
Ibero-America in Writing

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Translated by Eoin O'Neill

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Was there ever an Ibero-American unity that took shape in written culture? Or a literary collection encapsulating an Ibero-American identity? This article aims to investigate a publishing venture which set out to showcase the most representative works of Ibero-American literature. Focusing on the UNESCO *Œuvres représentatives* collection, launched in 1952, and its Ibero-American series it aims to reflect on processes of transnational cultural exchange and the construction of regional identities.

The Circulation of Ideas and Projects for Peace

In October 1989, Pierre Bourdieu gave a lecture on the social conditions governing the international circulation of ideas to inaugurate the *Frankreich-Zentrum* at the University

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of Freiburg, Germany.² He argued that while it is often believed that the intellectual sphere internationalizes quite spontaneously, the processes of cultural internationalization are in fact consistently marked by “misunderstandings” and imperialisms, and therefore call for careful consideration. Outlining a program of research into international cultural relations, Bourdieu suggested that the international circulation of titles, books, and authors should be considered less as a mutual admiration society and more in terms of modes of appropriation and deformation. In his view, international cultural exchanges are subject to a series of factors at play in both the exporting and importing cultures, determined by their respective cultural and scientific conditions and their positions in the space of global exchanges. Bourdieu ended his talk by making a proposal for “the historical foundations of categories of thought” in circulation: in other words, a comparative history of the social sciences taking into account the modes of international transfers, operationalized by translations and appropriations.

Building on Bourdieu’s program, translation processes have increasingly come to the fore in studies of the international circulation of texts.³ Although the history of translations and the commercialization of texts initially highlights an idea of approximation and egalitarian internationalization of knowledge, this was not a history produced from nowhere. On the contrary, these translation processes were profoundly marked by important asymmetries.

² The lecture was initially published in *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte / Cahiers d’histoire des littératures romanes* 1, no. 2 (1990), 1-10; and, later as “Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (Paris) 145 (December 2002), 3-8.

³ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Pascale Casanova, *La langue mondiale. Traduction et domination* (Paris: Seuil, 2015); Johan Heilbron, “Toward a Sociology of Translation: Book Translations as a Cultural World-System,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 2, no. 4 (1999), 429-44; Johan Heilbron, “Échanges culturels transnationaux et mondialisation: quelques réflexions,” *Regards sociologiques* 22 (2001), 141-54; Johan Heilbron, Thibaud Boncourt and Gustavo Sorá, “Introduction: The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations,” *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Gisèle Sapiro, *Los intelectuales: profesionalización, politización, internacionalización*, ed. Alejandro Dujovne, trans. Alejandro Dujovne, María Virginia García, Agostina Romano (Villa María: Eduvim, 2017).

At the end of the Second World War, universalizing cultural traditions and sharing human knowledge fairly became a pressing concern. Attempts were made to limit harmful nationalism and cultural administrators strove to produce a supranational apparatus to circulate knowledge produced by humanity. After the horrors of the War, societies had to be rebuilt and their historic, artistic, and intellectual heritage restored. This led to the establishment of UNESCO, initially discussed at the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) in London while the war was still underway. Its objectives included encouraging the free circulation of ideas and information among schools, universities, research establishments, and so on and convergence of scientific progress and human welfare.⁴

In the early years of UNESCO, two British scientists, the zoologist Julian Huxley (1887-1975) and the biochemist Joseph Needham (1900-1995), played leading roles. Huxley became the first director general of UNESCO, while Needham led the natural science sector. The draft project they led was based on principles defined in a philosophy essay published by Huxley in 1946,⁵ arguing that evolution would lead humanity to progress and social improvement, characterized by the growing control of nature and the unification of global civilization. In this sense, the foundational objectives of UNESCO between 1946 and 1952 were guided by humanist ideas of mutual aid and the dissemination of scientific ideas and cultural exchanges. This was the period when the *Œuvres représentatives* collection and its Ibero-American series came into being.

