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# Conviviality in Unequal Societies: Perspectives from Latin America

## Thematic Scope and Preliminary Research Programme

Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies

in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America



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## **Conviviality in Unequal Societies: Perspectives from Latin America**

### **Thematic Scope and Preliminary Research Programme**

The Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America

#### **Abstract**

The Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America (Mecila) will study past and present forms of social, political, religious and cultural conviviality, above all in Latin America and the Caribbean while also considering comparisons and interdependencies between this region and other parts of the world. Conviviality, for the purpose of Mecila, is an analytical concept to circumscribe ways of living together in concrete contexts. Therefore, conviviality admits gradations – from more horizontal forms to highly asymmetrical convivial models. By linking studies about interclass, interethnic, intercultural, interreligious and gender relations in Latin America and the Caribbean with international studies about conviviality, Mecila strives to establish an innovative exchange with benefits for both European and Latin American research. The focus on convivial contexts in Latin America and the Caribbean broadens the horizon of conviviality research, which is often limited to the contemporary European context. By establishing a link to research on conviviality, studies related to Latin America gain visibility, influence and impact given the political and analytical urgency that accompanies discussions about coexistence with differences in European and North American societies, which are currently confronted with increasing socio-economic and power inequalities and intercultural and interreligious conflicts.

**Keywords:** conviviality | inequality | Latin America

#### **About the Author**

The Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America (Mecila) is based on a consortium consisting of three German partners (Freie Universität Berlin, Universität zu Köln and Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut) and four Latin American partners (Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP), Instituto de Investigaciones en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales (IdIHCS of CONICET/Universidad Nacional de La Plata) and El Colegio de México (COLMEX)).

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## **1. Research Issue and Theoretical-analytical Framework**

### **1.1 The Challenge of Coexistence in Diverse and Unequal Societies**

Since the emergence of modern nation states, most interethnic, cultural and religious conflicts have tended to be circumscribed and regulated within national territorial borders, notwithstanding the fact that since the beginning of European colonial expansion, the challenges of diversity came to have a global dimension. Today, however, the compression of space-time relations has made new conflicts ubiquitous and impossible to understand and manage considering only their local or national configurations.

Diversity itself has assumed more complex configurations to the extent that cultural life-forms and categories of ascription and self-identification multiply and intersect, as the debate on intersectionality has shown (Céleri et. al. 2013). Accordingly, individual or group self-representations following gender, ethnic, religious and other categories become more and more intertwined with positions occupied by individuals or groups of individuals in social and power structures. This logical and structural coupling between processes of production and reproduction of inequalities and processes of construction and reproduction of differences represents a current analytical challenge since traditionally the spheres of recognition (of differences) have been studied in a separate way from redistributive struggles (Fraser and Honneth 2003).

In order to overcome this analytical blind spot, it is necessary to link two different fields of research which have been so far disconnected: inequality research, which focuses on distances between groups or individuals concerning the possession of socially valuable goods and power resources (Kreckel 2004), and diversity research dedicated to analysing the construction of ascriptions and self-representations in terms of gender, culture, ethnicity, etc. (Vertovec 2015). This implies, on the one hand, deconstructing the ontological concept of (national, ethnic, cultural, etc.) identity still dominant in diversity research, as different studies developed within the Research Network for Latin America – Ethnicity, Citizenship, Belonging have highlighted (e.g. Potthast et al. 2015, Youkhana 2015). On the other hand, it is indispensable to open inequality research for the analysis of everyday interactions, as the research undertaken in the frame of the Research Network on Interdependent Inequalities in Latin America has shown (e.g. Braig; Costa and Göbel 2015, Skornia 2014).

However, what is still missing is a more encompassing connection between the de-ontologization of identities in diversity studies and the inclusion of everyday interactions in inequality research. Some recent studies within research of migration - especially in Europe - offer first insights on how to bridge these fields: Starting from the concept

of conviviality, they show how everyday interactions constitute contexts of negotiation and resignification of both social positions and cultural identifications (for an overview: Nowicka and Vertovec 2014).

