Research on Latin America in Norway

Kristi Anne Stølen*

Norway has no long tradition with regard to research on Latin America and, in contrast to other European countries including Sweden and Denmark, there has been little public or private demand for competence in this country on Latin America. This is probably related to the fact that Norway had limited economic and political relations with Latin America until a few decades ago, except for the shipping activities that were important, especially before the Second World War. After the war, Norway as a NATO member tried to be loyal to US policy in Latin America and did not have an independent policy towards the continent. However, in the 1960s Norwegian governments started to express their serious disagreements with US involvements in the region in NATO as well as in UN forums. This was, for example, the case regarding US sanctions towards Cuba in the early 1960s and the US military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965. From the 1970s relations between Norway and Latin America have gradually been strengthened through the ‘politics of engagement’ of Norwegian governments, with their focus on human rights, indigenous rights and peace processes. The research community has contributed to the formation of an informed constituency influencing this change in public policies towards the region. The training of students who have found employment in the increasing number of Norwegian NGOs has also contributed to strengthen the relations with Latin America.

In Norway, research interest in Latin America is somehow related to the Cuban revolution that became a source of inspiration for radical movements in Latin America as well as in Europe. In the context of the radicalisation of students in the 1970s, the socialist experiment in Chile as well as the insurgency of peasants, workers and students in country after country in Latin America inspired young Norwegian students to prepare themselves for understanding and possibly contributing to the processes of change going on. The interest in the Spanish language and Latin American studies increased dramatically. By then only a few people, among them a group of young researchers at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, had actually carried out some research in Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela. The military repression in Latin America that provoked an academic diaspora, not only from Chile, but also from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, intensified this engagement.

In what follows I will first draw attention to debates about the status and organisation of research in Norway on Latin America, a debate coloured by conflict-

* I want to thank Anne Engh for helping to collect and systematise information about the MSc. and PhD theses, Birger Angvik and Jon Askeland for useful information and for helping to reconstruct the events of the past, Einar Berntsen and Sarah Lund for providing information that was otherwise difficult to find and Eduardo Archetti and Michiel Baud for constructive critique of an earlier draft.
ing interests among researchers and an unwillingness to prioritise this kind of research by Norwegian institutions and authorities. Then I will present the history of the only two institutions that have managed to build a critical mass of competence on Latin America in Norway, the Division of Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of Bergen and the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. This is followed by an outline of research and publications that have contributed to the development of Latin American studies in Norway and internationally. Finally, I will present a selection of ongoing research.

Organisation of Research and Teaching on Latin America

The debate on the status and organisation of research in Norway on Latin America started on a Nordic basis. In 1968 the Nordic Council proposed that a Nordic Institute for Latin American Studies should be established. Since corresponding institutions carrying out research on Africa and Asia had already been established respectively in Sweden (Uppsala) in 1962 and in Denmark (Copenhagen) in 1965, it was suggested that Norway should host the Latin American institution. This was not well received in Norway. Politicians as well as certain members of the research environment who were not especially qualified to host such a newcomer were sceptical about the construction of a strong institution and preferred to ‘strengthen research and researchers where they were’ – spread thinly over a number of universities and research institutes. Not until the late 1980s, after considerable pressure from the Scandinavian Association for Research on Latin America (NOSALF) as well as from individual researchers in Norway, did the Norwegian government make an initiative to strengthen research on Latin America (St.meld.42, 1987-8). A group of researchers was appointed by the Norwegian Research Council to make a report on the state of the art of research and teaching in Norway on Latin America compared to the other Nordic countries and, on the basis of this report, come up with a plan of action on how to strengthen research on Latin America quantitatively as well as qualitatively. In November 1990, this committee delivered its report, including a catalogue of projects for the period 1985-1990 (NAVF 1990).

The report documented in a systematic way what was already well known: in Norway research on Latin America had been mainly carried out within institutions with a disciplinary focus such as university departments, or research institutes with a thematic focus, for example, on international affairs, peace or development. The continent was not given priority in the research agendas at any of these institutions. Whether research on Latin America was carried out or not depended largely on the interests of individual staff members using their research time on Latin American topics. This implied that by 1990 the researchers were so scattered that there were barely any institutions with a critical mass of competence. Consequently, the quality of research was rather uneven.

The report took up a central question in the Norwegian debate, that is, whether a concentration of researchers at one or two institutions would give better results than supporting the researchers where they were, spread throughout a number of institutions. This relates to a more general debate about the convenience of multidisciplinary area studies compared to the strengthening of Latin American topics within disciplinary research – an old discussion that is not only related to research
on this continent. Arguing that the experiences with the Nordic Africa and Asia institutions had not been convincing enough to go for the establishment of a corresponding institution on Latin America, the committee recommended certain improvements while maintaining the existing diversification. To overcome the individualisation of research and the isolation of the researchers, the committee suggested that a research coordinator position in the social sciences should be established at the University of Oslo. A coordinator position in language and literature was already underway in Bergen. Even though these coordinators should primarily be active in their regions, they were given a responsibility of building networks in their respective fields at the national level. Tromsø and Trondheim, which are the two other most important university and research centres in Norway, were considered too weak to have a central role in Latin American research in the country.