The project was not completely new. Part of it was inspired by debates in the aftermath of the First World War, when intellectuals prepared a project for peace rooted in intellectual cooperation. As Christophe Charle notes, the 1914-1918 War had shaken the belief in the possibility of a “European spirit”:

⁴ *Archives de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Éducation, la Science et la Culture* (UNESCO) (Henceforth UNESCO Archives) Actes de la Conférence Générale, first session (Paris, 1946).

⁵ Julian S. Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy* (Paris: UNESCO, 1946).

The magnitude of the disaster caused by the world war; the sense of the “decline of Europe” – the title of a work published in 1920 by the geographer Albert Demangeon; or even that of the West – the title of a best-selling book by Oswald Spengler that appeared the same year; the fear of Bolshevism, which was equated with Asian barbarism; and the phobia of Americanization that was the obsession of certain French and German essayists, rekindled arguments in favor of a reconciliation of intellectuals to rebuild lasting peace.⁶

The League of Nations, founded in 1919, strove to lay the foundations for world peace, laying the groundwork for international cooperation. Although it did not appear in the initial proposals for the League of Nations in 1921, the Secretariat proposed an International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), which was established in 1922, joined in 1926 by the Paris-based International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC).⁷ The IIIC “rigorously specialized in the study and implementation of measures for the international organization of intellectual work [...] and concern[ed] itself solely with coordinating existing organizations and stimulating the creation of those that are desirable [...].”⁸

The fear of the decline of Europe and the conflicts that led up to the Great War frightened European intellectuals. As a result, they envisaged a future for the region through projects that either had an internationalist and universalist scope or sought to counter national advances through the establishment of a European perspective. These debates contributed to the emergence of humanist and idealist visions which “culminated in the conference of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) in Frankfurt in 1932 on the occasion of the centenary of Goethe’s death.”⁹

⁶ Christophe Charle, “Rebuilding a Europe of Intellectuals (1918–1939),” in *Cultural Organizations, Networks and Mediators in Contemporary Ibero-America*, eds. Diana Roig-Sanz and Jaume Subirana (New York: Routledge, 2020), 24-25.

⁷ Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L’UNESCO oubliée: La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle (1919-1946)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999).

⁸ Renoliet, *L’UNESCO oubliée*, 77.

⁹ Charle, “Rebuilding a Europe of Intellectuals,” 30.

Goethe was adopted as the symbol of an idealized European intellectual spirit that crossed frontiers.¹⁰ In the first half of the nineteenth century, his work had sought to demonstrate how translating texts helped ideas circulate and build a body of literature with a universal scope. The concept of *Weltliteratur*,¹¹ defined in Goethe's published conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann (1791-1854) as a "belief in the existence of a constant process of reciprocal effects among national literatures,"¹² allowed Europeans to dream of an ideal cosmopolitan culture.¹³ However, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century assumptions about the history of global literature were underpinned by a belief in the absolute originality of national literary works, downplaying reciprocal exchanges and appropriations among the literatures of various languages and countries.¹⁴

The notion of national culture, which continued to shape the debate at the IIC and ICIC, was a product of a dispute among League of Nations diplomats: efforts to promote international interests remained largely symbolic.¹⁵ Pre-war scholarly societies and international organizations were also against the League's ideal of centralization, hindering its efforts.

¹⁰ Charle, 30.

¹¹ Joseph Jurt highlights that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) used the term *Weltliteratur* for the first time in his diary on 15 January 1827, and afterwards repeated it in correspondence and articles. According to his comments, the formation of *Weltliteratur* should include translations, information about other national literatures through cultural periodicals and, finally, personal contact between men of letters in different countries. Cf. Joseph Jurt, "Du concept de *Weltliteratur* à la théorie d'un champ littéraire international," *CONTEXTES* 28 (2020).

¹² See Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens. 1823-1832* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1836). Cf. Eloá Heise, "Weltliteratur, um conceito transcultural," *Revista brasileira de literatura comparada* 9, no. 11 (Niterói, 2007), 43.

¹³ Heise, "Weltliteratur, um conceito transcultural," 53.

¹⁴ See Sapiro, *Los intelectuales*, 46.

