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Cultura(s) Periodística(s) Iberoamericana(s)

La diversidad de un periodismo propio

Prólogo

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Prólogo

THIS VOLUME, *Cultura(s) Periodística(s) Iberoamericana(s) - La diversidad de un periodismo propio*, is a milestone in bringing together two things: studies of Latin American journalism and comparative research. The book does so in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, it draws together the available data to sketch the Ibero American journalist, as he (yes, it is a he) emerges from the surveys and content analysis carried out in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela. On the other hand, many of the chapters point to the regional distinctiveness of certain types of journalism, be they community radio stations for Indigenous people in Brazil or sports journalism in the north of Mexico, where Latin American enthusiasm for *fútbol* encounters the influence of North American *beisbol*.

Comparative media research, as it were, is the communication discipline's reaction to globalization. It is recognition of the shifts in the forces that drive media research. A Western, and in particular American, approach dominated journalism research for decades. It seemed a given that the country that had established mass media early and was a pioneer in journalism research and journalism education should shape the norms both for journalism and the discipline. But comparative research revealed that the norms, as they had been developed in North America and Western Europe could not be generalized. What had been thought as being applicable to all countries -and Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's Four Theories of the Press is a prime example here- was found to be a highly blinkered, not to say imperialistic view of the world's media. It did not allow for, or was ignorant of, regional variances and differing historical and political developments. While some comparative research had already

pointed to the differences between journalists in two or more nations, it was the great merit of Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* to dispel the notion that there was firstly, one Western media system and secondly, that the United States was the model that fitted all. It was their painstaking exploration of political and parliamentary systems, media history and configuration of the media market that led to the outlining of three distinct media systems. Although Hallin and Mancini expressly stated that their systems were only applicable in the countries they had studied in detail, several of the features they highlighted, especially in the polarized pluralist model, are found in other parts of the world.

Comparative research can compare a number of things. It can compare media markets and ownership concentrations, it can contrast political communication cultures, it can look at media performance or it can assess individual actors, such as journalists or journalism students. Latin America has embraced the latter ones with enthusiasm, and two studies emanated from the region. Claudia Mellado initiated the research into *Journalistic Performance* and into *Journalism Students Across the Globe*. These ventures followed the pattern set out by Thomas Hanitzsch's *Worlds of Journalism Study*, which now encompasses 67 countries. The accumulated data has produced a wide array of insights, and these large-scale research projects heuristically opened the way to map out the commonalities and differences, a number of which can be found in this volume. Mellado's project of tracking journalism students in many parts of the world adds greatly to the insight into students' attitudes towards journalism, which at times can at best be described as ambivalent. The research in countries where the teaching of journalism is heavily circumscribed by the politics of the country, highlights the influence of ideological ambiances in the ways they are taught. An interesting case study can be found in this volume, titled 'The future professionals of the Devil's Triangle of Latin American journalism: Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela'.

While the wording of 'devil's triangle' strikes a note with Western views, populism and socialism have long been a hallmark of Latin America. It is therefore essential to include studies on the Latin American countries with populist or socialist governments, and to

take a step back from the entrenched notion that journalism has only a role to play in democratic countries. Journalism, as these global research projects prove, exists in varying manifestations all around the world, and it is the theorizing of their contexts, as Hallin and Mancini point out, what comparative analysis is about.

Efforts are ongoing to develop a model or a series of systems for Latin America, such as Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez “Captured Liberalism” model or as Oller and Tornay outline in “Towards a journalism-other: journalistic cultures in Latin America within the framework of the decolonial-turn’ in Chapter XII. Even as the Latin American political landscape keeps changing, the polarization between populist or socialist governments and governments that favour market driven economies over state interventionist economies continues, as a result of the glaring wealth divide in Latin America. Argentina and Brazil oscillate between administrations seen as populist and those which are not, whereas the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Nicaragua have had populist governments for more than a decade.

Both types of government have a strong interest in the media, although expressed in different ways. While market friendly governments can rely on media owners to uphold their interests, populist governments put forward patriotic concerns and lay claim to being in the service of all people. Neither position, to Western eyes, seems to leave journalists much autonomy. Yet the survey figures for Latin American countries do not reflect this. As detailed in Chapter I, journalists see themselves as the owners of their stories, in particular in Colombia and Mexico. Conversely, both countries are renowned for their violence against journalists and ranked by Reporters Sans Frontieres as difficult environments. Violence against reporters is heinous but is, as it were, recognition of the importance of journalists. Their work in shaping their countries’ future gives these journalists a strong sense of purpose. The same could be said of those journalists who offer their cooperation with those in power in order to defend the unity of their nation and, as a gesture of pride, wish to project a positive image of their country.

These complex signs may seem contradictory when considered from a Western perspective. But it is time to query the Western approach,

especially as journalism in those countries, which shaped the norms, is undergoing significant transformation. Many of the norms, formed in pre-digital days, are now put into question. Journalism is changing shape, with journalists no longer having the authoritative voice they were once presumed to have. Notions of autonomy are altering in an age when news users have a voice of their own. These transformations in the appraisal of journalism also demand adjustments of the way in which journalism is evaluated in the world. May Latin America be a trailblazer in finding ways of theorizing journalism amidst uncertain times, polarized societies, and populist presidents. The chapters in this book are a welcome contribution to this endeavor.

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