The committee also recommended that new resources should be made available through the establishment of a research programme. The committee members recommended a concentration of funds to projects in two geographically defined areas. The first one constituted a kind of transcontinental rectangle covering the area between the equator and 15 degrees south from coast to coast, and the Andean highlands, Amazonas and Northeast Brazil. The second area selected was Central America. The argument for this concentration was the interest in achieving a natural/geographic unitary picture to cover both Spanish and Portuguese speaking areas, areas with a variety of economic adaptations and levels of development, and, in the case of Central America, to meet the interests of Norwegian governmental and non-governmental aid organisations whose activities were concentrated in some of the Central American countries. Researchers would be invited to present projects on any topics bound to these areas. The committee also proposed to set aside funds for strengthening research infrastructure, such as libraries, information services and funds for networks.

The report was not well received by the research community. The strongest reaction was against the geographical delimitation. The milder critics found it arbitrary, the tougher ones were of the opinion that it reflected the interests of the committee members rather than the interests of the research community. Due to these disagreements the research programme never materialised. However, the University of Oslo and the University of Bergen got their temporary coordinator positions on the condition that the universities should take over the funding of the positions after three years. During the years from 1992 to 1995, the coordinators made considerable efforts to vitalise the research community. The number of conferences, workshops and exchanges of guest researchers that took place, together with the tutoring of students, stimulated the interest of graduate and postgraduate students to choose Latin American topics. But when, in a funding context characterised by a strong Africanist bias, research money was not made available and the universities did not assume the responsibility for the coordinators, they returned to their other teaching and research activities.

Nevertheless, the interest of students in Latin America, and especially in Central America, increased during the 1990s. The political situations in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala and the involvement of Norwegian governmental and non-governmental organisations in the region triggered the interest and engagement of researchers and students. The number of graduate and post-graduate stu-
Students increased dramatically, especially in social anthropology, language/literature, political science, human geography and agricultural sciences. Students from a wide number of other disciplines also became involved, but on a more limited scale.

According to a national database of master’s theses, a total of 314 theses (from more than 30 disciplines) relating to one particular country in Latin America have been produced since the first one in 1967. Only 39 of them were delivered before 1990. The increase has been particularly remarkable in certain Central American countries where 91 of a total of 94 theses were delivered after 1990. They were mainly based on material from Nicaragua (29 theses), Guatemala (31) and Costa Rica (29). El Salvador and Honduras came far behind with four and six respectively. Social sciences, especially social anthropology and political science, dominated the theses on Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador, generally focusing on different aspects related to violence, civil war, peace processes and development. The theses on Costa Rica, in contrast, were written primarily by students from the natural sciences (such as biology, geology and agro-forestry) and language/literature.

Another country that has become popular among students, especially anthropology students in the 1990s is Cuba. Twenty-three master’s students have written theses on the current changes taking place on this Caribbean island during that decade; only one thesis had been written before that in the mid 1970s. Survival strategies, gender, music and popular culture are preferred topics in addition to economic and political ones. Even though students had written about Mexico before 1990, most of these theses (26 compared to 4) were delivered in the 1990s. Also here the social anthropologists dominate, followed by human geographers and students of language and literature. However, students from a number of other disciplines such as psychology, theology, media, sports, business administration, history and science of education have also written about Mexico, but there is only one from each discipline.

In South America some countries are more popular than others. Paraguay is the least popular – only one music student has written a thesis on Paraguayan harp music – followed by Uruguay with four, three of them on literary topics, and all delivered in the 1990s. Venezuela (4) and Colombia (11) are the only countries that have not attracted more students in the 1990s than in the previous decades. Another particularity is that there has been no rub-off effect among students writing on these countries. Four disciplines are represented in Venezuela and ten in Colombia, covering a variety of topics. Even though student interest in the remaining countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Ecuador) had also increased considerably during the 1990s, it was the social and political events in these countries in the 1960s and ‘70s that motivated the pioneers in research in Norway on Latin America, as we shall see below. In addition to the theses on topics related to one particular country, there are approximately thirty or so topics relating to more than one country or to the whole continent. Here political science, comparative politics and language dominate.

Twenty-six doctoral theses with Latin American themes were defended at Norwegian universities, all of them in the 1990s. As in the case of the master’s theses, they were scattered in terms of disciplines and countries. Thirteen disciplines and fourteen institutions were represented, and the majority were part of the
University of Oslo. In this case social anthropology was more strongly represented than any other discipline with seven theses, followed by language/literature with four and sociology with three. The rest had one or two. Most theses were based on material from Mexico and the South American countries where Norwegian students started to do fieldwork in the 1970 and ’80s, and we can see that some of the same actors were represented. This was especially the case with the anthropologists and those from the humanistic sciences. Among the wide variety of themes, there were some that appeared with a certain frequency: gender, environment, war and peace.