¹⁵ Martin Grandjean, "A Representative Organization? Ibero-American Networks in the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations (1922-1939)," in Roig-Sanz and Subirana, *Cultural Organizations*, 68-69.

Although the League of Nations did effectively encourage mutual international understanding among peoples to a certain extent, inspiring the plan for UNESCO, the deterioration of international relations in the 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War demonstrated its limits,¹⁶ not least the fact that the very idea of the “scientist [...] [as] a type of spiritual guide for the masses” formed a “very elitist conception of intellectual cooperation.”¹⁷

Though the project failed in Europe, it remained an important model for the Americas, whose representatives played an at time significant role in developing the League of Nations.¹⁸ During the Second World War, when Paris fell to Nazi occupiers, the French diplomat Henri Bonnet had the activities of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) transferred to the United States. There, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, various Latin American countries oversaw a series of initiatives to develop the IIIC and the International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC).¹⁹ As a result, Ibero-American countries became fertile ground for initiatives inspired by League of Nations institutions, such as the Interamerican Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, established in Havana in 1943.²⁰ Even before the creation of this Institute, various events had paved the way for the construction of an inter-American network of intellectual cooperation. In 1936, the IIIC conference, generally held in Paris, moved to Buenos Aires. In 1939, the First Conference of American Commissions of the

¹⁶ Renoliet, *L'UNESCO oubliée*, 116.

¹⁷ Renoliet, 116.

¹⁸ As is the case of Miguel Ozório de Almeida, studied by Letícia Pumar in “Universalisms in Debate During the 1940s. International Organisations and the Dynamics of International Intellectual Cooperation in the View of Brazilian Intellectual Miguel Ozório de Almeida,” in Roig-Sanz and Subirana, *Cultural Organizations*, 291-313.

¹⁹ Pumar, “Universalisms in Debate During The 1940s,” 291.

²⁰ Grandjean, “A Representative Organization?,” 84. There had been previous attempts to create an Interamerican Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, for instance by the Brazilian medical doctor Xavier de Oliveira in the 1920s. Oliveira’s proposal was formalized in 1930 at the Inter-American Congress of Rectors, Deans and Educators in General, but it never materialized. See Juliette Dumont, “Un panaméricanisme à la brésilienne? Le projet d’Institut Interaméricain de Coopération Intellectuelle (1926-1930),” in *Nuevo Mundo, Mundos Nuevos* (CERMA, 2016), 17.

International Intellectual Institute was held in Santiago in Chile, while in 1941, the Pan-American Conference of Intellectual and Cultural Cooperation was held in Havana.²¹ Intellectuals from across the Americas, a space less affected by the war, came together to debate intellectual cooperation and share their experiences.²² English-language writers were absent from the 1936 IIIC meeting in Buenos Aires, making it “an opportunity for Latin America to break with an historical relationship of domination that would allow it to recover national sovereignty.”²³

When UNESCO was founded in the postwar period, the experience of the Latin American delegates shaped the emerging debate. Their views were marked by the previous discussions, which gave them a more central position with greater agency. UNESCO inherited part of the ICIC and IIIC projects, taking on “staff and cultural programs, such as the revision of school manuals, international university exchange, translation of literary works, the coordination of libraries and archives, among others” while “the IIIC also played the role of ‘countermodel’, and many of UNESCO’s founders, especially British and North American, tried to avoid the new organization reproducing the problems of its predecessor.”²⁴ The new postwar institution was founded “with the objective of having a worldwide dimension instead of a European dimension”²⁵ and with a socially broader scope than previously.

²¹ Roig-Sanz and Subirana, *Cultural Organizations*, 6-14.

²² Such initiatives did not occur only in the field of literary cooperation and translation. Bruno Silva and Heraldo Galvão Junior note that “Between 1943 and 1962 in different parts of Latin America, the Inter-American Conferences of Education were held,” which allowed intellectuals from the region to debate the “American specificities in the promotion of the historiography on the region.” See Bruno Silva and Heraldo Galvão Jr., “A ‘conexão latino Americana’: história das Américas, ensino de História e a historiografia de Eugenio Pereira Salas e Ruggiero Romano,” in *Redes culturais colaborativas latino-americanas*, eds. Júlio César Suzuki, Maria Margarida Cintra Nepomuceno and Gilvan Charles Cerqueira de Araújo (São Paulo: Programa de Pós-Graduação em Integração da América Latina PROLAM da Universidade de São Paulo, 2021), in press.

