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National bibliography in a globalized world: the Latin American case

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Abstract

The modern impulse toward universal bibliographic control particularly relies upon national bibliographies. But the conceptual underpinnings for these compilations are in doubt and their composite coverage remains incomplete. Moreover, users have had little say in either shaping the endeavor or assessing its results. Latin America's experience with national bibliography epitomizes the challenges and tensions that characterize the enterprise as a whole. The quest, which has always been idealistic, may by now have become merely quixotic.

The Purposes of National Bibliography: Dogma and Debate

IFLA has led the way in promoting the two interrelated "core programmes" of universal bibliographic control (UBC) and universal availability of publications (UAP). Taken together, these initiatives seek to ensure that anyone, anywhere, can discover and then consult any cultural manifestation considered appropriate for library collections and services. Achieving this overarching goal requires concerted efforts in several realms, among them bibliographic description, collection development, and document delivery/interlibrary loan.

National bibliographies comprise one of the basic supports for universal bibliographic control. These compilations in turn rely upon legal deposit, the mechanism through which relevant cultural objects first become known to the community at large. Common bibliographic and presentation standards then enable descriptive listings to be intelligible beyond as well as within individual countries. National bibliographies thereby systematize information based on materials identified via legal deposit in accord with shared conventions for bibliographic description. They

thus provide the building blocks for universal bibliographic control and the underpinnings for universal availability of publications.

The overall benefits of comprehensive access to information are explained through a meta-narrative of flourishing civil society, vital national communities, intellectual progress and cultural achievement, and personal fulfillment. Each component within the dual framework of UBC and UAP further reflects its own complementary array of aspirations and benefits. The case for national bibliographies thus subsumes a number of purposes and perspectives, among which their roles in codifying national memory and identity are especially evocative. National bibliographies open windows to memory and character by exhaustively enumerating the recorded manifestations of a country's economic, social, intellectual, and political trajectories. The compilations also carry more narrowly instrumental values as tools for selection and acquisitions, sources to identify particular works and provide reference information, and resources for cataloging.¹

This traditional rationale for national bibliography is based in the programmatic visions associated with Universal Bibliographic Control and Universal Availability of Publications. Different perspectives reflect alternative theoretical starting points, as well as sometimes volatile baseline realities. Such conceptual speculations can also be complemented with pragmatic analyses that focus on national bibliographies in terms of their coverage, currency, and utility. Taken together, these theoretical and practical reassessments suggest a more problematic enterprise.

Looking under the hood: Institutional politics and bureaucratic inertia

The formal resolutions, guidelines, and conclusions associated with national bibliographies in large measure reflect the agendas and institutional cultures of the international bodies that have championed them. These same organizations and agencies have likewise taken the lead in probing both the possibilities and the limitations of the national bibliographic endeavor, with results ranging from rather narrow assessments of formalistic features to no-holds-barred commentaries on the enterprise as a whole. A battery of recommendations typically accompanies both sorts of discussion.²

The institutional framework for universal bibliographic control, as channeled primarily through national bibliographies, thus draws upon several concrete constituencies. The players are not only international: national libraries are both charged with and sustained by such centrally sanctioned functions as legal deposit and the preparation of definitive bibliographic records. The practical politics of institutions, bureaucracies, interest groups, and specialized staffs reinforce the impetus to sustain these compilations and to expand their scope.

Our perceptions of national bibliography are very much wrapped up in our expectations for national libraries. Both may require further analysis, along with specific inquiries into whether universal bibliographic control and national bibliography might be decoupled in our assumptions and prescriptions. Questions concerning national bibliography, however, are not limited to the institutional sphere alone.

A historical slant

The institutional alliances and organizational underpinnings for UBC and national bibliography provide one vantage from which to evaluate these activities. Other starting points suggest additional perspectives. National bibliographies, and the legal deposit arrangements upon which they're traditionally based, reflect a long and rather ambivalent history. A number of countries, beginning with Renaissance France, mandated the formal registration of all publications for purposes that typically included censorship and taxation.³ These historical precedents have ever since buttressed assumptions that centralized national agencies are the natural institutional loci for legal deposit and national bibliography.

This same extended history likewise informs the consensus around compulsory deposit as the most effective means to assemble a nation's creative and cultural production. European practices concerning authorship and publication have privileged publishers, or in some instances printers, as the most obvious and appropriate participants in legal deposit. These assumptions, and the models they suggest, reflect one region's historical experience. This focus may blur our view as we look toward other world areas, and also as we confront other means and media for communication.