The big increase in the number of master and doctoral theses tells us that the interest in Latin America has increased dramatically during the last decade. Most people with PhDs are currently employed in research and/or teaching positions at universities or independent research institutions, but not all of them continue to do research on Latin America. With two exceptions, which I will return to below, researchers are as thinly spread as before; the difference now is that they are spread over a considerably higher number of institutions than ten years ago. This is an expression of the general research policy in Norway favouring decentralisation and dispersion of resources, something that I cannot go into here.

**Building a Critical Mass**

Currently only two research and teaching institutions can be characterised as having a critical mass of research competence on Latin America. One is the Division of Spanish Language and Latin American Studies at the University of Bergen. The other is the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. I will give a short history of Latin American studies at these institutions, which may serve as examples of what can be achieved with small means and enthusiastic scholars. Both are products of the radicalisation of the universities in the late 1960s and ’70s referred to above. In Bergen the Spanish division was created in 1971 as a consequence of student demands to study the Spanish language and Latin American literature and reality. Two young enthusiastic scholars, first Willy Rasmussen working on Spanish American language and history, and two years later, Birger Angvik working on literature, both with some experience of Latin America, were employed as permanent staff to start teaching assisted by a couple of teachers paid by the hour. In the beginning they tried to cover Spain and Latin America together, language, literature and reality, but gradually teaching and research were concentrated on Latin America. By the end of the 1980s it was decided that the Division should concentrate its activities on modern Latin America, which implied among other things that Spanish literature and reality was no longer being taught at this institution. In contrast, the corresponding division at the University of Oslo has remained in the classical romance and philological tradition, and does not have much to offer students and researchers interested in Latin America. At the beginning of 2002, Latin American studies in Bergen had seven permanent staff members. Spanish has outnumbered English and Nordic languages in terms of students, and is the most popular language course at this university. The division offers master’s degrees in language, literature and cultural studies. The concentration on contemporary Latin America during the last decade has been accompanied by attempts
to design more of an area study. Latin Americanists from other institutions and disciplines such as anthropology, religion and media are being invited to participate in teaching and research activities carried out by the division.

At the University of Oslo, the Department of Social Anthropology has been especially active regarding research on Latin America. Students interested in doing fieldwork and writing theses on Latin America started to make themselves heard in the early 1970s, inspired by the emergence of social and political movements in Latin America, the theoretical debates raised by the *dependencia* school in Latin American social sciences and the Marxist influence in social anthropology. At that point none of the staff members at the department worked on Latin America, but the students claimed that something had to be done. This led to the recruitment of Professor Eduardo Archetti in 1976, at that time a young PhD student from the University of Paris. His arrival at the department was crucial for creating an ambiance for the development of Latin American studies. In 1981 Archetti gained a permanent position earmarked for Latin America. This was the beginning of a process of recruitment of students and scholars with competence on Latin America in social anthropology. Moreover, the fact that the Norwegian Research Council granted student scholarships for non-European studies to cover travel expenses for doing fieldwork outside Europe contributed to this increase.

Since the beginning of 2002, five out of a total of fifteen permanent staff members and a number of PhD students have been carrying out research on Latin America and the Caribbean. It should be noted that only the first permanent position was specifically earmarked for a Latin Americanist, whereas the others happened to be the best qualified candidates for the open positions that were announced. In comparison to research and teaching at the Latin American division in Bergen that focuses exclusively on Latin America, the Social Anthropology Department in Oslo works within a disciplinary context where regional themes and topics are an integrated part of a discipline covering all the continents of the world and where teaching and research are organised around central disciplinary topics. Exceptions are the courses on regional ethnography that have a geographical focus.

The Social Anthropology Department at the University of Oslo and the Division for Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of Bergen are the most productive institutions in terms of the number of completed studies and of scientific publications. Between 1990 and 2001, 34 master’s degrees and seven PhDs were awarded from the former, and 39 master’s degrees and four PhDs were awarded from the latter. Twenty of the theses from the Spanish/Latin American Division deal with language, with a concentration on Costa Rica. This is related to the fact that the language professor Miguel Quesada is from Costa Rica. The rest deal with literature and cultural studies. During the same period at the University of Oslo, the Political Science Department awarded 24 master’s degrees and one PhD, and the Human Geography Department awarded fourteen master’s degrees. The Social Anthropology Departments at the Universities of Bergen and Trondheim awarded, respectively, thirteen and seven master’s degrees and one PhD each. The Department of Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen also awarded ten master’s degrees between 1990 and 2001. This is the only Political Science Department in the country that has a Latin Americanist – Einar Berntzen – in a permanent position. Berntsen’s work on stability and democracy in Central Amer-
ica and political culture in Latin America has inspired his students to concentrate on topics related to democratic transition pertaining mainly to Central America, such as human rights violations, security, peace processes and ethnic mobilisation (Berntzen 1993).

Other relevant university departments have awarded less than five master’s degrees, and one PhD at the most during this period. The number of publications is also limited among these, due to the fact that there are no – or only one – Latin Americanists among the permanent staff members.

