
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

EMERGING PATTERNS OF RESEARCH IN THE STUDY OF LATIN AMERICA

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For eight years I was associated with one of the most quixotic efforts in academic publishing—a journal concerned comprehensively with research about an area of the world. I must admit that when the *Latin American Research Review* (LARR) was about to move to Chapel Hill, I thought the original idea that had given birth to the journal had lost its vitality. The notion of reviewing research seemed restrictive and either excessively specialized or hopelessly protean. The dramatic increase in the training of Latin Americanists and the resulting explosion of publications about the region by the end of the 1960s seemed to threaten with extinction the *rara avis* that had been the journal's stock in trade, the review of the literature. In 1974, when John Martz and I assumed control of LARR, it was hard to imagine anyone repeating Richard Morse's feat in the two-part article on urban studies, "Trends and Issues in Latin American Urban Research, 1965–1970" (LARR volume 6, numbers 1 and 2 [1971]). The mere suggestion of surveying the field of colonial history in three articles, as James Lockhart, Karen Spalding, and Frederick Bowser had done in 1972, would have brought an incredulous curl to the nether lip of a student of that field just two years later. The fact that we received virtually no backlog of manuscripts from our predecessors appeared symbolic of the well having run dry.

In retrospect, the absence of a backlog was more than a challenge,

it was an opportunity to strike out on our own in new directions. I cannot claim that in the succeeding years we played a critical role in reshaping the research agenda for studying Latin America, but I can say that we were never passive agents or conduits for work carried out by an army of scholars operating in isolated academic bastions throughout the United States, Latin America, and the rest of the world. From the very outset, we employed a battery of devices and formats to attract submissions and to influence the pattern of research by nudging scholars in directions we considered of potential interest to a broad range of our audience and of greatest potential influence on the region as a whole. We solicited manuscripts from scholars, particularly Latin Americans, whose ongoing work we considered worthy of broader dissemination, either because of the issues with which they dealt or because of the methodology they employed. We even sampled gingerly from the rich mine of empirical research being conducted when we felt it necessary or useful in accomplishing our broad mandate. We instituted a section of essay reviews of “packages” of recent books in an effort to focus on themes in the published literature. We sought to increase the representation of academic disciplines that had become marginal in the area studies enterprise—anthropology, economics, geography, and literature. We solicited and included in each issue reports on the activities of research centers in Latin America. And, finally, though probably most significant in the long run, we systematically incorporated Latin American colleagues in every phase of the endeavor. Despite logistical difficulties, we added to our editorial board scholars living in Latin America. And they never were figureheads. They were among the most *cumplidor* of our manuscript referees and helped in many other ways—alerting us to work being done by younger colleagues, highlighting areas for scholarly concern, sending new manuscripts our way, lobbying with publishers in Latin America to send review copies of their publications, and providing a participant’s perspective on the academic debates over such immediate issues as social change, transnational enterprise, and authoritarian regimes.

While I am sufficiently immodest to believe that the strategic position I occupied for the past eight years warrants a systematic evaluation of the written work submitted to LARR—nearly two thousand articles, research notes, and review essays—the constraints of time and space militate against such an enterprise at this point. Instead, what I offer is a series of musings, in little more than outline form, on the patterns of research in the study of Latin America, and some ill-digested notions of what remains to be done. I cannot hope to be all inclusive. Instead, I have attempted to identify broad trends that seem to mark the convergence of many separate currents in the work of many scholars in many disciplines in many countries.

Increasing Interdisciplinarity of Research

The focus of concern among students of Latin America has shifted perceptibly to issues with heavy public policy dimensions. This has brought in its train an increasing interdisciplinarity of research. It takes the form of teams of researchers representing different academic disciplines working on the same project, as well as attempts by individuals to address problems with the tools and methods of various disciplines. The institutional rigidities of universities in this country, together with the outmoded prejudices of some funding agencies, has inhibited this trend and may place outer limits upon it. These structural factors certainly are part of the explanation for the fact that much interesting work of this type is being done in Latin American centers organized around major issues or social problems, not academic disciplines. Typical of the smaller centers with highly coordinated research activities is the Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales in Buenos Aires. More recently, this approach has been introduced to a few Latin American universities: the groups in Michoacan and Guadalajara studying regional social networks and population distribution; the group at the Universidade Federal da Bahia drawn from the medical school and the faculty of arts and sciences studying a similar set of issues with particular attention to the impact of migratory flows on the urban labor market and the effects of stress on the individual migrant; the group affiliated with the political science research institute at the Universidad Central de Venezuela studying the multifaceted problems of democratic regimes in developing societies. These projects have been a tonic for geographers and planners, placing great emphasis on spatial variables, and have brought together sociologists, anthropologists, and historians with representatives of other disciplines whenever appropriate. I should point out that there is some evidence of sympathy among funding agencies in both the public and private sectors for certain policy issues, such as human settlements and the environment. As this sympathy increases, having money available should help academics in their efforts to overcome structural obstacles in the way of their intellectual concern with interdisciplinary policy issues. The trend toward interdisciplinarity, in turn, has led to another major shift in research patterns toward multilevel perspectives and a tendency to merge or combine macro- and micro-level analyses in the same project. This trend, as with the first, has brought to center stage fields or disciplines that heretofore had often occupied marginal positions in the study of Latin America, such as epidemiology, planning, and ecology.

