

## Managing the first Luciano Tomassini Latin American IR Award

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The growing role of Latin America in the world today is one of the great stories of the new century. For LASA, the world's leading professional grouping of Latin Americanists, and one that is especially proud of its global membership, this should be a key topic. Yet, it could well be argued that LASA members have not been paying to it all the attention they should. At LASA 2012, the thirtieth meeting of the Association, a mere 24 panels were part of the IR track, one of the 38 program tracks, thus accounting for 2.4 percent of the total number of 999 special events at the meeting. And even if we were to add related program tracks like Defense, Violence and (In) Security (many of whose 28 panels deal with internal security issues) and Transnationalism and Globalization, with 22 panels, the numbers are still quite low for a meeting that gathered some 4,800 participants in San Francisco this May.

Thus, the 2011 establishment by LASA of the Luciano Tomassini Latin American International Relations Award, generously funded by the Ford Foundation, is especially welcome. In honoring the memory of the noted Chilean thinker, political scientist, and analyst, the founder of the *Red de Relaciones Internacionales de América Latina* (RIAL), and a man often described as the founding dean of Latin American IR, the Association is also stimulating and promoting scholarly work in a field that will be critical in helping Latin America to find its place in the changing 21st century scene.

Several proposals were considered for the establishment of the prize, including the possibility of giving it to a practitioner. Yet, in the end, the notion of recognizing academic contributions to our understanding of the complex challenges faced by the region as it attempts to find its niche in the shifting global architecture

prevailed. This will be done by granting the award to what is considered to be the best book on Latin American IR and/or foreign policies published in the three previous years in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Although some valuable work today is the product of collective research projects whose findings are published in edited volumes, it was decided that, to make the exercise more manageable, the prize would be confined to monographs by one (or more) authors, rather than to collective works.

The criteria established by LASA for the award were straightforward. The prize should go to works that excel in the originality of the research, the quality of the analysis and the prose and the significance of its contribution to the study of Latin American international relations. It was with these criteria in mind that the jury appointed by LASA president Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida (formed by Jorge Heine as chair, and Victor Bulmer-Thomas of University College London, Rafael Fernández de Castro of ITAM, Monica Hirst of the Universidad Torcuato di Tella and Julia Sweig from the Council on Foreign Relations) discharged its duties. Given that the award would be given for the first time at LASA 2012, this task acquired special significance.

A first challenge was to spread the word about the prize and let publishers and authors from around the world know of its existence. The fact that the award was announced in May 2011 with a 1 September 2011 deadline, that is, over the Northern Hemisphere summer, a time when much academic activity changes gears and/or goes into slow motion, made this particularly urgent. The last thing the jury wanted was to receive only a few entries, which is exactly what happened from May to July. To address this, jury members,

working hand in hand with the LASA Secretariat, contacted authors and publishers in Latin America, the United States, Canada and Europe to inform them about the award, something helped by a piece published on the subject in the *LASA Forum* summer 2011 issue. To provide additional time, the deadline for nominations was extended to 15 September 2011.

In the end ("Beware of what you wish for..."), a grand total of 54 titles was submitted for the award, in English, Portuguese and Spanish, a more than reasonable number for the first version of a book award. They included titles published in ten countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, the United Kingdom and the United States); they were written by authors of 14 different nationalities, as far as could be determined (Argentina, 2; Belize, 1; Bolivia, 1; Brazil, 5; Canada, 5; Chile, 7; Colombia, 4; Costa Rica, 2; Italy, 1; Israel, 1; Mexico, 4; Peru, 1; Uruguay, 1; United States, 13); forty-three were authored by men and eleven by women.

A first perusal established that not all the titles submitted complied with the requirements, either because of the subject matter, or for other reasons. For example, one of the books, though published in South America by a South American author, dealt strictly with the rise of China; another had not been published yet, and was submitted in MS form; a third was quite explicitly focused on Latin American comparative politics. The list of 54 titles was thus cut to 36.

On 1 October 2011 the jury established a three step-evaluation process: a "long list" of ten titles by 10 December; a "short list" of three by 10 January 2012; and a winner by 1 February.. The three-week period from

10 December to 5 January was one marked by an especially intense flow of e-mail and telephone exchanges among jury members, across three continents. On 5 January, the jury met via Skype teleconference call to agree on the short list. The latter ended up being formed by four rather than three titles.

On 18 January, agreement was reached on the winner of the first Luciano Tomassini Latin American International Relations Award. The jury recommended to the LASA Executive Council that it be given to the book by Brazilian political scientist Marisa von Bülow, *Building Transnational Networks: Civil Society and the Politics of Trade in the Americas* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

In its citation, the jury stated:

Although there were quite a number of fine books submitted for the Award, *Building Transnational Networks* stands out for the following reasons:

1) It (implicitly) asks a big, significant question: Why did the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), perhaps the most ambitious hemispheric project of the last two decades, fail? By taking on a hemispheric-wide issue (as opposed to a single-country study or one that looks at a bilateral relation), it expands our disciplinary horizons and pushes the study of Latin American IR precisely in the direction it should go—that is, towards exploring broad, system- or continent-wide questions that further our understanding of the changing role that Latin America in general and Latin American countries in particular are playing in the newly emerging international system of this century.

2) It is a theoretically sophisticated work that deploys the latest network-analytic techniques and explores the interaction between two spheres that are often examined separately: the action of civil society organizations, on the one hand, and the dynamics of international trade negotiations, on the other.

3) It is based on fieldwork done in six different countries—Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru and the United States. Its findings throw new light on the nature and implications of transnational collective action, and does so on the basis of abundant empirical evidence.

4) Despite its being a new prize with a short submission time, the large number of entries from throughout the Americas and Europe, by scholars from very different backgrounds, nationalities and approaches to the study of IR, indicates that the award has tapped into a growing and dynamic field that should benefit from the incentives provided by the Luciano Tomassini Award.

That said, some “lessons learned” from this exercise indicate the following:

- *Do not assume that just because the award has been announced, the entries will start flowing in. A pro-active attitude by the jury, in close coordination with the LASA Secretariat, “to beat the drums” about the award is essential to attract a truly representative set of submissions. The latter is especially true for entries from Latin American publishers.*

- *Keep front and center the three criteria established by LASA, as opposed to some abstract notion of what each of the jury members considers to be*

*“quality scholarship”. This was critical to move forward and break potential deadlocks.*

- *At least in this particular subfield, at this point in time, there seems to be no necessary, unilinear correlation between such traditional indicators as age, established scholarly reputation and affiliation to major Northern research universities, on the one hand, and quality of output, on the other. Some of the most exciting and innovative work in Latin American IR today is being done by younger scholars, many of them in the region.*

Given the encouraging response by publishers and authors to this first version of the Luciano Tomassini Latin American International Relations Award, the more LASA and its members can do to spread the word about it, the better. ■