

## Where to Publish? The Latinamericanist's Dilemma

by RORY M. MILLER | University of Liverpool Management School | rory@liv.ac.uk

Where to publish articles has long been a great dilemma facing Latinamericanist scholars, particularly those of us who live in English-speaking countries. This is inevitable in a multidisciplinary field like Latin American studies, where researchers confront some stark choices: first, whether to publish a particular piece of research in a disciplinary or area studies journal; and second, whether to publish in English or Spanish/Portuguese.

Given that most of us, in the early stages of our careers, sought jobs either in our home country or elsewhere in the Anglophone world, we inevitably faced pressures to publish in English. In order to attract the attention of those who control the academic and institutional environment, and hence the hiring decisions, and who frequently know little about Latin America, academics have been pushed towards publishing at least some of their papers in mainstream disciplinary journals, even if the primary audience they would like to reach is a Latin American(ist) one. After all, positions specifically in Latin American studies continue to be rather less common than those in discipline-based departments.

Professional pressures, for confirmation of tenure or for promotion, normally mean continuing to publish primarily in English. Particularly as family and professional commitments restrict our fieldwork, we may become "magpie academics," flying in to Latin America for a short time, collecting a few tasty research trinkets, and taking them back to our own nests, there to rearrange them in a way that pleases senior colleagues in our own countries. We thus run the risk of neglecting the academic communities of the countries in which we undertake our fieldwork and speaking to North Atlantic academic debates rather than Latin American ones.

At least around 1970, when I started my own research career, some common ground existed among scholars from North America, Europe, and Latin America in the form of the shared, if contested, paradigm of dependency theory. Concepts of dependency also had international significance, beyond Latin American studies. In addition, the methodologies that researchers in different disciplines tended to use allowed them to speak to one another across disciplinary lines. In the past two decades, however, a process of disciplinary fragmentation and reorientation has created enormous problems for Latin American scholars and for foreign specialists committed to multidisciplinary research.

First, the dominant approaches in many disciplines, especially in North America, have become more exclusionary, most obviously in economics, though increasingly in political science, and even in disciplines like history where the cultural turn and neglect of economic history that has characterized many U.S. departments since the 1990s has found few echoes in Latin America. For those who retain a commitment to work that is comprehensible across disciplines and relevant within Latin America this narrowing of focus and increasing "tunnel vision" within the social sciences has created enormous difficulties.

Second, leading researchers in Latin America have themselves come under pressure to publish in English, either from national research councils or from their own universities and research institutes. Publishing in English-language journals has become a synonym for international reputation and performance, often rewarded with financial incentives. In one leading research council, I am informed, this has been accompanied by persistent denigration of well-respected international journals of long standing such as *El Trimestre*

*Económico, Desarrollo Económico*, and even *Revista de la CEPAL*.

Third, research assessment exercises and other performance indicators have become increasingly common. Such reviews often depend on journal ranking lists, especially in well-populated disciplines. Examples of these are the European Science Foundation's disastrous and misguided attempts to rank humanities journals on a European scale, or the many lists produced in economics, accounting, business and management. "Impact factors," especially those determined by the Thomson-ISI *Web of Knowledge* or Elsevier's *Scopus*, have become critical to departmental and individual reputations as well as those of the journals concerned. Given the overwhelming English-language bias of the *Web of Knowledge* and other such ranking lists, this has created further pressure on authors to publish outside Latin America and within the context of North Atlantic debates in their disciplines.

There are, of course, some benefits from the growth of on-line databases and electronic access to articles. A carefully constructed abstract and selection of keywords can bring research on Latin America to the attention of those in the disciplinary mainstream. Consortia and other arrangements developed by publishers have made English-language journals much more accessible both within Latin America and across the world. However, they have also had the effect of making North American, and to a lesser extent European, approaches to scholarship the expected norm.

Editors of English-language journals on Latin America, judging from conversations with colleagues at LASA, now receive a markedly increased number of article submissions each year, and this is partly a result of these changes. But, while grateful

for this as editors, we are also, I think, concerned about the proportion we receive that are unlikely to be suitable for publication in area studies journals that seek to connect the North Atlantic and Latin American worlds.

Part of the problem is that authors may submit an article that is pitched entirely in terms of a broader English-language debate and methodology, paying no attention to local scholarship and, in effect, conveying the unspoken assumption that local scholarship is not worthwhile. Authors in political science departments in the United States, for example, have been known to submit articles analyzing key Latin American presidential elections without referring to a single source in Spanish or Portuguese, despite the wealth of local literature. Such an approach totally ignores the work of vibrant social science communities in Latin America that have gained in strength since the 1960s.

On the other side of the coin, authors in Latin America seeking to publish in English may not realize the need to contextualize an article so that it grabs the attention of a researcher working in a North American or European university on a related topic in a different Latin American country. Those best placed to publish in English, therefore, are often those Latin American scholars who have studied or worked in North America or Europe themselves, and have therefore internalized North Atlantic methodologies and research priorities. Latin American researchers who have come through their own country's higher education system rather than studying abroad, one suspects, often make discouraging mistakes in their selection of possible outlets, with the result that their work does not receive the exposure to the wider Anglophone social science community that it may deserve.

Overcoming these information asymmetries, linguistic obstacles, and disciplinary biases is a difficult task, but one that we need to address. The journal editors' sessions at recent LASA Congresses, begun by Peter Ward and continued by Phil Oxhorn, have been valuable in developing a dialogue among editors, and between editors and authors, but we need to consider how we might do more. There is scope, perhaps, for smaller meetings at disciplinary conferences, especially within Latin America. It is, after all, in our collective interests to ensure that scholarship on and from Latin America is taken much more into account in the mainstream humanities and social sciences disciplines. The contemporary world of on-line searching and wider access to journals in Latin American studies, wherever they are published, provides us with a path to this.

But these are also issues that we need to consider in our own individual publication strategies, whether we work in Europe, North America, or Latin America itself. The dilemmas of where to publish, whether in English or Spanish/Portuguese, whether in disciplinary or area studies journals, how to pitch and place our articles successfully, and how to bring them to the attention of the readers whom we wish to influence are ones that we all face throughout our careers. ■