Increasing Use of Multiple Levels of Analysis

The trend toward multiple levels of analysis, too, has a great deal to do with public policy questions. The application at the micro level of policies conceived and formulated at the macro level is a methodological issue addressed with increasing frequency. Again, the team approach is one way to incorporate multiple levels of analysis in the same research, and the Guadalajara project is a good example of such work. For too long, students of population movements and regional development have been divided into two groups, firmly isolated from one another. One dealt with models of individual decision making, while the other focused on policy outputs or aggregate movements of production factors. The division is largely a function of hyperspecialization among social scientists in the developed nations and was imposed on Third World research dealing with population issues. It has become clear that neither the micro nor the macro model, by itself, is adequate to answer either the academic question of why people in Latin America moved in such large numbers or the policy question of how to influence the direction or the timing of the migratory flows. Efforts to combine the two models, while fraught with complexity, are encouraging. Similar splits that exist among students of the development process, of transnational corporations, of political behavior, and of social cleavages will require equal efforts to combine the two analytical models.

The tendency toward multiple perspectives on an issue, which I consider a healthy sign, undoubtedly stems from a strong urge for "useable" social analysis. It stems, too, from the felt need to test the broad propositions of dependency theory. For, if modernization theory has fallen into ill repute and dependency theory or another form of structural analysis has taken its place in the hearts and minds of scholars and some policymakers in Latin America, the challenge lies in testing the theory on bodies of data that deal with spatial or social entities smaller than the nation state and comparing their evolution over time and across space. For example, how do different groups in a society cope with the structural rigidities that result from dependent development? How have different regions within a nation evolved over time, and can we determine whether their factor endowments or certain exogenous influences were more important in forming the peculiar hierarchy of social forces that characterizes them? Comparing regional networks or specific social groups in two or more countries is one way to explore the role of dependency relationships, the role of the state, or the role of oligarchies in the formation of social classes. Recent comparative studies of human settlements, of labor unions, and of political parties are examples of a growing body of work that will help in the formulation of a middle-level

theory dealing with dependent societies and combining macro and micro levels of analysis.

Increasing Use of Structuralist Analysis

Without putting too fine a point on it, the past few years have seen Marxist analysis come out of the closet. This does not mean that all of us have converted to Marxism or suddenly realized that we were Marxists all along, as if there had been a massive unmasking of the *marranos*. What has occurred or is occurring is a gradual convergence of theoretical perspectives. We can observe it in the selection of research topics, in the questions we ask in organizing our research, in the adoption and adaptation of analytical concepts from one intellectual tradition to another, even in the emergence of a common vocabulary to discuss our research interests. There has been a gradual absorption into the mainstream of the principles and concepts of Marxist theory as well as of its structuralist "cousins" such as dependency, human ecology, and world-system theory. While there is great benefit in the interpenetration of theoretical perspectives, there is danger as well. Latin Americanists, particularly in the United States, have a strong herding instinct, and there are indications that we may lose the tension between competing traditions that is so important to intellectual endeavor. There is a danger, in other words, of replacing the crippling control of modernization and development theory of the 1950s and 1960s with a new paradigmatic orthodoxy in the form of a pseudo-Marxism. Because functionalist and empiricist methodologies still predominate in most disciplines, the major challenge to Marxism will come from micro- and middle-level perspectives, which raise nitty-gritty issues about human behavior that all too often are lost in the great systemic sweep of grand theories. My hope is that the convergence between the two major intellectual traditions will enrich our research agenda and quickly spin off new schools critical of this burgeoning orthodoxy.