The preliminary research project builds on the findings of conviviality research and seeks to broaden them at different levels. Its theoretical-analytical goal is to investigate the interpenetrations of processes of negotiation of differences and disputes concerning social inequalities in a more systematic way than research on conviviality has hitherto done. This requires linking different disciplinary fields including, on the one hand, anthropology, cultural studies, literature studies, and history particularly specialized in understanding processes of construction and negotiations of differences and, on the other hand, sociology, political sciences, and legal studies more directly engaged in researching structures and dynamics of inequalities from a macro-analytical perspective.

Empirically, the future research project broadens the regional scope of research about conviviality that remains concentrated on the contemporary European context by studying forms of living together in contexts characterized by profound inequalities as well as persistent intercultural, interreligious, interethnic and gender tensions. Thus, as postcolonial, post-slavery and (post-) immigration societies, Latin America and the Caribbean societies have been confronted since their violent integration into the colonial system with the global dimension of questions concerning diversity and inequality. Through history, they have also developed a broad repertoire of political and scholarly responses to these challenges. This constitutes a powerful resource for transnational academic cooperation.

## **1.2 State of the Art: From Ontological Identities to Articulations of Inequalities and Differences**

From a political, historical and normative perspective, reactions to diversity can be divided into at least two large groups according to the type of solution indicated: a) differentialist responses and b) integrationist responses.

Differentialist responses dominated European and North American theoretical and political debates of the late twentieth century. They lost influence thereafter due to the proliferation of attempts to improve the “integration” of migrants. In Latin America, these responses have become more influential in recent years. They involve various positions, ranging from liberal (Kymlicka 2007) and communitarian (Taylor 1994) multiculturalists, who defend the creation of special rights for minorities in the realm of law centralized by the state (for the Latin American reception see among others: Stavenhagen 2011, García Peters 2016), to more emphatic legal pluralists, who believe that it is necessary to concede to the multiplicity of existing normative orders

(indigenous justice, “traditional” practices, etc.) autonomous institutional spaces suitable for their legal and political expression (Santos 1995, Glenn 2007, Albó and Romero 2009, Berman 2012). At the political level, emphatic legal pluralists have become especially influential within discussions concerning the constitution of plurinational states in Bolivia and Ecuador since the 1990s. In these cases, plurinationalism assumes a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it implies a substantial expansion of territorial autonomy of indigenous people leading different authors to identify, in these countries, new forms (or a restoration) of indigenous sovereignties (see Sieder 2011). On the other hand, plurinationalism refers to “decolonization” of national states in order to overcome their ethnoracial bias in favour of creole or white populations. Accordingly, the Bolivian or the Ecuadorian independent state has historically functioned as an extension of the colonial state inasmuch as it has reproduced the European model of organization ignoring local values and local forms of political organization: “The plurinationality is insofar decolonial as it seeks to re-think the national state as multi-identitarian, participatory, and fundamentally democratic.” (Altmann 2013: 300)

Integrationist responses, in their different theoretical and political hues, explicitly or implicitly indicate the need to incorporate minorities in a common cultural and legal framework which ranges from national belonging and citizenship to the global regime of human rights. The types of integration proposed vary from neo-assimilationist models to neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism.<sup>1</sup> Although criticizing the forced “nationalization” of large demographic groups as it took place in Latin America and Europe in different historical periods, the neo-assimilationists emphasize the political advantages of absorbing minorities and immigrants into national “mainstream cultures” (Alba and Nee 2003).<sup>2</sup> Neo-Kantian cosmopolitans, in turn, argue that the conditions for coexistence in diverse national societies are generated by the normative power which is inherent to the formation of opinion and political will, and materialized in positive law (Habermas 1992, 1996).

Beyond the widespread criticisms made at the normative-political level that each one of the approaches classified here as differentialist and integrationist has

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1 The neo-Kantian qualification is needed to distinguish the model referred to here from that cosmopolitanism anchored in daily experiences as expressed in terms like “cosmopolitanism from below” (Gilroy 2004, Appadurai 2011), “cosmopolitanism of the poor” (Santiago 2004), “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 1997).

