
Editorial:

Revisiting Latin American communication and culture

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Latin America is a multicultural territory with a longstanding mosaic of identities and hybrid cultures (Garcia-Canclini, 2005) in continuous transformation. A melting pot of distinctive heterogeneity and difference, from the indigenous ancestry blended with European, African, and Asian migrations. Hall (1987) would call it the 'moveable feast', transformed progressively by cultural systems around us, now intensified with globalization. In recent decades, upheavals in social, economic, and political processes pervaded the region. Military dictatorships, civil wars in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, Argentina's Dirty War, the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia and, more recently, Mexico's violent drug war - to name a few examples - have all had devastating effects. The region is also fraught with relentless problems of poverty, socio economic inequality, and exclusion throughout. These are issues that need to be addressed in relation to the region's integration into the global economic and political order. In recent transitions to democratic and neoliberal regimes in the region, particularly during the last decade, the shift to left-wing progressive governments has been a distinctive feature of South America that have changed the geopolitical, social and economic map. Also, as migration flows have increased across the continent, and European capitals, the boundaries of Latin American cultures have been redrawn (Waisbord, 1998) and the hybridisation process pushed further.

All these processes have transformed not only societies and economies, but also culture. Latin American cultural and media research developed from an

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epistemological break from the British, European and North American Cultural School paradigms and a decentralised and de-westernised analysis of sociocultural and political processes in the region. Given the concern of the unequal communication structures, and 'cultural imperialism', academics and intellectuals boosted 'the new world order for information and communication' McBride Report (One world, multiple voices, UNESCO) towards national communication policies. From early on, communication scholars in the region had a strong connection with social change, (Pasquali, 1972; Martin-Barbero, 1987; García-Canclini, 2005; Beltrán, 2000; Freire, 1970). This tradition recovered the concept 'popular', as an object of enquiry heretofore disregarded, *mestizaje*, *hybrid cultures*, and *mediations*. Given that Cultural Studies are undergoing diverse changes in all the regional scenarios, it remains a highly contested field of intellectual debate and analysis. The Latin American cultural and communication academy is currently at a crossroad; it needs to articulate a robust voice, as well as to circulate knowledge and to engage in dialogues with other regions.

This new issue of *Westminster Papers of Communication and Culture* is dedicated for the first time to Latin America, and by re-visiting the cultural and communication standpoints undertaken in the region, it will help to address the ongoing questions on globalisation, and cultural hybridisation from the local and regional cultures. The papers explore a range of important issues including media democracy, hybrid identity, media and migration, structure and agency, social change, technology, and resistance. Articles originate from and refer to different countries: Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States. These confer diverse approaches and different perspectives of the study of culture and are authored by different generations of scholars (both consolidated and early career researchers), giving a glimpse of the latest research and new directions of the research agenda. An interesting characteristic is that many of the authors are an "academic diaspora" (both Latin Americans working in the West and vice versa). Whilst we faced the challenge of a linguistic and academic discourse divide (see Pérez-Llantada et al, 2010) during the call for papers and in collating the collection, such a mix of perspectives should help to highlight and advance Latin America cultural research.

As an introduction to the intellectual development of Latin American cultural studies, Silvio Waisbord, the media and politics scholar, and culturalist Mónica Szurmuk jointly analyse the political frameworks of cultural studies (including the work of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams) in order to explain how the study of culture in the region has been, somehow, divorced from the political and economy enquiry. This, the authors argue, is one of the reasons for a current impasse. In order to overcome it, they put forward new research directions regarding how developments in the region help to understand longstanding questions of power, globalization, conflict, and collective identities.

The second paper by Jesús Martín-Barbero, a key figure in Latin American cultural tradition, analyses the relationship between culture and technology, and the possible ways to overcome technological determinism. Two processes are dramatically shifting the place of culture in Latin America: the revitalization of identity and technological revolution. The latter makes more evident the technological and social divides; this inequality is also cultural, yet mobilizes the social imagination. These new forms of cultural resistance are Barbero's mediations revisited in the Twenty-first Century. The author proposes cultural sustainability and cultural convergence in order to include cultural diversity of regional and indigenous minorities in the network society; he drafts a map of strategic action to engage with the digital revolution.

