In terms of published articles and books, as well as papers and reports, there is plenty of trash written in the name of Cultural Studies, which should not blur the valuable contributions of other publications or research.

To conclude this section, I consider that there are two clearly distinguishable ways of inhabiting the field of Cultural Studies in Colombia. For some, Cultural Studies is a field they move in because it suits them for other types of projects ranging from other ways of understanding their political role to the accumulation of academic capital or job security. They could inhabit this field or another; in the end their projects do not necessarily pass for what has become articulated as Cultural Studies. In extreme cases (which are not few), it seems that they have not even bothered to understand what Cultural Studies is, since for them it is actually irrelevant.

For others, however, Cultural Studies 'involves them'. From this position, Cultural Studies matter because the field's turf is intellectually and politically relevant. Therefore, Cultural Studies is not simply and easily substitutable by any other intellectual project, nor does it become a contingent excuse to accumulate academic capital or maintain a salary. Although the field of Cultural Studies is not understood as an end in itself, its consolidation and the dispute of what is done in its name matters as part of an intellectual project that does not close itself off in the name of a conception of the political that is not thought of apart from as an intellectual exercise.

Conclusions

After this rough genealogical sketch of the intellectual terrain from which Cultural Studies emerged, outlining some arguments in the process and characteristics of its institutionalization and, finally, making a cartography of vested interest of the trends of truly existing Cultural Studies, it is then worth asking: who needs cultural studies in Colombia?

For starters, Cultural Studies has operated successfully within the framework of the more conventional academic establishment. It constitutes good business for some universities-companies, including the Universidad Nacional. This is known by the academic bureaucracies that operate under a logic spanning the crudest indicators of profitability to the more sophisticated repetitive classification of their universities on 'quality' lists, which say rather a lot about the effects and substance of their feverish submission to the capricious demands of Colciencias and all the geopolitical knowledge apparatuses.

In the same vein, Cultural Studies has helped a number of academics position their careers, some achieving good stable jobs in prestigious universities where, in general, not much is required of them and they can settle in cavalierly for years. Among these academics, it is worth mentioning some originating from the Global North, whether bodily or mentally, who, with or without training in Cultural Studies, have become professors of these programmes. Textualism, academization, and banalization prevail among not a few of these comfortable academics.

One cannot fail to mention those figures that have managed to accumulate significant amounts of symbolic capital by inhabiting, sometimes opportunistically, the field of Cultural Studies. Their prestige seems to lie in the popular adage: 'In the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king!' Of course, not everyone enjoys such privileges or earns so many returns in the name of Cultural Studies. There is also a kind of reserve army, many of them graduates of the existing programmes, who teach classes as lecturers in different universities, not necessarily in the master's of Cultural Studies, in conditions of increasing precariousness.

Outside the academic establishment, cultural studies serve a group of State and NGO officials, whilst setting them up as experts to hold positions in entities, programmes, and projects related to culture or the cultural. The entire framework of the governmentalization of culture (which is not limited to the State) is fed, among others, by graduates of the master's in Cultural Studies who, either because of constraints in their positions or a poverty of imagination, can really do little or nothing to disrupt the relations of power and domination that unfold in the name of culture and the cultural. Of course, they manage to reproduce their existence materially, a few with job stability while the majority move in the draconian dynamics of contractors. From this

place, cultural studies, with the passing years, becomes a hazy reference since everyday life is defined by the often tedious eight-to-five workdays destined for meetings, filling out forms, and delivering dull reports that tend to stunt any spark of theoretical and political imagination.

As cannot but fail to be evident to the reader at this stage of the exhibition, a strong pessimism runs through my reading of who Cultural Studies serves in Colombia today. This does not mean that I do not acknowledge its enormous potential, especially to upset the vast majority of students who end up problematized, with questions and discomforts that many did not once have. Nor do I wish to ignore the handful of practitioners who have found inspiration in this field for an intellectual and political style of work. Of course, Cultural Studies can still become a hardly insignificant *trench* from which the certainties and right-wing practices of the academy can be disturbed, and from which certain articulations of studying the world to transform it can be enhanced. But for this, it is vital to interrupt the banalizations and opportunisms that are installed in the name of Cultural Studies. Therefore, we must not cease taking it on from under erasure.

Notes

1. This specialization was comprised of four modules: (1) Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies, (2) Cultural Politics and Social Movements in Latin America, (3) Globalization and Culture, and (4) Literature and Cultural Studies in Latin America. These modules were led, respectively, by professors Alberto Moreiras (Duke University), Catherine Walsh (Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito), Daniel Mato (Universidad Central de Venezuela) and Mabel Moraña (University of Pittsburgh).
2. Some of the participants were Fernando Coronil, Michael Hardt, Ernesto Laclau, Edgardo Lander, Linda Martín Alcoff, Eduardo Mendieta, Walter Mignolo, Mabel Moraña, Alberto Moreiras, Carlos Rincón, Aníbal Quijano, Freya Shiwuy and Catherine Walsh, among others.
3. At the commemoration of the ten-year anniversary of the Master of Cultural Studies on October 20, 2017, Santiago Castro Gómez introduced in his talk a hitherto unused narrative connecting his work and positions and that of other participants from the Pensar Institute with a tradition of socialist thought in Colombia. It is very interesting to examine the narrative transformations of how authors like Castro Gómez are portrayed during the emergence of Cultural Studies. Following Stuart Hall ([1985] 2010, p. 213–216), one can see how the past is largely invented by the narratives we make with the interests and positions of the present.
4. This does not mean that these are the only ones. Journals such as the *Journal of Cultural Studies* from Universidad de los Andes have dedicated special issues to Cultural Studies or have published articles associated with the field.
5. At the Universidad de Los Andes there is an undergraduate programme in the Department of Languages and Culture in which one can opt for an emphasis on Cultural Studies, which means that one has to take a series of courses in the area of Cultural Studies taught by professors affiliated with the aster's, in addition to

all the Social Science subjects and general courses offered to the university. The programme webpage indicates that students who take the concentration in Cultural Studies (the other two are in Pedagogy and second foreign language), will be trained to go on to continue their postgraduate studies in '[...] master's in Cultural Studies, *American Studies*, *British Studies*, Latin American and related studies and cultural management'.

6. For a more detailed examination of these transformations, see Restrepo (2019).

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Notes on contributor

Eduardo Restrepo Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo is the 2019 recipient of the *Cultural Studies* and Stuart Hall Foundation/Routledge Award for Early Career Researchers. He graduated from the University of Antioquia (Medellín, 1996) with a Masters, followed by Doctoral studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is Professor of the Department of Cultural Studies of the Javeriana University in Bogotá, and is currently the director of the Master of Latin American Cultural Studies and the Master in Afro-Colombian Studies. He has co-edited the Spanish edition of a compilation of 26 articles by Stuart Hall (*Sin garantías: trayectorias y problemáticas en estudios culturales*, Bogota: Instituto Pensar, 2010) and is editor of the book *Stuart Hall desde el sur: legados y apropiaciones* (Buenos Aires: Clacso, 2014). Restrepo's lines of research include studies referring to Afro-Colombian populations, with particular interest in the Colombian Pacific region. Ethnisation and racialisation processes, as well as representation policies and black political subjectivities, are some of the issues addressed in his publications. He has also been interested in the geopolitics of knowledge and processes of location that shape disciplinary fields such as anthropology, or transdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies. Email: restrepoe@javeriana.edu.co

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