National bibliography as an Enlightenment endeavor

The age of print intersects with the age of science. Biology, chemistry, and geology are among the disciplines that coalesced around taxonomies. The natural history "cabinets" of the Enlightenment, and our museums ever since, have featured rooms crammed with exhaustive (and exhausting) arrays of bugs and rocks, stuffed animals and exotic artifacts. The *encyclopédistes* and their successors sought similarly to categorize the realm of knowledge. Closer to home, the bibliographic impulse again entails an almost fetishistic obsession with collection and classification.

Librarians are driven to identify, acquire, organize, and provide access to the sum of recorded knowledge. These predilections are very much of a piece with the Enlightenment's universalizing aspirations. Descriptions of the complete human record are, as an article of faith, held to be both desirable and indispensable. The conviction is enduring, and perhaps even innate.

National bibliography for knowledge and progress

Subsequent understandings of recorded information have added in the complementary core concept of "useful knowledge." Only benefits will follow as information is assembled in the service of industry and invention. Progress and knowledge are two faces of the same coin, with libraries critical to both. The case again seems self-evident. Other perspectives, however, variously question the desirability, the utility, and the feasibility of these optimistically totalizing visions.

Nations and their discontents

The project of national bibliography is rooted in our assumptions concerning recorded information on one hand, and nations and nationalism on the other. A national framework for bibliography seems almost intuitive in its logic. Individuals reside in nations, which in turn highlight their citizens' creative achievements in order to gain stature among their peers and to

cultivate internal cohesion. States routinely appropriate the achievements of their citizens for political as well as practical ends.

But the complicated and sometimes conflictive relationships among nation, regime, recorded expression, and national bibliography encompass other dimensions as well. Legal deposit, in particular, is shadowed by its historical overtones of state censorship and control. It's easy to combine the goals of projecting a nation's collective creativity with those of controlling dissent. Such collisions remain all too frequent: there are inherent tensions when state agencies are charged with gathering and organizing materials that the same state deems illicit, criminal, or otherwise important to suppress.

An often fraught interplay among power, control, and coercion is more profoundly implicit in the very concept of the nation. Some scholars argue that nations take shape around active efforts to enforce particular sets of myths, values, and shared experiences that are then manipulated as both rallying points and markers of a putative common identity. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and Doris Sommer's analysis of Latin America's "foundational novels" are among the works suggesting that nations—and national memories—are conscious constructions, rather than natural expressions of some essential bedrock reality.⁴ Nations may thus reflect the particular interests of an ethnic group, an emerging elite, colonial powers, or political pressure groups. National bibliography and national memory may similarly be artificial constructs used to simplify more vital (and conflictive) underlying realities in the interests of specific political agendas.

Scholars' speculations concerning the concept or construct of the nation, even at their most provocative, may carry but little practical weight. The impact of experience is typically more direct. Several observers have questioned the validity of national bibliographies as nations continue to demonstrate their volatility, for instance through the late twentieth century fragmentation of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia; the reunification of Germany; and the pluralistic approaches to autonomous communities and component nationalities in such countries as Spain, Belgium, and the United Kingdom.⁵ Regional groupings like the European Union, conversely, pose different sorts of challenges as they limit state power. Multinational corporate enterprise likewise blurs the concept of nation through the amorphous economic conglomerates that find all boundaries artificial. Communications and the media, tellingly, are among today's most globalized economic sectors.

Perhaps most dramatically, our restive humanity is in unprecedented numbers moving to and fro, voluntarily or by force, temporarily or for the long term. Diasporic communities very often manifest split identities and divided allegiances. Their members can be beholden to different nations in different ways; their record may "belong" to several places at once. The meaning of nation is again a matter of debate.

The conundrum of recorded knowledge: new formats and shape-shifting media

Not only is the nation a problematic concept, but the basic nature of recorded information is today in flux. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, those concerned with national bibliography devoted a great deal of energy to incorporating non-print media like sound recordings and film.

Successful work to develop new descriptive standards was matched by increasing awareness of new issues involving costs and service.

The rise of electronic resources has more fundamentally shifted the debate through a tangle of interrelated theoretical and practical issues that call the very nature of recorded information into question. The information landscape from which national bibliographies must spring is increasingly unruly. All of our doubts concerning national bibliographies and recorded information in their relation to institutional frameworks, historical precedents, aspirations to exhaustiveness, bounded geographies, and commodification and globalization, are emphatically in play. The panorama is dizzying.

