

Associate Editor's Report

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Articles appearing in the *LASA Forum* since 2002 that address the overall problematic of “de-centering” Latin American Studies reflect a generalized attempt to make the *Forum* a more vibrant publication, one that keeps scholarly debate alive *between* our Congresses (Alvarez). At this point in time, especially, it is difficult to conceptualize new spaces of knowledge without dealing with collaboration. If we are in a moment where the politics of representation have merged with the politics of recognition (Rodríguez), and where there is no end to disciplinary frontiers (Williams), it seems logical to dedicate a *Debates* section to collaborative research and its methodologies. By this we mean the collaboration, complicity, solidarity, political identification, links, or simple social interaction, established between a scholar implementing field research and those individuals and/or communities being studied by the scholar in question, who ought to be considered as “knowledgeable, empowered participants in the research process” (Mendez, Hale). It is a problematic that already was raised and debated during the twentieth century, and one that continues to be critical in the wake of subaltern concerns and the quest for *otros saberes*.

The first essay exploring these topics is Jennifer Bickham Mendez’s “Research as Social Justice Work: Reflections on Doing Politically Engaged Scholarship.” Mendez begins with the basics, asking what the point of research is. “Why and for whom do we do it?” She believes that these issues get lost in the bureaucratization of academia that forces scholars to perform a double duty: they need to fulfill their required obligations at their institutions—and on their free time (and often while receiving no credit toward promotion or tenure) address the social issues that moved them to become academics in the first place. She then proceeds to argue how feminism made an important contribution to this form of research, given

its preoccupation with “microlevel dynamics,” and also its “emphasis on process and on the means of struggle as equally important as and inextricably related to outcomes.” In collaborative research, the scholar-activist becomes an “interlocutor” at the crossroads of intellectual endeavor and social change. Nevertheless, these collaborative operations alone do not bring about structural change, and can also generate contradictions for academics, given their insertion within institutions of power and privilege. As Mendez states, her experiences “may raise more questions than directly answer how to ‘do’ politically engaged research.” Still, she argues, “it is perhaps in learning to ask the right questions and to build the right kind of relationships that we come closest to developing a research practice that serves social justice.” Jennifer Bickham Mendez is in the Department of Sociology of the College of William and Mary.

Marc Becker’s “*Indígenas, Indigenistas, Tinterillos, and Marxists*” uses examples from Ecuador from the 1920s, when various groups engaged with indigenous peoples while portraying themselves as their “saviors.” He chronicles the reaction of the elite to these negotiators to determine how different kinds of intermediaries, whose dealings could be seen as mutually exploitative, and/or mutually beneficial for both interlocutors and indigenous peoples, “approached Indigenous struggles in fundamentally different ways, engaging different issues and seeking to achieve different ends.” These past patterns enable Professor Becker to problematize contemporary collaborations with indigenous groups, using the Internet by way of example. He argues that “one of the goals to be met needs to be that of striving for direct Indigenous control and autonomy over these means of communication.” Becker indicates that for the foreseeable future

outsiders will likely continue to play a part in indigenous affairs, whether or not we or they like it and suggests that collaborative research where “respectful relationships” are constructed, “in which people interact as equals, even while understanding their differences,” is the best way to proceed. Marc Becker is Associate Professor of History at Truman State University.

Patricia Richards begins “A Feminist Sociologist’s Reflections on Collaborative Research” by asking what it means “to do action-oriented, feminist research.” She proceeds to outline a series of obstacles that emerge from this framework, beginning with the issue of power, to trace a line that should ideally reach that point where “‘other knowledges’ are legitimated, collaborative research is considered a valid methodological approach, and activist scholars are not scorned for their lack of objectivity and rigor.” Nevertheless, warning us to stay away from any form of idealization, she confirms that even when a decision is made to engage in collaborative research, factors such as ethical issues, the question of with whom to collaborate, and even a need to work with humility, complicates its actual practice. Patricia Richards is in the Sociology and Women’s Studies departments at the University of Georgia.

In “Research Collaboration from a Geographer’s Perspective,” Elizabeth Oglesby notes that “the question is not whether Geography is relevant (it clearly is), but rather, to whom is it relevant, and for what end.” She points to the “the thorny issues of research collaborations” as a part of the debate. To this she adds a twist of her own regarding collaborative research: “it is not whether research collaboration happens (it clearly does), but between whom does it happen, under what terms, and to what end?” She then proceeds to outline her personal experience training at AVANCSO in

Guatemala. Professor Oglesby adds the caveat that it is difficult to engage in long-term collaborative projects when there is no guarantee of a publication at its end, given that tenure and/or promotion are always at play for academics. She ends, accordingly, by calling for a transformation in how academic institutions value and give worth to this kind of research, as a way to generate more efforts of its kind. Elizabeth Oglesby is in the Latin American Studies and Geography departments at the University of Arizona.

Finally, in “The Comparative Politics of *Compañerismo* and Collaboration,” José Antonio Lucero problematizes the words that indicate collaborations or relationships with local subjects. He argues that being “in the field” is learned “very much on-the-job.” He cites as an example how he was told by a mentor to be a “*compañero*” while on the field. Though admitting that this taught him that research “is an intervention in people’s lives and worlds that needs to be justified first and foremost to those people who make it possible,” and that it is “not simply another extractive industry ...” but, rather, one that contributes to the wellbeing of the communities it studies, his experience also taught him that he was using the word *compañero* incorrectly. He presupposed he was establishing horizontal relations with his collaborators, but indigenous communities used the term to define members of the community exclusively, not choosing to ascribe it to researchers and/or those of a different ethnic background. Much as the researcher had good intentions, the perception of difference was a two-way street. José Antonio Lucero is in the Department of Political Science at Temple University.

Given the reactionary politics of the U.S. government that prevented Cuban scholars and many others from attending LASA’s XXVI International Congress in San Juan, we dedicated our *On the Profession* section to two articles analyzing the implications of this exclusion. The first is by Milagros Martínez, an elected officer of LASA’s Cuba Section. Her essay, “Una pelea contra los demonios,” outlines the history of Cuban participation in LASA Congresses, and how, after 2003, the Bush administration arbitrarily blocked the exchange with Cuban scholars using terrorism as an unfounded pretext. She concludes by stating: “*el intercambio académico ha significado, además, un proceso de aprendizaje: aprender a discutir, a argumentar frente a opiniones diferentes. Dialogar es más difícil que recurrir a discursos preestablecidos.*” The other is a short piece by well-known Sandinista ex-comandante Dora María Téllez, titled “*La negativa de mi visa para asistir al congreso de LASA.*” She mentions her surprise at being denied a visa to attend the LASA Congress, given that she had already been in the United States countless times, and her political activities, for which she is honored in her country but were used as an excuse for this denial, had come to an end 15 years before. She rightly argues that “*restringir la libertad en nombre de la libertad sigue siendo un contrasentido,*” and concludes that “*esta es una manera de censurar, de coartar la libertad de expresión que afecta a ambos lados del Río Bravo, pues el intercambio de ideas, de experiencias, perspectivas y puntos de vista, enriquece a todos los pueblos.*”

Finally, Lynn Stephen’s “Oaxacan Women Democratize Media: *Radio Cacerola* and the APPO Movement” appears in the *Political Commentary* section. This article recounts the summer’s events in Oaxaca, with APPO emerging as an alternative power to the “desprestigiado” PRI governor. Stephen explains that *Radio Cacerola* was the locus of this social mobilization, and narrates how women organized the radio station and kept it going during the most difficult days of the confrontation with local authorities. Lynn Stephen is professor and chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oregon. ■