2 The defence of classic forms of assimilation based on the cultural conversion of minorities has recently disappeared from the Latin American political debate after having had accompanied the whole process of modernization in the region (Costa 2015). In Europe and the United States, this type of position was rehabilitated in the realm of the fears of new attacks motivated by religious fundamentalism as is reported in the debate about the “securitization” of migration (Jacobsen and Durden 2014).

received (Braidotti et al. 2013, Gonçalves and Costa 2016), it is necessary to highlight analytical insufficiencies that are common to both approaches and that strongly limit their ability to interpret the challenges triggered by coexistence in highly diverse societies. This type of critique mainly refers to the static concepts of identity and diversity used by both sets of contributions. Both lines treat cultural, ethnic and religious groups as fixed unities that are constituted in the realm of a closed and homogeneous primary cultural system.

This ontological concept of identity ignores key anthropological and sociological findings that have been gathered since Barth's seminal work (1969), according to which differences are not constituted and reproduced through isolation and self-reference, but on the contrary, by means of interchanges between different groups, that is, in the realm of interethnic, inter-cultural or interreligious relations. Since Barth's pioneer study, this dynamic concept of group identity has been developed and elaborated within anthropology itself as well as in various other disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, from literary theory and ethnic studies to gender, intersectionality and queer studies (e.g. Pratt 2008 [1992], Glick Schiller 1977, Escobar 2008, Haritaworn 2015).

These different analytical developments reveal that the articulation of identities – here understood as dynamic identifications – of both minorities and majority groups, is always a political act, “a complex, on-going negotiation” (Bhabha 1994: 2) linking symbolic, material and power disputes. This involves seeking to analyse intercultural, interethnic, and interreligious interactions as an expression of circumstantial and contingent positions or positionalities assumed by social actors, according to existing political constraints and opportunities (Anthias 2013, 2016). Following this interpretation, the quality and character of the interethnic, intercultural or interreligious relations depend less on the degree of difference or similarity between the cultural repertoires of each one of the groups in question than on the context in which the interaction and negotiation of their positionalities take place. That is, since markers of difference are articulated and mobilized at the very moment of interaction, these features can be minimized or emphasized, according to their effectiveness for validating, in a given context, “claims for justice” (Canessa 2007).<sup>3</sup>

At this point, diversity studies converge with some recent studies in the field of inequality research which search for coining a broader definition of inequality (Kreckel 2004), including socio-economic, socio-ecological and power asymmetries. These

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3 Different contributions examine the dissemination of (neo)liberal multicultural policies in Latin America, revealing some unintended consequences of applying an essentialist concept of identity. Shaped to supposedly protect threatened minorities, these policies, in several cases, actually created the identities they were designed to preserve. Accordingly, groups previously self-identified as landless peasants or rural workers re-signify themselves as indigenous or Afro-descendants in order to claim for land or other “cultural” rights not available for other poor peasants (e.g. Sieder 2002, Hale 2006, French 2009, Bocarejo 2014).



studies have broadened the classical focus on class and strata, placing a reinforced emphasis on factors such as gender or ethnicity, and accentuating the complementary and interdependent nature between different axes of constitution of inequalities (Braig; Costa and Göbel 2015).<sup>4</sup> Also, the previous exclusive interest for inequalities within national states has changed to the extent that new contributions have increasingly highlighted the entanglements between national and global structures of inequalities (Boatcă 2015). However, inequality researchers, being rather concentrated on studying social structures, still dedicate very little attention to the role of social inequalities for configuring everyday interactions (for a critique: Skornia 2014).

### **1.3 Diversity, Difference, Interculturality, Conviviality**

In order to clarify the connotation attributed to conviviality here, we distinguish this concept from other (more or less) similar terms: diversity, difference, and interculturality.

Diversity is used in this preliminary research project to refer to both an encompassing research area (diversity studies) and to empiric contexts characterized by social and cultural plurality. Although specificities that may accompany each particular form of plural coexistence are not ignored here, the general term diversity allows capturing similar processes present in the constitution of groups, no matter whether they articulate ethnic, gender, religious or cultural claims. It also encompasses a broad range of contexts characterized by a dense presence of multiple (self-)representations, including as those described by other authors with neologisms such as multicultural (Gilroy 2004, Pieterse 2007) or super-diversity (Vertovec 2007).