The conundrum of recorded knowledge: commodification and globalization

Recorded knowledge has always served needs that are instrumental as well as expressive. Useful knowledge, in market economies, implies knowledge at a price: economic considerations are inevitably in play. Most regimes for intellectual property therefore seek to balance the property interests of authors and creators with the social benefits of information that is easily available to all.

The potentially divergent interests of intellectual property owners and the community as a whole, however, are ever more overt. In the United States, for example, the term of copyright protection has been extended to unprecedented lengths. Most producers of media and electronic resources rely upon licensing arrangements that entirely sidestep copyright law. Piracy, file sharing, and open access are just a few of the key words associated with today's contests around the economics of information. All these epiphenomena reflect a more fundamental and seemingly inexorable process of commodification. Even within the traditional print realm, elements of marketing and marketability are more and more pervasive. On one hand, it's never been easier to identify, describe, and acquire materials intended for the market. On the other, publications deemed marginal to economic circuits are becoming ever more obscure.⁶

Globalization, while often characterized in terms of mutual participation and reciprocal benefits, has to disconcerting degree taken shape through multinational corporate enterprise.⁷ Regional experiences and voices may be marginalized as a result, whether by simply being ignored or through appropriation within deracinated "theme parks" of the senses and the mind. This same commercial environment, driven by market values, also shapes national bibliographies. The shifts suggest intensifying tensions around the basic purposes of recorded human expression. Are national memory and national bibliography anything more than sentimental relics within our ubiquitous information marketplace?

Summing up: the case for national bibliography invokes librarians' professional responsibility to ensure access to recorded information. The deliberations have centered around IFLA, national libraries, and UNESCO—historically potent institutions that epitomize the field's deepest values. The rationale for national bibliography more broadly resonates with aspirations of empowerment, development, and fulfillment for both individuals and societies. With such clearly laudable goals, most discussion quite naturally focuses on pragmatic measures to improve coverage, timeliness, and usability.

But other perspectives suggest that national bibliographies, like all other human creations, embody assumptions that are neither universal nor immutable. Whether examined in terms of their historical trajectory, totalizing classificatory ambitions, subordination to nationalist agendas, or role vis-a-vis the commodification of information, national bibliographies are heavily implicated in efforts to *construct*—not just passively reflect—particular areas of experience and expression. Electronic information and the Internet set all these issues into sharp relief as they break boundaries and transcend categories. The moment is perhaps best perceived as one of immense opportunity in the face of new and almost limitless possibilities to redefine both our operational categories and, perhaps, our ways of knowing.

Obdurate Nuts and Recalcitrant Bolts: How Good Can We Get?

Any assessment of national bibliography must on one level probe its underlying goals, assumptions, and purpose. Another type of inquiry is more practical. Do existing national bibliographies, taken on their own terms, provide the timely, comprehensive, authoritative record—and records—that we expect? If not, how might they be improved? Can we realistically anticipate that current models will ever meet our needs, or should we look to other arrangements instead?

These and similar questions have stimulated innumerable conferences and meetings, papers and debates, resolutions and plans, mostly within the orbits of UNESCO and IFLA. Specific threads of discussion have become more and less prominent through time, for instance as ISBD and MARC gained general acceptance, as legal deposit provisions were revamped to encompass non-print media, and most recently as the community grapples with electronic information and the World Wide Web. Most such issues and arguments are by now very familiar, even when their ramifications may lead us—sometimes unexpectedly—back to the core conceptual challenges signaled above.

The enterprise of national bibliography includes several salient features:

A community of champions

Those committed to national bibliography comprise a group that is both dedicated and productive. These sponsors and champions have invested massive amounts of time and energy in their plans and analyses, with palpable results. Individuals make things happen, and those associated with national bibliography have a strong record of achievement.

Patterns of achievement: legal deposit

The traditional model for national bibliography is based on legal deposit laws that oblige printers or publishers to provide a specified quantity of all new materials to one or several institutions. These materials are then used to provide the standardized descriptions that ultimately comprise the national bibliography. Legal deposit laws ensure comprehensive coverage through a blend of inclusive requirements and rigorous enforcement. Many surveys have recommended corrective action for nations whose legislation is outdated or incomplete. Broadening coverage to encompass non-print and electronic formats is a continuing concern. Minimizing administrative and economic burdens, providing incentives such as timely listings for deposited works, and educating potential depositors with regard to their obligations, are recurrent

themes as well. More radical possibilities are suggested by countries like the Netherlands, which do not require legal deposit.⁸

One of several follow-on concerns involves the extent to which materials supplied through legal deposit are then included within national bibliographies. Cost, operational capacity, and philosophy all enter in. Some argue for comprehensive coverage and others for selectivity. As a very general rule, the scope of legal deposit continues to expand on the basis of terms that are increasingly consistent across nations. There's still a long way to go.