During the last decade the situation at the independent research institutions has deteriorated with regard to competence on Latin America. The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Peace Research Institute, both in Oslo, and Chr. Michelsen’s Institute in Bergen, which are the most important institutions carrying out research on development and international affairs, have none or only one of their numerous staff working on Latin America. Ten years ago they had a few more. This not only reflects the priorities of these research institutions but also those of the Norwegian government that funds most of their researchers and projects. Negligence of research and teaching on Latin America is persistent, in spite of the fact that Norway is now more involved on the continent than ever before. Generally one can say that what characterises research in Norway on Latin America is that most of it has been carried out by graduate and post graduate students whose involvement in this type of activity was limited to a shorter period of time. This was also the case before 1990. The theses produced are available at the national libraries. Their quality is uneven, yet nevertheless they provide an interesting body of material on Latin America. Even though there was an increase in the number of Master’s of Science theses written in English or Spanish in the 1990s, the majority were still written in Norwegian. PhD theses, in contrast, are normally written in English. The same holds good for scientific books and papers, but the proportion written in Spanish is higher among the latter. More popularised books and articles directed at the domestic public are published in Norwegian.

In the following, I will present a worthwhile, though limited, selection of research projects and publications that have had an impact on the development of Latin American studies in Norway and internationally. An important criterion of selection has been the availability of the publications in either Spanish or English.¹ The reader will see that the geographical focus, themes and perspectives have changed over time according to the changing social and political conditions on the continent and the changing disciplinary tendencies in Norway.

**Changing Themes and Perspectives of Research**

In the other Nordic countries natural scientists as well as ethnologists/ethnographers have carried out research on Latin America since the nineteenth century, and some of their contributions are well recognized internationally. Norway has no such long tradition. Henning Siverts, social anthropologist at the Ethnographic Museum in Bergen was a pioneer when he started his fieldwork in Chiapas in 1953. Up until his death last year he had been following the destiny of the indigenous people in the municipality of Oxchuc for more than forty years. He worked within a classic ethnographic ‘indigenista’ tradition inspired by Redfield and Villa Rojas,
to whom his detailed monograph on social organisation in Oxchuc from the late 1960s was dedicated (Siverts 1969).

Not until the 1970s did anthropological research on Latin America gain a certain momentum in Norway. As mentioned above, increased interest in the continent was motivated by political events and the introduction of ‘peasant studies’, and the influence of Marxism in social anthropology offered new perspectives for analysing these political events. Studies of Latin American peasant societies, focusing on processes of change and social and cultural integration and differentiation, represented an important contribution to the understanding of complex societies. The studies of Redfield, Foster, Wolf and Mintz became sources of inspiration for the young students at the Social Anthropology Department in Oslo who aspired to demonstrate through their own research the social and practical relevance of applying anthropological perspectives to problems of social change and development.

In Argentina, the creation and the rapid expansion in the early 1970s of the agrarian movement, The Agrarian Leagues, caught the interest of Eduardo Archetti and Kristi Anne Stølen, who spent almost two years among the colonos of the Santa Fe province in Argentina. Their studies, first published in a monograph in Spanish in 1975, not only provided a detailed analysis of immigrant farmers who had received very little attention by social scientists before, but also challenged dominant ideas about the character and role of agrarian movements in Latin America (Archetti and Stølen 1975). Inspired by discussions within the area of ‘peasant studies’ they also contributed to the development of the anthropological study of post-peasant societies. Stølen continued her studies among the colonos fifteen years later, but by then her research focus as well as her theoretical approach had changed considerably (Stølen 1996).

The interest in peasant movements was also what motivated Marit Melhuus and Svein Erik Duus to do fieldwork in another area of Argentina during the same period, namely among the poor dependent tobacco growers of the Corrientes province. In her thorough and ethnographically rich monograph based on this work, Melhuus analyses the peasant condition under the advance of capitalism, and the ways in which non-capitalist economic sectors were articulated with and subsumed under capitalism as the dominant mode of production in Argentina (Melhuus 1987). In tune with the period, the focus was on economic processes, and the analytical approach reflected Marxist influences.

From 1976-7 Harald Skar and Sarah Lund Skar carried out fieldwork in Peru studying the impact of the land reform in Quechua communities in the highlands, trying to combine the analysis of the social consequences of State-initiated planned change with a systematic treatment of cultural categories and oral patterns of social organisation. In the case of Lund Skar, what had started out as a community study continued for another ten years with subsequent fieldwork on migrants from the original community in the newly opened settler areas in the eastern foothills of the Andes and in the coastal capital of Lima. Their rich material has been published in two monographs and a number of papers in international journals (Skar 1982; Lund Skar 1994).