Resurgence of Engagé Scholarship

A trend toward engagé scholarship follows from the previous three. In fact, it is hard to conceive of multidisciplinary, multilevel research concerned with public policy issues and informed, if not infused with, a Marxist perspective that is not somewhat engagé. The trend is highlighted in the debates among literary critics and anthropologists. Extreme proponents are at war over the issue of whether scholarship is possible at all within or without an engagé posture, a zero-sum mentality that does not contribute to communication. I might add that the

polarization in these two disciplines is especially tiresome to an editor trying to secure Solomonic judgments from referees on a submission to his journal. Fortunately, most scholars, engagé or not, are willing to deal with differing points of view. For most of us it is impossible to know anything about Latin America without caring very deeply about what goes on there, although, as I tell my freshman seminar, the fact that we all care does not mean that we all will prescribe the same remedies for solving the region's problems.

*Increasing Involvement of Latin American Scholars in
Setting the Research Agenda*

The increasing involvement of Latin Americans in setting our research agenda for Latin America is manifest in the organization of the Woodrow Wilson Center and other institutions in this country. One of my principal objectives as the editor of *LARR* was to increase that involvement. It is not only long overdue and indispensable to fruitful study of the region, it is the logical concomitant of the other trends I have identified. Who could be more concerned with people as well as policy than the scholars who live in the region, who experience underdevelopment or authoritarian regimes every day of their lives? Much of the increased concern with policy questions is a function of our willingness to listen to and be guided by our Latin American colleagues.

As we pay more attention to our colleagues in the field, not only are we shifting the focus of our concerns, but we also are reshaping the manner in which we formulate questions and redefining the basis on which we make empirical comparisons. Most of us analyze data the way we were trained to do. We rarely stop to question the biases inherent in those methods. Statistical procedures have come into favor in one discipline or another because they suited the nature of the data available and the central questions posed in the discipline. The point is that many of the available techniques are simply inappropriate for addressing some of the important questions we have about Latin America or handling the kinds of data that are available. Are regression equations equally robust in economic studies of developed economies and developing ones? Is factor analysis equally helpful in studying elite formation in Los Angeles and São Paulo? Psychologists have shown that so-called "standard" personality tests produce wildly divergent results when applied in different cultures and that the famous IQ tests never are universal. We need not reinvent the wheel so that we can study Latin America; but I advocate a more skeptical, eclectic approach to the selection of statistical procedures and methods, with a view to ensuring that they are compatible with the assumptions we make about the world we study. In a piece to appear in a forthcoming issue of *LARR*, Edmundo Fuenzalida

recounts the fascinating, sometimes painful, experiences of those who tried to introduce "scientific sociology" to Chile. Fuenzalida concludes that we need a Latin American sociology, by which he means a disciplined study of society that takes into account the historical and structural conditions of each Latin American country.

One of the most positive results of calling into question the analytical models dominant in the developed world has been the rapid expansion of interest in Latin America for studies of the United States. In 1974, I tried to conduct seminars on U.S. history for graduate students at several Latin American universities. They were supremely uninterested. They knew everything about the U.S. that they needed to know: it was "developed" or it was "imperialistic," according to their point of view. In that same year, at a conference in Lima, a group of Latin American social scientists told a group of their North American counterparts that bureaucratic political analysis was irrelevant, epiphenomenal. How different the intellectual landscape appears today! Led by CIDE, in Mexico City, there is a growing network of Latin American centers, which includes many intellectuals who participated in that Lima conference, focusing with increasing energy and sophistication on the inner workings of the economy, the society, and the polity of the U.S. While they are engaged in their research activities for the benefit of Latin America, the documents and studies they have produced will help us formulate a more coherent image of our own country, an image made sharper and more useful by virtue of its progressive comparative perspective.

The rise of U.S. studies has served to revitalize the field of international relations, in which traditional inquiry had taken on a vapid tone and become isolated from the rest of Latin American studies. Now, with leadership from the Instituto de Estudios Internacionales, in Santiago, and the International Relations Program at the Instituto Universitario de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro, we have before us an entire set of new questions having to do with intraregional linkages, the role of middle powers in the region, the significance of subregional groupings, the significance of nonhemispheric powers in the region, the contributions and limitations of dependency and world-system theory to understanding U.S.-Latin American relations, and how developments in U.S. society and the characteristics of the U.S. political system affect its relationship with Latin America.

Where do we go from here? In my opinion, the greatest single need is for specificity and verification, for testing some of the more interesting general propositions put forward in the past decade. The scholarly debate on at least four major issues—dependency, modes of production, trans- or multinational enterprise, and corporatism—has become stilted, bogged down in a shouting match reminiscent of young children: "No you can't!" "Yes I can!" So long as the discussion remains

stuck at the societal or macro level, there is no empirical resolution to the issues under debate. In one period of two months we accumulated seven manuscripts on modes of production, each of which reviewed exactly the same body of literature. Progress consists not in repeating oneself in a louder voice but in applying these propositions to specific cases, testing them, and, where appropriate, modifying them in the face of empirical results.