Patterns of achievement: standards for description

Both national bibliography and universal bibliographic control are tightly linked to standards. The pages of *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control*, among other publications, are replete with analyses of MARC, UNIMARC, and national variations; with discussions of the role and values of ISBDs, ISBNs, and their far-flung kin; with conversion protocols and programs to exchange electronic records. Authority control is another preoccupation, along with the emerging challenges of the late 1990s "functional requirements for bibliographic records." Adherence to standards remains incomplete, and the entire field is in motion as the community grapples with a host of differing approaches to metadata and resource description. The debates are both energetic and productive.

A perhaps less compelling impulse toward standardization involves sometimes excruciating prescriptions for how national bibliographies should themselves be organized and presented. Descriptions of such essential best practices as the need for introductions that explain coverage and conventions are thus juxtaposed with injunctions on how and where to provide price information for the bibliography itself. Compliance appears uneven, not least as some compilations move toward non-print formats.

Patterns of achievement: current and complete compilations

Comprehensive, timely national bibliographies are the goal of all the activities described thus far. But the results are mixed.⁹ Levels of compliance and conformance appear highest in the developed world, particularly among the traditional "core countries" of IFLA and UNESCO—though even these bibliographies vary in their coverage and currency. The collective utility of national bibliographies as the foundation for universal bibliographic control is far from certain.

Continuing conversations, new questions, neglected concerns

National bibliography, in its conceptual underpinnings and operating assumptions, and also in its goals and procedures, is an inherently conservative endeavor. Some recent discussions have nonetheless probed other possibilities. What are the topics, and limits, of debate?

Legal deposit: The prevailing model for national bibliographies is based upon legal deposit. The system, despite its insistence on penalties for non-compliance, primarily relies on goodwill and mutual benefits. But legal deposit also carries overtones of censorship and coercion. For their part, many nations continue to suppress intellectual, artistic, and political expression. Whatever the rhetoric, the realities of state policies and power will inhibit deposits of sensitive materials. Coverage built around state-based depository agencies will never be complete.

Alternative arrangements might explore different combinations of such players as writers' guilds, organizations of printers and publishers, and specialized bibliographic agencies. Publishers' groups in many countries assign ISBNs and otherwise track new materials. Even within the current framework for legal deposit, regional bibliographic centers may be more effective in capturing local materials than national bodies.¹⁰ Format-specific agencies, for instance for music or for film, can likewise be successful. The national bibliographic agency may then, at best, play little more than a coordinating role.

Descriptive standards: The standards community has successfully consolidated such initiatives as MARC/UNIMARC and a growing array of ISBDs. New standards, for instance to describe electronic resources or the potentially revolutionary "functional requirements for bibliographic records," are likewise moving ahead in apparent good order. Standards for bibliographic description, perhaps precisely because they are somewhat technical and abstract, may lend themselves to promulgation followed by gradual implementation within specific institutions. Mandates affecting functions like legal deposit, by contrast, are concrete in their terms, local in scope, and political in origin. Whatever the reasons, descriptive standards comprise a realm of vigorous debate and substantial success.

Alternate approaches to national bibliographies – sources and organizational base: Many analyses of national bibliographies look to legal deposit and centralized national bibliographic agencies. With more formats coming into play, for example film and video, specialized complementary bodies have been considered as well. The fullest and most useful sources for data involving science and technology are maintained by the disciplines themselves, sometimes in alliance with commercial providers.

Very different frameworks for universal bibliographic control may also merit attention. OCLC's WorldCat claims more than fifty million unique bibliographic records. The PICA union catalog in Europe, now a part of OCLC PICA, likewise encompasses a large array of bibliographic information. These research-oriented databases may underrepresent some categories of material, for instance devotional literature. Additional issues include costs and fees, and the interplay between vast, universalizing union catalogs and nationally-defined authority records and bibliographic descriptions. But cooperative bibliographic databases, options for federated searches across separate catalogs, and other emerging possibilities may suggest both complements to and alternatives for our current model.¹¹ Some fledgling proposals have already surfaced in print, albeit without much additional discussion.

Alternate approaches to national bibliographies – coverage: The range of materials that national bibliographies should describe is a matter of active debate. Some maintain that definitive retrospective compilations are every bit as important as efforts focused on current imprints. In a different vein, Robert Holley in 1993 analyzed the commercially vital but bibliographically underrepresented U.S. publication sectors of newspapers, mass market materials, and erotica. Whether due to their format or to a perceived lack of respectability, these materials tend to receive short bibliographic shrift.¹² Comic books, even when covered by legal deposit, are likewise often omitted from national bibliographies.