Changes in agrarian communities provoked by land reform and technological modernization was also the focus of Stølen’s study in the Central Highlands of
Ecuador that was carried out in 1976 and 1983. Her monograph on gender relations in the context of agrarian transformation was published in Spanish and created a heated debate in Quito with regard to the interpretation of gender in rural contexts and particularly the understanding of gender violence (Stølen 1987; Sanchez Parga 1990). Archetti’s research on the social and symbolic significance of guinea-pigs among peasants in highland Ecuador published in Spanish in 1992 also created an intense debate questioning the current agrarian modernization imposed by State-induced development programmes (Archetti, 1992). In 1996 this book was selected by a British editorial committee as one of the five best books to be translated into English and published in the UK (Archetti 1997). Jon Hanssen-Bauer’s study (1982) of the market of onions in the Central highlands of Ecuador also provides detailed insights on agrarian change. The focus of his study was the importance of the peasant market system characterized by a high number of intermediaries for the process of differentiation and modernization in agriculture.

During the 1980s, gender became a central topic for Norwegian researchers on Latin American studies. In Latin America, research on gender was closely linked to political movements and strongly influenced by structural Marxism (Leon 1982; Navarro 1982; Werlhof 1982). The Norwegian researchers, who were not only influenced by Marxism but at the same time challenged by western feminism and the contrast between the Latin American and the Nordic societies, were less convinced than many of their Latin American colleagues that class struggle and the socialist revolution alone were adequate means to eradicate women’s subordination. The studies on Latin American gender relations carried out by Norwegian researchers were coloured by the fact that the ‘pioneers’ in this field were social anthropologists with previous research experience in Latin America. Most of them were critical of the materialist approach for being too narrow. Instead, they attempted to combine culturalist and structuralist approaches, recognising that ideas about maleness and femaleness were neither wholly independent nor directly derived from economic relations to production. Most studies on gender were based on micro-oriented case studies. In this field of research, consequences of rapid social change on gender relations have been a dominant theme as well.

A number of gender studies deal with rural livelihoods in situations of socio-economic change where the existing division of labour and responsibility is altered, thereby provoking formal and informal negotiations about what women and men may or may not do or be. The consequences of a lack of recognition of gender roles in agrarian transformation have been a recurrent theme. This was the focus in Lund Skar’s study of the impact of the agrarian reform among Quechua Indians in Highland Peru referred to above (Lund Skar 1982). While supposedly emulating Indian forms of social organisations, male/female relationships within the Indian community were completely ignored by the planners as having any relevance for the land reform. Thus by allocating usufruct rights to land to ‘heads of the household’, the planners, ‘with the mere stroke of a pen’, swept aside centuries of tradition in which Quechua women held individual rights to land and an important role in agricultural production and marketing.

Haldis Valestrønd’s studies among peasants in Costa Rica demonstrate how the introduction of the African palm – a profitable cash crop – produces a ‘housewifization process’, whereby women withdraw from agriculture and become exclu-
sively mothers and homemakers. This is also to some extent what happened with Quechua women in the Highlands of Peru. However, in Lund Skar’s case, this implied a rupture with dominant indigenous values and practices, whereas in Valestrand’s case, the changes implied a harmonisation with dominant mestizo values – which stated that men should be providers and women mothers, housewives and ‘centres of home’ (Valestrand 1991). The consequence of the transition from subsistence to cash crop was also the focus in Kari Siverts’ studies from Chiapas. In her case the process goes the other way around. She analyses how, in a context of galloping land shortage combined with demographic growth, Tzeltal-speaking peasant housewives have become working women (Siverts 1985, 1990, 1993). These studies draw attention to the fact that similar phenomena may have different and sometimes contradictory meanings and demonstrate the necessity of understanding the socio-cultural context when studying the consequences of innovation and change.

Dominance and subordination has been an underlying theme in Norwegian gender research. If gender relations are power relations, what kind of power are we talking about? The fact that women are often depicted as subordinate to men may tell little about prevailing male-female relationships, since gender ideology rarely accurately reflects these relationships. A number of studies have explored the expressions of power in face-to-face relationships in different Latin American contexts. In her studies of gender relations in rural communities in Ecuador and Argentina, Stølen analyses how changes in gender roles and relations are associated with changes in conceptualisations of maleness and femaleness. She observes that certain ideas and practices (such as the association of women with the home and men with the street, and the high valuation of female virginity, chastity and the sexual control of women) are more resistant to change than others, and suggests that this is because they are deeply rooted in Catholic gender ideology, symbolism and practice, something that in turn permeates other institutions in society (for example law, education, media). She concludes that when gender ideas are institutionalised in this way, they seem particularly resistant to change (Stølen 1987, 1996a, 1996b).

The role of religion in the construction of gender is also a central theme in Melhuus’ studies of social change among mestizo peasants in Central Mexico (1992, 1993). Through the exploration of religious practice and symbolism, she contributes to a deeper understanding of what she calls the ‘enigma of Latin American gender imagery’, a male dominant society that places its highest value on the feminine. In her reflections on morality, Melhuus draws the attention to ‘machismo’ and ‘marianismo’ and demonstrates that masculinity, like femininity, is uncertain. The machos are both strong and fragile, while women characterized by their suffering are at the same time men’s moral superiors. Melhuus also explores the symbolic imagery of the virgin of Guadalupe, representing a collective frame of reference in Mexican culture.

