

'La Crisis' and Contemporary Spanish Media Studies

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It is fitting that *The International Journal of Hispanic Media* publish an issue composed entirely of articles exploring the contemporary Spanish media situation. "Hispanic," as a concept, has a long, complicated, and vexed history, especially in relation to Latina/o and Latin American Studies. This special issue of this journal aims to bridge this gap through research that illuminates the connections and flows between America, writ large, and España, itself a heterogeneous construct. Spanish media studies is a vibrant enterprise, with scholars producing innovative research throughout the country.

Recent developments in the Spanish academy that require the professoriate to publish in ISIS ranked "scientific"¹ journals mean that faculty have to circulate their research beyond national borders, as other than the journal *Comunicar*, there are no other ISIS ranked communication or media studies journals within Spain. Members of the professoriate are assessed through a "*sexenio*" process that effectively makes them adhere to a six-year cycle of publications and academic output and activity. While "*sexenio*" is not exactly the same as the six-year probationary process of promotion and tenure in the U.S. academy, a positive outcome has important implications not just in terms of rank and status but also for access to research resources and travel funds.

In most countries, financial and scholarly productivity is concentrated in the major metropolises; this is also the case in Spanish media studies. For the Spanish professoriate, as is the case in many other countries, this publication requirement nearly by definition means that research must be published in English, mostly in U.S. and sometimes in U.K. journals. There are many problems with a

¹ This notion of "scientific" is used in a tautological manner—that is, a journal that is ISIS ranked and peer reviewed is considered a "scientific" journal.

requirement that forces faculty to publish beyond their borders in another language—issues of unequal academic power and resources combined with the dominance of English as the academic *lingua franca* are foremost in my mind. Translation of language is but one of the barriers to entry into the U.S./U.K. world of academic publishing. Ways of developing an argument, construction of sentences, networks of cited scholars, and paradigms of scholarly influence all impinge on the success of exogenous scholars to penetrate the rarified world so often entered through that appropriately named U.S./U.K. portal called "Manuscript Central." The review process in our journals intrinsically discriminates against scholarship from other countries, as reviewers often demand a review of the U.S. and U.K. literature, with little patience for articles written through a review mostly based on scholarship written by national and regional scholars. It is as if reviewers were saying: "Our scholarship is universal while yours is particular" or "Reference and cite us, though we do not have to keep up or read your research." For this and many other reasons, it is *imprescindible* that journals move beyond this Anglocentric perspective and welcome research by our colleagues throughout the world. This issue of this journal is one step in that direction.

As we proceed through the teens of this 21st century, media studies continues to illuminate on matters of policy, public sphere, "new" technologies, heterogeneous identities, and transnational flows. We have here a range of very different articles, all of them based on contemporary Spanish media studies. Our colleagues who write about Spanish Media Studies are located in a range of departments such as Journalism, Advertising, Communication Studies, Media Studies, and Sound Studies. All of these colleagues regularly attend a number of regional [within Spain], national, European, and global conferences such as ICA, IAMCR, and ECREA. Thus, their research is grounded in Spain in relation to a broad range of literatures and countries. Both their literature reviews and the topics of research have transnational dimensions. Communications research and mainstream media cannot be confined to a national space, and these articles demonstrate the

necessity to account for global flows of research, population, and culture. For example, Porta has to analyze children's television produced elsewhere—in Argentina and the U.S.—for that is part of the Spanish child's television diet. Porta draws on children and media research from around the world. Similarly two of the other research teams—Sebastián Morillas and Martín as well as García Galera, del Hoyo Hurtado, and del Olmo Barbero—draw on social media research and advertising campaigns from around the globe in conversation with Spanish case studies of social media and advergaming, respectively.

Given the recent pressure to publish in “scientific” journals whose positivist bent remains the dominant paradigm, much Spanish media studies research is quantitative in method. However, contributors to this special volume demonstrate an ability to combine qualitative with quantitative approaches. As well, whereas all of the articles engage with empirical research, their range of topics is wide and exciting. Most of the papers are multi-methodological. Whether combining press analysis about the coverage of Latin American migrants to Spain (Retis); advergaming campaigns and interviews with key marketing executives (Sebastián Morillas and Martín); content analysis of children's television shows with interviews of the children regarding sound (Porta); or a textual analysis of two Spanish movies representing sexual transition (Roig-Mora), the scholars in this volume extend themselves in method and approach. Unsurprisingly, most of the articles take into account the presence and influence of “new” information and communications technologies, as well as digital and social media platforms. For example, García Galera, del Hoyo Hurtado, and del Olmo Barbero explore the implications of Facebook and Twitter activism for local Spanish politics. At issue are the participation and contribution of youth to the many layers of political input necessitated by “*la crisis*”—how the devastating economic downturn which, in turn, has generated a crisis of confidence in the political system, is referred to in Spain. Porta explores an understudied element of the much-researched topic of children and the media: how children make sense of sound and how sound contributes to their affect, listening, attention, and comprehension. Despite the fact that most children's television programming has notable music and sound dimensions, and—indeed—that musicals and musically inflected genres continue to be a staple of children's television, there surprisingly is little research that explores the connection between sound and understanding. Trained as an educator of music, Porta possesses the ideal skills to carry out her lifelong project of understanding music in relation to media content and audiences. From quite a different perspective, yet still focusing on the Spanish situation, “new” digital media, and the cyclical success of new approaches in relation to “the crisis,” Sebastián Morillas and Martín explore the new advertising strategy of advergaming. Being careful to differentiate between advergaming and in-game advertising, the authors take a multi-pronged approach that examines the success stories in advergaming as well as relevant marketing executives' opinions as to why this new approach is promising yet underutilized. Undeniably the convergence of digital gaming

with advertising will come about, as that has been the history of commercialized mass media since at least the early 1900s. Retis draws on a wide range of media studies paradigms to explore the differential coverage of particular nationalities of Latin American immigrants to Spain. Her findings challenge the flattening of difference so often found in narratives about immigrants. Roig Mora draws on Foucault and science and medicine studies to analyze the construction of transgendered subjectivity as a medical and a cultural category and its presence in Spanish film. Roig-Mora's research draws important connections between scientific approaches and filmic representation, although it is useful to remember that such Spanish films are amazing in treating an issue that remains rather absent from Hollywood film altogether.

Whether exploring children's comprehension of televised content through musical backgrounds, the relative utility of advergaming for brands and advertising, the stereotypes used to construct narratives of different nationalities of immigrants from Latin America, the representation of transgender people in Spanish film, or the use of social media to cohere and coordinate collective responses to “*la crisis*,” this contemporary research highlights the importance of nation, identity, and technology in the contemporary transnational media environment.