In contrast, difference refers not to contexts but to features which individuals or groups can contingently articulate for describing themselves or others. Theoretically, the term difference, as generally used in current debates, goes back to post-structuralism and more specific to the work of Jacques Derrida (1967: 44ff). Accordingly, difference is not an ontological, pre-linguistic property of individuals or groups, it is articulated and modified ad hoc within social interactions.

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4 Since the 1950s, Latin American scholars have systematically studied how class and race (Fernandes 1965), class and ethnicity (Stavenhagen 1969) and class and gender (Saffioti 1969) have shaped structures of inequalities in the region. This field of studies remains one of the most productive and innovative of Latin American social sciences (for an overview: Jelin 2017). However, studies developed in this context have another focus and do not serve for developing and articulating diversity and inequality research to the extent this preliminary research programme does. In particular, these studies do not focus on the construction, articulation and negotiation of social categorizations in institutions, public sphere, everyday life etc. To the contrary: they understand classifications concerning gender, race and ethnicity solely as structural categories which together with class articulate existing hierarchies. In this way, our project goes far beyond previous work on topics that are in (rather limited) ways related to conviviality.

In recent political and academic debates, the concept of interculturality has assumed two central connotations. The first is mostly found in the context of development aid and diversity policies as well as in management studies, applied pedagogy and applied social psychology. Interculturality, in this understanding, refers to encounters of individuals or groups which allegedly have different “cultural backgrounds”, that is, which come from different territorial or national origins (see for instance Kaldschmidt 2012). The second connotation has emerged in the context of indigenous movements and their organizations in Ecuador and Bolivia. In this case, interculturality condensates aspirations for a profound social transformation, as Walsh argues:

It allows imagining and opening of pathways towards a different society based on respect, mutual legitimacy, equity, symmetry and equality where difference is the constitutive element and not merely a simple addition. Interculturality also requires an understanding that behind the relations to be constructed — among group and between the structures, institutions and rights that the state might propose — are distinct logics, rationalities, customs and knowledges. For these reasons interculturality is central to state re-founding (Walsh 2009: 79-80).

The expression *conviviality*<sup>5</sup> has a quite generalized and diffuse usage both in English and in its variations in the neo-Latin languages. In the realm of contemporary humanities and social sciences, the term became influential after the publication of the book “Tools for Conviviality”, written by the Viennese theologian Ivan Illich (1973) and based on discussions at the Intercultural Documentation Center, an institution Illich headed in Cuernavaca, Mexico. In Illich’s pioneering contribution on the subject, *conviviality* assumes a programmatic connotation, in the realm of a radical criticism of industrial capitalism and of human alienation and the environmental degradation that derives from it. In opposition to this, “*conviviality* is intended to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons and the intercourse of persons with their environment [...]” (Illich 1973: 11). The term *conviviality* and variations of it continue to be applied with this normative meaning as shown by its uses in theology

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5 In the Spanish and Portuguese languages, the terms *convivencia* and *convivência* respectively, beyond their colloquial uses, are applied to refer to the period in which regions of the Iberian Peninsula were occupied from the 8th century by Arabs, while Christians and Jews were allowed to maintain their religions. In this way, the three large monotheist religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, coexisted for various centuries until the expulsion or forced conversion of the Jews and Arabs in the late 15th century (Viguera Molins 2000: 31).

(Sundermeier 1995) and in the influential manifesto led by French sociologist Alain Caillé (Les Convivialistes 2013).<sup>6</sup>

Among some scholars specialized in Latin American Studies, the term conviviality or *convivencia* has been recently rediscovered (Schwartz 2016). In Germany, the term *Konvivenz* has recently gained application and appreciation in the context of the research programme initiated by Ottmar Ette (Ette 2010, Ette 2012, Ette and Müller 2011). Ette's idea of conviviality, or rather *Konvivenz*, is based on the premise that the main challenge in the current phase of globalization lies in the creation of conditions that will allow peaceful conviviality on a global scale beyond any cultural differences. Ette concentrates on the literatures of the world, which constitute both the basis and the demonstration of his ideas. This preliminary research programme, however, aspires to investigate existing social interactions both contemporarily and also historically. It does not limit itself to literature.