Even though the studies referred to so far have analysed gender in relational terms, with most of them having a female bias, gender relations are mainly seen through the eyes of women. Eduardo Archetti, in contrast, has approached gender from a male point of view. His methodological emphasis has been on urban contexts and on the impact of modernization and change on gender ideas and percep-
tions. Archetti’s analysis of tango texts is centred around male narratives of gender relations with the explicit aim of describing ideological and moral predicaments based on the classifications and moral evaluation of different kinds of male and female (1994a). The meaning of masculinity is also revealed in the football stadiums in Buenos Aires today. Based on the analyses of activities and expressions of football fans, Archetti identifies masculine moral idioms consisting of a complex relationship between ‘tradition’, ‘male virtues’, ‘class’ and ‘neighbourhood’ (1994b, 1996).

Male-male relations and the complexity of masculinity is also a central theme in Annick Prieur’s study among homosexual transvestites in a marginal neighbourhood in Mexico City (1998). Prieur portrays how a group of men (the machos) shape their masculinity through social interaction with other men, women and homosexuals, and how transvestites become feminine by adapting what they consider to be associated with womanhood. As in Archetti’s football case, sexual penetration is identified as a root metaphor in the constitution of masculinity, what distinguishes a ‘real’ man from a ‘disguised’ one and what places a man in the male hierarchy. Homosexuality, whether it is symbolic as in Archetti’s case or practiced as in Prieur’s case, tells about how power and dominance are conceptualised in the respective countries. It also reveals the complexities of dominance and subordination. Different relations of power and dominance are intertwined.

Finally I will draw the attention to Melhuus and Stølen’s edited book, *Machos, Mistresses and Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery*, even though four out of the ten contributors are non Norwegian (Melhuus and Stølen 1996). The book addresses the power of Latin American gender imagery. However, it does not equate power with the simple notion of male dominance (and a concomitant female subjugation) that has dominated the discourses on gender in Latin America, nor does it reverse the order by speaking of female power.

The theme of gender imagery and power is set to elicit the mutual overlapping by exploring how gender relations are perceived and how representations of gender relate to other significant social phenomena. Grounded on empirical research in social anthropology and sociology, the essays reveal a multiplicity of representations of gender in a variety of settings throughout the continent. One aspect that emerges from the essays is that there are different schemes of evaluation for men and women. Men are classified according to the degree of masculinity, women according to their moral character. It also appears that gender is central to the understanding of Latin American reality, past or present, and whether one is concerned with economic, political or cultural processes. This is a central argument in Archetti’s book, *Masculinities: Football, Polo and Tango in Argentina* (1999), where he explores the complex relationship between nationalism and masculinity both historically and sociologically with one consistent conclusion: male concepts of courage and virility are the core of nationalism in Argentina.

The relationship between masculinity and nationalism is also a central theme in Christian Krohn-Hansen’s writings from the Dominican Republic. He argues that notions of masculinity among Dominicans have played and continue to play, a dominant role in everyday production of political legitimacy. He shows how notions of masculinity construct differences between men, and how these differences
in turn feed into the notions of the political. Masculinity is ambiguous; there is a continuous tension between being a responsible father and being a womaniser. The summarizing metaphor for this ambiguous masculinity is *tíguere* – the image of the Dominican man, which glosses over the multiple meaning of masculinity (Krohn-Hansen 1996). Krohn-Hansen is one of the very few Norwegians who has carried out research in the Caribbean. However, the work of his colleague at the Social Anthropology Department, Thomas Hylland Eriksen needs to be mentioned. His fieldwork in Trinidad in the late 1980s was part of his comparative PhD study of ethnicity and nationalism in Trinidad and Mauritius, where he was concerned with the complexity and the ambiguities of ethnic classification in ‘poly-ethnic’ societies and the tension between ethnicity and nationalism. A number of his publications often draw on his Caribbean material in a comparative way (Eriksen Hylland 1992).

In literary studies Birger Angvik’s work needs to be mentioned. He was one of the founders of the Spanish/LA Division at the University of Bergen, and his mark has been left on this institution ever since. His interest in Peruvian literature has resulted in several books and a number of papers. In *A Novelist Who Feeds the Social Carrion* (1997), he concentrates on Vargas Llosa’s early literary texts and his publications as a literary critic. He presents Vargas Llosa’s ideas about the novel, the methodology used in the writing process and the ideas underlying his practice as a literary critic. Angvik demonstrates that in spite of Vargas Llosa’s almost compulsive attempt to break with Peruvian and Spanish American narrative tradition, he contributes to its reproduction, even when he modifies and modernises it. In a later book (1999), Angvik broadens his perspective and analyses a wider selection of Peruvian twentieth century novelists and literary critics. He argues that the normative and traditional critics that dominate in Peru become distressed when faced with exceptional, experimental and advanced Peruvian narrative, which is, according to Angvik, the best on the continent since the 1920s. Angvik demonstrates how the critics categorise, judge and even condemn this literature. Angvik has also contributed to a collection of articles on gay culture in Peru (1997). Currently he is involved in a study of Latin American female literature. It should also be mentioned that several scholars at the Latin American Studies division has done important work on Jorge Luis Borges’ texts (Selnes 1999).