The situation becomes even more problematic for non-print media. Sound recordings and audio-visual materials raise concerns with regard to selection, cataloging, intellectual property, and access. The most daunting cases, of course, involve such non-tangible products as radio and TV broadcasts, and Internet resources. The latter are difficult even to identify, and selection is then complex as well. On one level, what does "national" mean when the medium is global? Within the electronic realm, too, some argue that national bibliographies should limit coverage to the virtual analogs of already familiar print categories. Monograph- and serial-like expressions are therefore appropriate, but not personal websites, blogs, and chat rooms—which are in some ways more like manuscript diaries or round-robin letters. Such pronouncements, however, may elide the issue of whether and how electronic ubiquity changes our understandings. Both the nature of these materials and our need to acknowledge new modes of expression come into play as we seek to document knowledge and memory.¹³

Practical issues also abound. We don't really know how to harvest and then reliably preserve websites, our legal structures can't ensure acceptable combinations of access to users and protections for creators or owners, and we don't know how—or whether—to collaborate with other organizations that are concerned with the same issues. The debate goes on.

Finally, discussions of national bibliography intermittently grapple with the "digital divide" between rich and poor countries. This issue may resolve itself as connectivity and bandwidth improve. In the meantime, some reports from areas lacking electricity and communications suggest that hardcopy alternatives are essential, while others point happily to satellite communications and portable power sources.

Purposes and goals redux: The goals of national bibliography were articulated within a community aspiring to universal bibliographic control. A host of recommendations, surveys, and assessments have emerged from that same community. However, we know little about how national bibliographies are actually used. What strengths and weaknesses do their users perceive? Do the listings in fact serve as model catalog records? Are the bibliographies employed as acquisitions tools, or to verify citations? Have scholars mined these compilations in order to explore national memory? Do national bibliographies serve entirely different purposes? Our analyses must incorporate users' responses and needs, as well as insider assessments.

In sum: for all their energetic champions and their many successes, national bibliographies today comprise a global patchwork of more and less complete compilations that become available after widely variable delays. Budget constraints, shifts within organizations, inconsistent legal regimes, and staffing uncertainties suggest that absolute currency and coherence will remain forever beyond our reach. As human creativity and culture become manifest in new formats and media, we're also less and less able to imagine what meaningful coverage might mean—or how to attain it.

The conceptual foundations for national bibliography are more slippery than we may think, and the products of the enterprise are in many respects flawed. New models that engage broader arrays of both approaches and participants might improve the situation. But, first and foremost, we need to re-frame the entire endeavor in terms of user needs and expectations.

National Bibliography within Latin America

Bibliography as microcosm and metaphor: historical conflicts and postmodern confusions

We now turn to Latin American national bibliographies, referring in particular to a survey carried out by Unni Knutsen and Francisca Movilla López early in 2004. Any specific discussion of national bibliography, however, must be conceptually and contextually grounded in the enterprise as a whole. This broad-gauged approach is especially crucial for Latin America, a region which is riven by many of the same contradictions and paradoxes that make national bibliography so problematic.

Latin America's history embodies an enduring struggle between purportedly universalistic world-views originating in Europe and the often contrasting visions of the conquered and enslaved. The region's understandings of national heritage and national memory have always been sharply contested. But Latin American peoples, within this conflictive context, are nowadays also quintessentially postmodern in their navigations of both mental and physical frontiers. Eclectic music and movies, clothes and cuisine, language and literatures, bump up against vibrant local identities, "hybrid" cultures and customs, insistently globalized policies and economies, and an often-manipulative hypernationalism. Migration is a way of life, with remittances essential for back-home survival. Persistent poverty and some of the world's most skewed divisions of income and wealth further complicate the picture. What, within this dizzying framework, defines the nation?

Similar albeit more prosaic questions arise around publications. Spanish (and other) multinational publishers, for instance, produce many works by Latin Americans for domestic consumption and also for export. Some of the same publishers may simultaneously release national editions of the same title in several different countries. As everywhere else, the impact of non-print resources vastly complicates an already muddled panorama. Many indigenous communities are using video in order to document their own rituals and customs, and thereby consolidate their own memories. Internet sites concerned with the region are as varied, evocative, frustrating, and difficult to characterize and control as those anywhere else. Peru's notorious Sendero Luminoso represented itself, among other ways, through a website in California. Mexico's Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) has effectively employed the Internet for global communications, proselytizing, and propaganda.¹⁴

The recorded information relevant to Latin America is as fluid and polyvalent as the region itself. Institutional underpinnings tend to be likewise uncertain. Insufficient staff and financial resources characterize Latin America both in general terms and with regard to its bibliographic efforts. As elsewhere, bureaucratic routines are all too easily upstaged by political expediency. Institutional crises and budgetary limitations can further undermine promising initiatives. And a host of new challenges, in domains that include bibliography, have not yet been addressed.