In the definition adopted for the purpose of Mecila, conviviality does not carry any normative or programmatic claim. It has an analytical-empiric function in order to describe coexistence as an open field of discursive and non-discursive negotiation. It thus seeks to expand the meaning coined by Gilroy (2004) to other regions and contexts. Considering developments in the field of cultural studies since the last decades of the twentieth century, the author reconstructed the concept of conviviality in order to overcome analytical and political insufficiencies of multiculturalism. Accordingly, conviviality designates

[...] process[es] of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere [...] It introduces a measure of distance from the pivotal term "identity", which has proved to be such an ambiguous resource in the analysis of race, ethnicity, and politics (Gilroy 2004: ix).

Although our perspective presents some affinities with Gilroy's work, we aim at developing a systematic research programme on conviviality, which is not the intention of Gilroy. He set the concept of conviviality in the debate as an epistemological contribution to overcome certain limits of the concept of multiculturalism, yet did not

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6 Alain Caillé's position in "Les Convivialistes" (2013) focuses very particularly on France and has a clearly normative, political bias. This means that the idea of "convivialisme" represents a vision for a political future characterized by less consumerism and post-utilitarian human relations. This body of Caillé's work has produced interesting insights, but it cannot be translated into general terms (for a more extensive discussion on conviviality, *Konvivenz*, and *convivialisme*, see Costa 2016).

intend to create an international research programme around the concept conviviality like Mecila does.

The term conviviality that inspires this preliminary research programme refers to everyday interactions in contexts characterized by inequality and diversity. Therefore, our approach allows for the integration of the micro-level, i.e. daily relations, into inequality research usually restricted to the analysis of macro-structures. At the same time, the emphasis on economic, ecological and power inequalities represents an improvement of diversity research and even existing conviviality studies inasmuch as researchers in this field tend to overlook economic and power asymmetries involved in daily interactions.

Thus, the novelty of this preliminary research programme lies in analysing intercultural, interethnic and interreligious or gender relations not as epiphenomena of pre-political processes, but as “cooperative and conflictual” arenas of disputing the very frontiers that define and distinguish different groups (Heil 2015: 317). Obviously, these arenas are not autonomous or isolated; they reflect constraints imposed by their social surroundings, political institutions and legal frameworks as well as by available cultural imaginaries. This circumstance explains the methodological urge to reconstruct, from both a current and historical perspective, the structures in which the convivial interactions to be investigated are inserted. Equally relevant is the investigation of symbolic and cultural repertoires which may inform existing conviviality.

#### **1.4 Dimensions of Analysis**

In order to encompass the variety of variables involved, conviviality will be looked at from three interdependent analytical dimensions:

(1) Structures – Shaping Conviviality: this involves analysing, at a theoretical-analytical level as well as by researching an illustrative sample of convivial contexts, relevant structures which constitute and configure conviviality, including social structures, legal, political and institutional frameworks, but also, as a burgeoning literature has emphasized (Clayton 2009, Neal et al. 2013), physical spaces and “infrastructures” in which interactions take place. Urban spatial design and architecture, unequal access to natural resources and to protection against risks, control of territories, violence, legal frames or the specific configuration of knowledge infrastructures, for instance, have immediate effects on modes of conviviality.

(2) Negotiations – Articulating Conviviality: this dimension examines processes of disputing, negotiating and regulating conviviality in diverse spheres including public space, political and legal arenas and everyday interactions as well as at different levels: local, national, international and also the entanglements between them. Thus,

the dimension focuses on how societies dispute relevant issues such as symbolic belonging, political participation, distribution of resources and risks, rights for nationals, minorities, foreigners, etc. in forums as diverse as the media, political institutions, social movements, or academic conferences.