**Current Research**

In this last section I will refer to new themes that have gained momentum in the late 1990s as a consequence of socio-political conditions on the continent combined with the current trend in research policy to allocate most available funds to interdisciplinary thematic programmes. Most PhD projects referred to below are financed though these programmes. The concentration of research to programmes does not mean, however, that there has been a complete break with the themes and topics referred to above. There is a continuation, especially, among those in permanent positions at the universities who therefore are less dependent on external funds.

Much of the new research is centred on the consequences of and the reconstruction following the armed conflicts that took place in many parts of the continent in
the 1980s. *The Dynamics of Displacement in Situations of Conflict* programme at the Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, comprises studies of reconstruction of livelihoods and identities in post-conflict societies in Asia and Latin America. It explores how people produce and secure livelihoods in new locations and under changing and volatile circumstances, how social identities are shaped and reformulated, and how people create and recreate social structure, cultural institutions and forms of organisations when confronting fluid, unpredictable situations. The case studies from Latin America are being carried out in Guatemala and Peru. The former is based on fieldwork among Guatemalan returnees, who, after more than a decade in refugee camps in Southern Mexico, are in the process of building a new multiethnic community in the tropical rain forest of Petén (Stølen 2000 a,b). The latter, which is a doctoral project, studies the changes taking place within peasant communities in the district of Tambo, Ayacucho, during and after the armed conflict in Peru during the 1980s and early 1990s. In contrast to the Guatemalan project that studies actions and perceptions of people who fled from the conflict areas, this project explores contextualised forms of collective action developed by people who remained. The basic assumption is that contexts of political violence force traditional forms of peasant organisation to adapt, innovate or dissolve, leaving room for the creation of alternative forms of organisation, which is something that implies a redefinition of strategy and identity for the actors involved. This project is a continuation of Garcia-Godos’s previous research on peasant organisation in Northern Peru (Garcia-Godos 1998).

Another doctoral project dealing with consequences of war and armed conflict is being carried out by Nora Sveaass at the Psychosocial Centre for Refugees at the University of Oslo. Her PhD thesis is based on material from this project comprising clinical work with refugees in Norway and interviews with Nicaraguan health personnel about their experience with psychosocial treatment of war victims in Nicaragua (Sveaass 2000). It explores ways in which psychosocial work contributes to reconstructing lives after war, human rights violations and disruption. Sveaass also develops an integrated approach whereby psychological help goes hand in hand with measures leading to employment, training and network building.

One of the most challenging issues present in post-conflict societies is the design of national mechanisms to resolve disputes which arise when displaced persons return to their places of origin, or resettle in a new area and are confronted with persons laying claim to the same land. Cecilia Bailliet’s doctoral project in public law at the University of Oslo tries to meet this challenge through her research on refugee law, human rights, and conflict resolution in Guatemala. Starting from the premise that internal flight is often linked to the breakdown of effective conflict solution procedures, Bailliet considers the adoption of alternative dispute resolution procedures based on an amalgamation of customary norms and state practices (Bailliet 2000a, 2000b).

Consequences of the civil war and the peace process are also the focus of attention in Jon Schackt (University of Tromső) and Stener Ekern’s (University of Oslo) research in Guatemala. Based on fieldwork in Alta Verapaz, Schackt studies changes in identity and cultural outlook among Q’eqchi’ Indians. He reveals how the development of the new Mayan identity is accompanied by inventions in the field of symbolism and religion. While symbols, rituals and esoteric knowledge
with a pre- or extra-Christian frame of reference have always, in varying degrees, formed a part of the religious life of Mayan-speaking peoples, such customs are now labelled as Mayan, ritual specialists are called Mayan priests and the rituals they perform at natural shrines Mayan rituals. Schackt tries to determine the social significance of the new Mayan identity and the extent to which it is accepted and used in different types of localities and layers of the population (Schackt 2000a, 2000b). It should be mentioned that Schackt has been involved in research on indigenous people for many years. In the 1980s he studied the intersection of political and religious organisation among the Q’eqchi’ population in Belize (Schackt 1983), and in the 1990s, he studied culture and identity politics among the Yukuna Indians in Colombia (1990, 1994).

Stener Ekern’s PhD project in Guatemala focuses on different aspects of Maya Nationalism. Based on fieldwork in Totonicapan, he studies how indigenous local leaders perceive political traditions, community construction and relations with the Guatemalan state. Politics was also the focus of attention in Ekern’s previous research in Nicaragua (1998). Based on fieldwork in a neighbourhood in León, he explored the relation between culture and politics under the Sandinista regime. The title of his monograph Street Power refers to an important aspect of Nicaraguan culture, the street as a place where political praxis and ceremonies are carried out. The control of the streets gives power to political parties and or factions that are able to fill them with their followers. Ekern demonstrates how the Sandinistas use the streets as their main tool to keep power in Nicaragua. He also demonstrates how they used cultural symbols, such as the Virgin Mary, to mobilise people for their cause.