The most obvious case of a tired debate is the discussion of dependency. Not long ago, it was rare to receive a manuscript at LARR that did *not* have “dependency” in its title, no matter what the ostensible subject of the paper. Can anyone doubt that Latin American societies are dependent upon the international market and upon more developed, industrial nations? Is it not plain that the development of the Latin American nations was affected (distorted?) by their relatively late reinsertion into the international market in the nineteenth century and their subordination to the more industrialized nations of Europe? Not even the most literalist critics of dependency can deny the persistence over time of the hierarchy of power among nations that Raúl Prebisch later was to label “center” and “periphery.” In this sense we are all dependentistas. But if dependency includes everything, if it explains everything, in the long run it can explain nothing. Fruitful work in the future should avoid debate over whether or not dependency is a theory; it should accept dependency as an insight into the nature of economic growth in the Third World, as an insight into the nature of the international hierarchy of nations that has had profound consequences for each Latin American nation, and seek to apply this basic understanding to questions subject to empirical verification. When does dependency begin? What are the social structures associated with dependent development? How are the lives of individuals and groups affected by the conditions of dependency and how can those conditions be changed? We need studies of people and institutions across time to learn how they adapted to the structural inhibitions of dependent development so that we can determine with confidence which, if any, of the social science models formulated from the study of center countries is relevant to the study of reality on the periphery.

One encouraging sign is the appearance of a vigorous discussion of the rise of the state and the role of the state in dependent development. It is urgent that this discussion provide detailed historical information about the relationship between the oligarchy and state formation during the period of national consolidation, and between the state and the mediating institutions of an export economy, so that we can address the compelling contemporary questions, with their manifest implications for public policy, regarding the transition from authoritarian to nonauthoritarian forms of government, the nature of elite formation in

urban, semi-industrialized societies, and the factors that precipitate massive population movements either within a single nation or across national boundaries.

The new literature on the state and, more specifically, on the formation of state and bureaucratic institutions, will help us out of the impasse in the debate over the impact of the Iberian legacy on Latin American development. As with dependency, the culturalists certainly are correct at the broadest level of generalization in pointing our attention to the Iberian influence on Latin American patterns of thought, cultural norms, social organizations, and political institutions. But culture cannot be the only independent variable in the historical evolution of Latin America, and from the manner in which the debate has been conducted thus far, it is impossible to determine the nature or the extent of its contribution to that condition. The way out of the dilemma is to apply the general argument to specific cases and attempt to demonstrate how the legacy affected the behavior of individuals or groups, rather than focus exclusively on entire societies. How did Iberian models or examples shape local and regional institutions and how did they color the content of policies formulated in a variety of Latin American nations? Such studies would be invaluable in helping us understand the vexatious question of the transition to democracy that has caught the attention of so many social scientists today.

Another topic on which future work should strive for a more narrow focus than existing work is transnational corporations (TNCs) and technology transfer. The few studies we have on sectoral differences suggest strongly that this would be a fruitful area for more intensive work. What has been the record of various host countries in stimulating domestic research and development? Does host country leverage over TNC technology vary across sectors or across levels of development? Are there science and technology policies suitable to particular levels of development and not others or to particular sectors of the economy and not others? We really know very little about decision making at the level of the firm in Latin America, whether TNCs or local firms, and it is somewhat idle to debate the value of alternative models of development without knowing something at least about how those models may affect the private sector.

The next decade should be a stimulating period for Latin American studies. The juxtaposition of previously divergent theoretical perspectives, together with the gradual interpenetration of academic disciplines, promises a certain flexibility or eclecticism in the approach to research. The concern for public policy and the strengthened commitment of scholars to the area they study should facilitate the expanded dialog with our colleagues in Latin America and lend to area studies a

sense of intellectual integration it has lacked. But there are problems ahead, as well as challenges. Engagé scholars, by definition, are never the most objective observers. Worse, they tend to focus on issues with which they are emotionally involved, not issues that detached judgment may indicate warrant our attention. As scholars, we must guard against the enshrinement of any orthodoxy, whether it be dependency, capitalism, anti-imperialism, or what have you. We must be willing to entertain new ideas until they have been tested and verified or found wanting. Similarly, in listening more attentively to our colleagues in Latin America, we must beware the *vaca sagrada* syndrome. There is considerable evidence that we are creating new orthodoxies by according to individuals an influence or a monopoly on our attention that no individual deserves. This is painfully obvious from a review of the principal funding institutions concerned with Latin America or from a careful study of the footnotes of articles submitted to LARR. We must be willing to listen to new voices and to include younger scholars in our councils, conferences, and fellowships, even if their ideological perspectives are different from our own. That, finally, is the task before us.