(3) Representations – Imagining Conviviality: this dimension studies the heterogeneous - often conflictive ways in which individuals and social groups represent conviviality in their respective social spaces. Imagining conviviality involves looking closely at discursive (mythical, cultural, literary and other narrations) and non-discursive expressions (iconicity, material culture, etc.) in order to understand reflections on and concepts of conviviality in specific historical and contemporary contexts. Researchers will also examine how different ways and practices of knowing constitute, ground and affect conviviality and how knowledge is produced, translated and transformed in and through convivial contexts. As such, Mecila will also provide a space for reflections on how knowledge constitutes, and is constituted through, the interaction and interdependence of social actors with one another as well as with non-human entities, including artefacts, books, commodities, plants or animals.

When combined, these three analytical dimensions define the leading research questions to be addressed by Mecila, i.e.: How is conviviality structured, disputed, negotiated and represented in diverse and unequal societies?

### **1.5 Perspectives from Latin American and the Caribbean**

Through its integration into the global context, in the realm of European colonial expansion and the trafficking of enslaved Africans, the region referred to today as Latin America and the Caribbean is a space marked by deep asymmetries and complex gender, interethnic, intercultural and interreligious relations. Given the diversity of its autochthonous peoples, this was also true even prior to European conquest and occupation. With the independence of the former colonies and the formation of nation states during the nineteenth century, questions related to intercultural, interethnic and interreligious coexistence did not disappear. On the contrary, social disparities deepened and nationalisms crystallized, but at the same time large-scale immigration, particularly from Europe, and also from the Middle East and Asia and other Latin American countries, heightened diversity.

During the twentieth century, various nationalist strategies led to the construction of discursively stable nations. In the most recent decades, however, new forms of politicization of ethnicity and the diversification of ways of life including new life styles and sexuality patterns as well as a growing multireligiosity led to important reconfigurations of the symbolic ties that shape most Latin American nations, conferring a new visibility to questions related to diversity (Büschges and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007,

Costa 2012, Potthast et al. 2015). The elaboration of new constitutions in different countries of the region during the last decades of the twentieth century reflects and feeds this new diversity (Gargarella 2013).

Over time, the challenges of dealing with diversity in contexts of odd inequality also led to an accumulation of a significant number of ideological constructions in each of the countries and regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, including a broad variety of positions, from assimilationist models – as paradigmatically represented by *mestizaje* – to conceptions (supposedly) anchored in indigenous and local experiences - e.g. *comunalidad* (i.e. commonality, Aquino Moreschi 2013); *buen vivir* (i.e. good living, Acosta 2015); *la brega* (i.e. a never-ending negotiation, Díaz Quiñones 2000).

The academic production dedicated to this issue in various disciplines is equally varied. In fact, intellectual reflections and debates about this topic date back to the 16th century, when theologians formulated the first legal arguments to justify colonization and legitimate race-based inequalities while others object to it (Góngora-Mera 2012: 13). Since the formation of the nation states, the theological literature ceded space to reflections about the construction of nationality, which – influenced by the reception of European scientific racism – developed formulas to make disappear or to physically and/or discursively absorb the indigenous and African legacies (e.g. Sarmiento 1845, Romero 1878).

Latin American contributions that influenced the international debate arose in the first decades of the twentieth century, when conceptual frameworks to study interethnic relations were developed, which are still underlying current debates (e.g. Vasconcelos 1927, Freyre 1933, Ortiz 1940). Since then, studies exploring the nexus between social inequalities and gender, intercultural and interethnic relations have become one of the most productive and internationalized fields of Latin American research (e.g. Sieder 2002, Briones 2005, Walsh 2009, Bocarejo 2014, Gravito 2015). This literature-rich region has also evolved in recent decades into one of the most privileged spaces of theory formation. Theories of *négritude*, *créolité*, *relationalité* – in this chronological order – have attempted to take stock of conviviality in Latin America and the Caribbean and from there to develop universal categories, such as Édouard Glissant (1990) has done in *Poétique de la relation* and Benítez Rojo (1998) in *La isla que se repite*.

By linking studies about interclass, interethnic, intercultural, interreligious and gender relations in Latin America and the Caribbean with international studies about conviviality, Mecila strives to establish an innovative exchange with evident benefits for both European and Latin American academic communities. The focus on

conviviality in Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of their translocal and transregional entanglements broadens the horizon of European studies on conviviality as they focus mainly on the contemporary European context. By establishing a link to research on conviviality, studies related to Latin America gain visibility, influence and repercussions given the political and analytical urgency that accompanies similar discussions in European and North American societies, which are currently confronted with increasing socio-economic and power inequalities (Mau 2015) and intercultural and interreligious conflicts (Göle 2014).