Maria Guazmán’s PhD project is concerned with indigenous identity in Ecuador. Comparing two Quichua communities in Amazonia, she explores how different economic systems and their products influence local perceptions of people and places, gender and kinship relations. This is a continuation of previous research in the same region (Guzman, 1997).

Other popular research topics are related to different aspects of globalisation. A group of researchers at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, is carrying out a project on Religion in Globalised Age. On the one hand, they are focusing on the influence of religion in general and Christianity in particular upon current worldwide processes of change, and, on the other, how religious interpretations and practices are transformed in this process. Two of the seven projects in this programme deal with Latin America. One of them headed by Sturla Stålsett focuses on liberation theology and, more specifically, on the critique of globalisation voiced by Latin American liberation theologians during the 1980s and ’90s. It questions whether this critique is an expression of resistance against globalisation on particularistic grounds; or is it rather a critique of certain consequences of the form that globalisation has taken within ‘market fundamentalism’ (exclusion) based on other globalised/universal norms such as ‘liberation’, ‘inclusion of the marginalized’ and ‘human rights’? The project also draws attention to one of the most important changes in liberation theology in the 1980s and ’90s; and that is a shift in orientation away from the political towards the civil society, from party affiliation and state building to mobilisation through popular movements. The project studies two of the most spectacular and powerful popular movements in Latin America in the
1990s: the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, and the movement of the landless in Brazil. Both are rooted in church-social work and liberation theology. The latter is also the focus of attention of the second project on Latin America led by Berge Furre. From a historical perspective, Furre attempts to dig more deeply into the theology and practice of the church with regard to the land question as a form of resistance. Furre compares the Brazilian case with similar movements in Zimbabwe and the Philippines. Stålsett’s project is a continuation of his PhD research on related topics in El Salvador. His thesis deals with the liberation Christology of Jon Sobrino, the Salvadorian-based Jesuit theologian (Stålsett 1997).

At the Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Benedicte Bull is finalising her doctoral project on transnationalisation of policy-making based on a study of telecommunication reform in Central America. She analyses the role of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in the reform processes in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras. Bull reveals that the multinational development banks have had far less influence than what is commonly argued in literature on market-oriented reforms in small, heavily indebted countries. In her cases the domestic private sector groups have been the driving forces in the reforms. She also reveals that privatisation does not mean the same in the three countries, because the neo-liberal model is modified when confronted with the prior structure of state-private sector relationship. Privatisation has improved the quality of and access to a limited set of services, but it has been ineffective in overcoming basic problems in the state-private sector relationship and has halted efforts to provide universal access to services. Bull, 2000 a,b).

Conclusion

This paper shows that Latin American studies in Norway have survived and even produced original and interesting research and scholars in spite of having been developed in an unconcerned and sometimes even hostile environment. The decision to create a Nordic institute on Latin America never materialised, and neither did the much less ambitious attempt to establish a research programme with earmarked funds. It is not likely that such initiatives will succeed in the future either, unless the research community manages to organise in a more coherent way than before and constitute a pressure group – something that seems rather unlikely at the moment. With a couple of exceptions, research and researchers are more scattered and fragmented than ever regarding disciplines as well as institutions; this is a product of the public policy of decentralisation. However, in spite of no special incentives, the number of students has increased dramatically during the 1990s. Even though most of the MSc candidates do not pursue a research career, this increase has contributed to a more solid base of recruitment for students who want to compete for PhD scholarships. The number of PhD projects on Latin America is low compared to the number on other regions (Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe). Nevertheless, interesting research and good candidates are being produced, who in the future will hopefully contribute to strengthening the interest in Latin America in academia as well as beyond.
Kristi Anne Stølen is Professor in Social Anthropology at the Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, where she coordinates a research programme on Forced Migration, Reconstruction of Livelihoods and Identities. From 1992-1995 she was a national coordinator for social science research on Latin America in Norway. Currently Stølen is working on a research project on returned refugees in Petén, Guatemala. The paper ‘No hay mal que por bien no venga: Experiencias de retornados guatemaltecos en Petén, Guatemala’, Cahier Gralthim No. 2 (2000), is based on this work. Her major research interests are gender, power, social change, conflict, violence, forced migration. <k.a.stolen@sum.uio.no>

Note
1. Due to the limitation of space it has not been possible to make an exhaustive presentation, including all the research on Latin America carried out over the years.

Bibliography

the Environment.


St.meld. nr. 42 (1987-88) *Om u-landsorientert utviklingsforskning*.


—– (2000b ‘No hay mal que por bien no venga: Experiencias de retornados guatemaltecos en Petén, Guatemala’, Cahier Gralhim No. 2.
Ugarteche, Oscar; Birger Angvik and Dag Strand Nilsen (1997) India bonita: (o, del amor y otras artes): ensayos de cultura gay en el Perú. Lima: MHOL.