There is consolidated research on the phenomenon of migration from developing nations to the global north. Unsurprisingly, this is a key multidisciplinary topic in Latin American studies, yet media-migration enquiry is still a developing field. In this regard, this issue presents two articles analysing media and migration from different approaches. Firstly, from the perspective of diaspora and political news, Gabriel Moreno evaluates the news coverage of *Univisión* the largest Spanish-language broadcaster in United States. He has conducted a content analysis of the newscast programme *Noticiero Univisión*, with reference to the controversial anti-illegal immigration law 'Arizona SB 1070' passed in April 2011 that aims to identify, prosecute and deport illegal immigrants. This is a point of departure to investigate the construction of diasporic public spheres and whether media can make significant contributions to the empowerment of transnational

communities. This thought-provoking article proposes a new regard of the configuration of transnational Latin American ethnicity, and their 'mediascapes', by delivering an original understanding of the largest ethnic minority in the United States.

Jéssica Retis and Francisco Sierra study the production, consumption, and reception patterns of transnational Latin American diaspora in London, Madrid and Los Angeles. With globalization, recent migratory flows have slightly shifted from North America to European capitals. The authors undertake a theoretical critique to cultural consumption analysis with regard to migration, by offering a structured literature review of the region's media research. Given that a significant proportion of Latin Americans live outside their geopolitical region, the authors acknowledge that the study of diaspora and media in the USA and Europe focused in Latin America is still a pending task, and propose a novel research agenda.

When we think about modern Latin American capitals, large, dynamic, sprawling urban growth, and slightly chaotic cities come to our mind (e.g. Mexico City, São Paulo). Whilst metropolis are not usually associated with cultural enquiry, Puerto Rican scholar Patria Román-Velázquez and Alejandra García-Vargas, intertwine the urban, cultural and communication research of ordinary cities within the context of globalization. This comprehends new forms of being urban in ordinary cities and understanding the political contexts under which urban practices are occurring. This work stresses the importance of moving away from the notion of global cities as production, information hubs, and economics flows, to the idea of the city as a site of symbolic expression. Thereon, the research proposes different ways of narrating, imagining, and understanding the capital and provincial cities, often disregarded from the prevailing urban-cultural studies.

Citizens' media emancipation through community media is an emblematical landmark in the region that goes back to Freire and Beltrán towards democratic participation. In this regard, Alejandro Barranquero embarks in a comprehensive exploration and analysis of communication for social change in the region, by reviewing the standpoints of Latin American communication research. These are

skilfully interlaced with contemporary theories of participatory and democratic communication. Through examination of the regional grassroots and critical frameworks in the region, the author sheds light on the Western participatory communication paradigm.

The last paper by Carolina Matos analyses how media democratization can assist in deepening the political democratization process in Brazil. In a comparative perspective with European countries, her examination of media system development in Latin America shows a history of neglect of public communication. The relationship between public communication and the public interest, in particular, illustrates the historical deficiencies of public communication frameworks and the mishandling of political, private, and social interests. The Brazilian media environment has changed over the decades, with media conglomerates expanding, the paper highlights the importance of a media committed to its citizenship, wherein public media is a mechanism that can reinforce both national and local identities, and cultures in negotiation with the public sphere.

The issue's first book review by Anastasia Kavada, media and technologies scholar, provides an analysis of *Communication Power* (2009) by Spanish landmark scholar Manuel Castells. By progressing from the ideas of the 'Information Age' trilogy, in the context of the network society the book investigates the functioning of communication power, one of the key questions in current academy enquiry.

Andrea Medrado writes the second book review. A specialist on media and Brazilian *favelas* (shantytowns), she provides a well-grounded assessment of Janice Perlman's book *Favela. Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro* (2010). During the sixties, Perlman, lived and researched a *favela*. Thirty years later, she returned to re-examine it. The findings' re-evaluation in two different periods opens up old methodological questions regarding the appropriate length of fieldwork to fully understand a phenomenon.

Finally, it is important to note that marginal (i.e. indigenous) cultures are unfortunately not included in this issue. A lack of economic and academic resources has affected development work in this area. This problem exemplifies some of the arguments raised in this issue and also the importance of further research to be done. However, this new issue of *Westminster Papers of Communication and Culture* aims to open up a window of scholar dialogue and exchange. This is a special opportunity to bring together established scholars and young researchers and to offer an overview of research in the region.

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