National libraries with a twist, national bibliographies on the edge

The Latin American experience both embodies and epitomizes many of the same contradictions that also inhere in national bibliography. The region's specific bibliographic successes and failings may further enhance our understandings of the endeavor as a whole. Its national bibliographies, in turn, are inextricably linked to the region's national libraries. Closing the

circle, the historical trajectory of these institutions is bound up with that of the nations themselves.

Many countries established national libraries soon after independence, early in the nineteenth century, often on the basis of the Jesuit libraries that had been confiscated in preceding years. Only around 1900, however, did most countries gain the wherewithal and sense of purpose to recast their national libraries (and, often, national museums and universities as well) as emblems of sovereignty and enlightenment. Grand new buildings bore witness to an impulse toward culture that was bolstered by an optimistic rhetoric of democracy and growth. By the mid-twentieth century, however, these national libraries had been swamped by the region's emerging masses—themselves the products of mass education, mass politics, and mass urbanization. Palatial "patrimonial" repositories, once havens of the elite, were overrun by university students, schoolchildren, and the general public. Various longstanding intellectual and bibliographic exercises gave way as well, leaving such single-minded champions as Bolivia's Werner Guttentag and Cuba's Fermín Peraza to during some periods sustain their countries' national bibliographies as a personal quest.

Straitened budgets, political interference, the repressive regimes of the 1970s and 1980s, and fairly generalized technological isolation have more recently complicated bibliographic initiatives within the region's national libraries. Powerful administrators, adequate funds, and first-rate staffs have in some countries coalesced to bring progress, for instance in Brazil, Venezuela, and in recent years Chile. But other national libraries have barely hobbled along, and their national bibliographies as well.

Most of Latin America's legal deposit laws have been long on the books. Compliance has been more problematic, partly for want of enforcement but also in reflection of a persistently incipient publishing industry. Poor communications, dispersed populations, and low literacy made publishing an economically marginal proposition until well into the twentieth century: many materials were self-published and then distributed only to a limited audience. The most complete collections, and bibliographies, were often assembled by individual bibliophiles. The situation began to change as a result of processes similar to those that were at the same time overwhelming some national libraries. Mass education, mass communication, urbanization, and economic growth generated a small but growing market for books and journals. Book production and the book trade gradually became more efficient as well. Commercial publishing and an organized book trade can today, in some countries for the first time, allow reasonably effective bibliographic coverage of most printed publications. Some countries can likewise describe such media as sound recordings and film. The limits of control nonetheless correspond, broadly speaking, to the boundaries of the information marketplace.

Empirical data and speculative results

The current panorama is specifically and effectively captured in responses to the 2004 Knutsen-Movilla survey of Latin American national bibliographies.¹⁵ This exercise reflects the IFLA Bibliography Section's 2004-5 strategic plan to "... extend the provision of universal bibliographic control by advocating and promoting the production of national bibliographies." It also follows up on a 2001 questionnaire, distributed in English and on the heels of several others, that generated but five responses from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The 2004 survey was sent to thirty national bibliographic agencies and elicited seventeen replies. Its four clusters of questions focus in turn upon legal deposit and bibliographic control, the national bibliography and its content, publishing format(s) for the national bibliography itself, and the online availability of the bibliographic records created for the national bibliography. Respondents often embellished the questionnaire's simple response boxes with additional commentary.

The summary results present a very mixed picture. A question concerning legal deposit, to which sixteen agencies responded, reveals that half—eight bibliographic agencies—feel that deposit provisions are "not effective" within their country. Several countries plan to strengthen their laws, in many cases also extending coverage to new categories of non-print materials. Fourteen countries produce a national bibliography, in some cases only for books. Production and dissemination remain problematic. Eleven of thirteen respondents report annual compilations, but at least six suffer from very long production delays. Seven of fourteen responding agencies further note ineffective distribution arrangements. Finally, thirteen of the seventeen reporting agencies create MARC-based records: Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, and Guatemala do not.