## **2. Preliminary Research Programme and Methodology**

As a global reference for studies of how unequal societies constitute their modes of living together, the Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America will generate substantive epistemological, theoretical, methodological and analytical-empiric results. It will also engage in advancing discussions about concrete challenges societies in Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere are facing in response to increasing interethnic, intercultural and interreligious conflicts. While Latin America will be the central focus of empirical work, the region will also be studied comparatively and based on its interdependencies with other regions of the world.

### **2.1 Epistemic, Theoretical-analytical, and Methodological Perspective**

At the epistemic level, Mecila will be an innovative forum for transnational academic production marked by a symmetric cooperation between institutions and researchers from different countries, disciplines and career stages. It involves reflecting on the very role of the Centre in promoting a more symmetrical transnational production of scientific knowledge. In order to achieve this objective, three realms of epistemological reflection will accompany all the project's activities:

(1) Transference/translation: this involves the analysis of historical and contemporary tensions, transformations and negotiations inherent to the processes of circulation of knowledge, ideas, norms as well as practices and their materiality (objects) (e.g. Venuti 2008, Bachmann-Medick 2012).

(2) Positionality/multiperspectivity: since all knowledge is "situated" (Haraway 1988, see also Mignolo 2000) – that is, non-universal – it is necessary to reflect on the multiple locations of the production of knowledge and the position of each of them in the realm of academic and non-academic networks of power.

(3) Transregionality: the emphasis here is on both comparison – in the sense of understanding past and present interactions and interpenetrations between Latin

America, Europe, and other regions of the world – and the promotion of the international circulation of knowledge and experiences.

On the theoretical-analytical level, the research programme involves developing, based on a broad critical review of the relevant literature, a situational and relational approach that can be applied to the study of conviviality in different contexts in unequal societies. The studies and methodological resources available until now refer basically to contexts of recent migration, mostly based on Europe. Evidence exists, however, as shown by Mbembe (2001: 128-129), that conviviality has a constitutive importance to power relations in colonial societies and in “postcolonies”. What we seek to do, therefore, is to develop tools for the analysis of conviviality in these contexts, particularly in Latin America, that take into consideration historiography on early modern and modern societies which contribute to these discussions on the basis of historical empirical research (e.g. Rappaport 2014). Due to the deep social and power asymmetries observed in Latin American and Caribbean societies, systematic research on conviviality in this region will contribute, “to reconnect structural sources of inequality with cultural dimensions of difference” (Brubaker 2015: 3).

From a methodological perspective, this involves systematizing existing findings, linking discussions so far disconnected (e.g. in Germany and Latin America), as well as conducting new empirical studies in order to establish a comprehensive overview of the broad repertoire of doctrines and concrete forms of conviviality observed in Latin America since the colonial period, reaching up to our present. The studies to be conducted at Mecila will significantly contribute for extending the methodological repertoire of existing studies on conviviality. While the available studies, mostly conducted by anthropologists, are based on ethnographic methods (ethnographies, interviews, participative observation), being circumscribed to the study of negotiations of conviviality in contemporary societies, the interdisciplinary cooperation within Mecila will allow us to combine multiple methods and mobilize different sources, including also historiographical archives, in order to study not only contemporary, but also past conviviality along the three dimensions mentioned above: structures, negotiations, representations. This innovative combination of methods is represented in the following table:



### Researching Conviviality

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Main disciplines</b>	<b>Main Methods</b>	<b>Main Materials</b>
<b>Dimension</b>			
<b>Structures</b>	Economy, Sociology, History, Urban Studies, Geography, Environmental Studies	Social structure analysis, urban and environmental analysis	Statistics, maps, secondary literature
<b>Negotiations</b>	Anthropology, Sociology, Political Scientists, Law	Ethnography, participative observation, analysis of documents	Historiographic and parliamentary archives, newspapers, secondary literature
<b>Representations</b>	History, Law, Literary and Cultural Studies	Discourse analysis, visual analysis, interviews	Archives, newspapers, secondary literature, novels, art objects.