When the responses are combined, thirteen of the seventeen respondents report significant problems concerning coverage, legal deposit, and/or currency in their national bibliography. (See Appendix I for fuller detail.) Put another way, only four of the thirty national bibliographic agencies in Latin America and the Caribbean—Barbados, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago—claim adequate and timely coverage.

Perhaps the most encouraging results from the 2004 survey reflect specific improvements in the region's national bibliographies, for example in the scope of their coverage. One wonders, however, whether these changes are too little, too late. Multinational publications in some cases both sidestep and confuse questions of geographic scope. Migrant and diasporic communities produce materials that variously combine, choose between, and fit within neither of two (or more) states. Noncommercial, sometimes semi-clandestine, often electronic ephemera are neither well understood nor adequately documented. And on, and on.

Conclusion

National bibliographies arose to provide control and comprehensive categorization within an environment of clearly delineated nation-states and tangible formats for publishing. Their future appears increasingly uncertain as boundaries blur between nations, between institutions, between publications designed for general commercial distribution and expressions that are accessible to all, and between publications that may be fixed texts or more fluid emanations. Commentaries that focus on the inevitable challenges of funds and staff, of legal language and institutional prerogative, of myriad practical obstacles, may simply miss the point. Perhaps most tellingly, we at this moment lack the user input that would allow us to know.

The strengths and weaknesses of Latin America's national bibliographies reflect tensions that are characteristic of the enterprise as a whole. They also embody the paradoxes inherent within the area itself. Some analysts perceive Latin America as a quintessentially postmodern region

with all the contradictions, challenges, and possibilities that follow. National bibliography—quixotic, unattainable, unbearably alluring—can seem very much the same.

Appendix I: Summary Results, 2004 Survey of Latin American National Bibliographies

<u>Respondent</u>	<u>Is legal deposit effective?</u>	<u>Is there a national bibliography?</u>	<u>Is the national bib. in arrears?</u>	<u>Does the natl. bib. appear in a print version?</u>	<u>Is the natl. bib. distributed effectively?</u>
Argentina	no	no	--	--	--
Barbados	yes	yes	--	yes	yes
Bermuda	no	yes	--	yes	no
Bolivia	no	yes	--	yes	yes
Brazil	yes (q)	yes	--	no	--
Chile	no	yes	--	no	no
Colombia	yes (q)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Costa Rica	yes	yes	--	no	yes
Cuba	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Guatemala	no	no	x	--	no
Jamaica	--	yes	?	yes	yes
Mexico	no	yes	yes	no	no
Panama	yes (q)	no	--	--	--
Peru	no	yes	--	yes	no
Trinidad & Tobago	yes	yes	--	yes	no
Uruguay	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Venezuela	yes (q)	yes	?	yes	yes

"Yes (q)" signifies a "yes" response to the survey, qualified by additional comments or notes.

"?" reflects uncertainties that were suggested by respondents' comments and notes, rather than their explicit survey responses.

Notes:*

¹ See, for example: Dorothy Anderson, "IFLA's Programme of Universal Bibliographic Control: Origins and Early Years," *IFLA Journal* 26-3 (2000), p. 209-214; Dorothy Anderson. *Universal Bibliographic Control: A long term policy; A plan for action* (Munchen: Verlag Dokumentation, 1974); Marcelle

Beaudiquez, "National Bibliography as Witness of National Memory," *IFLA Journal* 18-2 (1992), p. 119-123; Marcelle Beaudiquez, "The Perpetuation of National Bibliographies in the New Virtual Information Environment," *IFLA Journal* 30-1 (2004), p. 24-31; Marcelle Beaudiquez, "What will be the Usefulness of National Bibliographies in the Future?" *IFLA Journal* 28-1 (2002), p. 28-30; International Conference on National Bibliographic Services (1998: Copenhagen), *The final recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services: ICNBS, Copenhagen, 25-27 November 1998* <http://www.ifla.org/VII/3/icnbs/fina.htm>; Barbara L. Bell, "National Bibliography Today as National Memory Tomorrow: Problems and Proposals," *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* 21-1 (Jan.-March 1992), p. 10-12; Winston D. Roberts, ed. *Proceedings of the National Bibliographies Seminar held under the auspices of the IFLA Division of Bibliographic Control* (London: IFLA Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC Programme, 1988).

² See especially *IFLA Journal* (passim.), *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* (passim.), and the sources mentioned in notes 1 and 9.

³ See the historical summary in José Antonio Cordón García, *El registro de la memoria: Las bibliografías nacionales y el depósito legal* (Gijón: TREA, 1997), and also such articles as John Byford, "Publishers and Legal Deposit Libraries Cooperation in the United Kingdom since 1610: Effective or Not?" *IFLA Journal* 28-5/6 (2002), p. 292-297.