## 2.2 Convivial Contexts

In order to allow for an accumulation of knowledge and to foster comparisons between different cases, research will focus on convivial contexts, which will be examined through the history of their constitution and their interdependencies at local, regional, national and global levels.

Convivial contexts do not have an automatic spatial configuration. For this reason, the convivial context may correspond to a neighbourhood, a municipality, a country or to global or transnational spaces such as diaspora and “translocal social spaces” constituted in the realm of transnational migrations (Pries 2008) as well as to virtual contexts of interaction (Castells 2009). Different convivial contexts will be studied within our Centre through the three dimensions of analysis outlined above: structures, negotiations and representations.

Given its international, inter-institutional and interdisciplinary character and the long-term nature of Mecila to be created, this preliminary research programme does not confine its agenda to a single sample of concrete past and present convivial contexts. During the preliminary phase, participating researchers will define the research plan based on concrete convivial contexts which they identify together.

Examples of convivial contexts partially examined in the existing literature on Latin America include conviviality in the Amazonian region as described by Overing and Passes (2000), contexts characterized by an important presence of transnational migrants (Grimson 1999), as well as the Caribbean islands in the nineteenth century as studied by Müller (2011) among others. Beyond the observation of everyday interaction in ordinary situations, a special insight into the quality and character of conviviality can be gained by taking a closer look at extreme processes and unequal distribution of socially construed risks. During catastrophes, social asymmetrical conflicts become evident and social structuring principles (i.e. emotions, options for action, conflicts, and power relations) of conviviality appear in a nutshell (Voss 2008, Lorenz 2013). Similarly, cases characterized by the systematic use of violence (land conflicts, drug markets etc.) can be seen as exceptional situations for examining the dynamics of conviviality. Specifically relevant to our analysis is the way individuals and groups are influenced by conflict-related violence regarding their perception of conviviality as well as their disposition to interactions (e.g. Baquero 2015).

As mentioned before, an example of such convivial contexts is the Caribbean in the nineteenth century – roughly, from the beginning of the Revolutionary Age (1792) to the Spanish-American War (1898) – where men and women of the most diverse provenance and ancestry lived together: enslaved African men and women from Senegambia, the Gulf of Guinea, the kingdoms of Congo and Angola, labour migrants from South Asia, indigenous groups – Jíbaro, Taino or Kalinago, many of whom, contrary to the myth of indigenous Caribbean extinction, persisted through colonization – as well as the kaleidoscope of settlers, colonial officials, and missionaries belonging to the period's Dutch, British, Spanish and French colonial powers.

Researchers involved will examine the structures grounding the Caribbean as a convivial context: the “racial”, political and legal hierarchies that underlay colonial societies and plantation complexes, but also, epidemiological structural differences – Europeans' greater vulnerability to “tropical” diseases like malaria and yellow fever – that potentially undercut colonial hierarchies (Curtin 1989). Other researchers will be concerned with how Caribbean societies negotiated the grounds of their living-together – how they disputed ideas of “race” or “nation”, confederationist projects, or plans for abolition. Scholars involved in the third dimension will study how Caribbean intellectuals imagined their societies, for instance, in literary representations – of “race”, or after 1860, utopian projects of *caribbeanidad* or *créolité* – and through theoretical concepts – of *négritude* or *relationalité* (Müller 2011).

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## **Working Papers published since 2017:**

1. Maria Sybilla Merian Centre International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America (Mecila) (2017): "Conviviality in Unequal Societies: Perspectives from Latin America: Thematic Scope and Preliminary Research Programme".





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The Maria Sibylla Merian Centre Latin America was founded in April 2017 by three German and four Latin American partner institutions. It is being funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for an initial period of three years. The participating researchers will investigate coexistence in unequal societies from an interdisciplinary and global perspective. The following institutions are involved: Freie Universität Berlin, Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut/Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Universität zu Köln, Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP), IdIHCS (CONICET / Universidad Nacional de La Plata), and El Colegio de México.

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