⁴ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. ed.) (London: Verso, 1991); Doris Sommer, *Foundational fictions: the national romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵ See, for example: José Antonio Cordón García, *Op. Cit.*, for Spain; Cate Newton, "Bibliographic Control in Scotland: Providing a Specialized National Bibliography within a Wider National Context," *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* 31-2 (April/June 2002), p. 23-25, for Scotland; Josiane Roelants, "The evolution of the concept of the national library," in Maurice B. Line and Joyce Line, eds., *National Libraries 3: A Selection of Articles on National Libraries, 1986-1994* (London: ASLIB, 1995), p. 33-39 for Belgium; and the more general comments in Ross Bourne, "National Bibliographies: Do They Have a Future?" *Alexandria* 5-2 (1993), p. 99-110; Ross Bourne, "The role of the national bibliographic agency," *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* 23-4 (Oct.-Dec. 1994), p. 64-67; and Maurice B. Line, "Editorial: National Libraries and the Decline of the Nation State," *Alexandria* 5-2 (1993), p. 95-98.

⁶ One counter-argument maintains that the potential to "self-publish" on the World-Wide Web augurs a golden age of freely available information.

⁷ The World Intellectual Property Organization, for instance, acknowledges "traditional knowledge" as an area requiring particular attention—but then frames most of that attention in terms of commodification and commercialization.

⁸ Wim van Drimmelen and Gerard van Trier, "The Koninklijke Bibliotheek: national library of the Netherlands," in Maurice B. Line and Joyce Line, eds., *National Libraries 3 (Op. Cit.)*, p. 283-292.

⁹ See Barbara L. Bell and Anne M. Hasund Langballe, *An Examination of National Bibliographies and Their Adherence to ICNBS Recommendations. Final Report to the IFLA Standing Committee on Bibliography* (2001?) <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s12/pubs/sbrep.pdf>; Barbara L. Bell, *An Annotated Guide to Current National Bibliographies* (2nd ed.) (München: K.G. Saur, 1998); John D. Byrum and Patricia Myers-Hayer, "Inclusion of Information Covering Electronic Resources in National Bibliographies: Results of a Survey Conducted May-June 1998" <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/124-153e.htm>; Hope E.A. Clement, "National Bibliographic Agencies cataloguing survey," *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* 19-1 (Jan.-March 1990), p. 6-10; Unni Knutsen, "Changes in the National Bibliographies, 1996-2001" <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/143-199e.pdf>; Unni Knutsen, "Electronic national bibliographies: state of the art review" <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/109e-Knutsen.pdf>; and the sources listed in note 1.

¹⁰ See the sources listed in note 5 plus, for example, Lorcan Dempsey, "Publishers and Libraries: An All Through System for Bibliographic Data?" *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* 20-3 (July-Sept., 1991), p. 37-41.

¹¹ Christine L. Borgman, "Will the global information infrastructure be the library of the future? Central and Eastern Europe as a case example," *IFLA Journal*, 22-2 (1996), p. 121-127.

¹² See Araceli García Carranza, "La bibliografía nacional como sistema de repertorios bibliográficos para el estudio de la cultura cubana," paper for IFLA 70, Code #075-S. Henry Snyder's ongoing efforts to create a database of all letter-press publications printed in Latin America before the mid-nineteenth

century fall within this same general category. Also, Robert P. Holley, "National Bibliography as National Memory: Is Popular Culture Forgotten?" *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control* 22-1 (Jan.-March, 1993), p. 13-17.

¹³ See Michael Gorman, "Bibliographic Control or Chaos: An Agenda for National Bibliographic Services in the 21st Century," *IFLA Journal* 27-5/6 (2001), p. 307-313.

¹⁴ See "Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru" <http://www.csrp.org/> (site last updated in October 2003); also <http://www.ezln.org>.

¹⁵ Unni Knutsen and Francisca Movilla López, "Survey on the state of national bibliographies in Latin America" (manuscript, April 2004); plus detailed companion document, "Results of a survey on national bibliography – Latin America." Also see Claudia B. Bazán, "Legal deposit and the collection of national publications in Argentina," *IFLA Journal* 29-3 (2003), p. 227-229; Filiberto Felipe Martínez-Arellano, "El estado del control bibliográfico en Latinoamérica," paper for IFLA 70, Code #003-S; and the other papers presented in IFLA 70's session on national bibliography within Latin America.

*All URL's functional as of 5 July, 2004.