²³ Roig-Sanz and Subirana, *Cultural Organizations*, 6-14.

²⁴ Pumar, “Universalisms in Debate during the 1940s,” 300.

²⁵ Pumar, 300.

UNESCO soon launched a major study on the status of “International Tensions and Comprehensions.” Aiming to integrate various areas, including philosophy, humanities, arts and literature, the institution drafted a questionnaire for renowned intellectuals worldwide to grasp how societies facilitated understanding among different peoples. The responses were studied comparatively, focusing on cultural and historical aspects, assessing the images nations had of themselves, and exploring the techniques used in formal teaching, politics, and psychology to alter mentalities predisposed towards aggressive nationalism.²⁶

This was the context in which the *Œuvres représentatives* project emerged, to foster mutual understanding among UNESCO member states. The collection was intended to showcase the finest literary, philosophical, and scientific works of each member state, to promote world peace through artistic expression and scientific thought.

In Search of Peace and World Literature

The *Œuvres représentatives* Collection

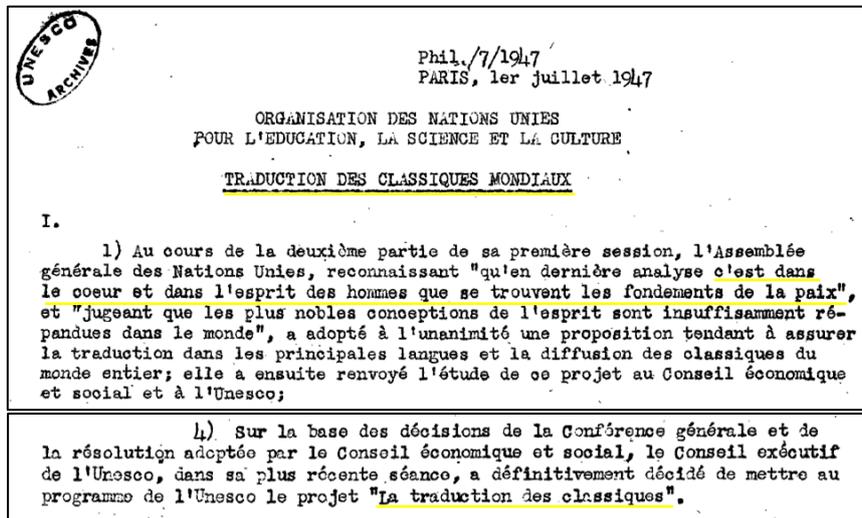
The United Nations General Assembly of 14 December, 1946 decided that although the foundations of peace could be found “in the hearts and spirits of men [...] their most noble experiences were not well disseminated among societies.”²⁷ Since countries needed to know each other better, a plan was drawn up to translate national classics into the most common languages to make them universal. After a unanimous vote, the resolution was submitted UNESCO’s Economic and Social Council, which accepted the proposal in March 1947, considering it crucial to international cooperation. The decision was taken to present a report on the question by June 1948.²⁸

²⁶ *Résolutions de la Conférence Générale. Deuxième session.* Archives de l’UNESCO (Mexico City, 1947).

²⁷ *Archives de l’UNESCO.* Translation of *Classiques Mondiaux*, PHIL / 7 (Paris, July 1, 1947), 1.

²⁸ *Archives de l’UNESCO.*

The plan had been on the agenda at UNESCO's own general conference in its first official meeting in Paris in November and December 1946. It recognized the need to translate the most significant works from each country for a collection to be called *La Traduction des classiques*.²⁹



Images 1 and 2. Document from the UNESCO Archives discussing the translation of *Classiques Mondiaux*

The collection was not for "technical works aimed at scholars and specialists" or "works of vulgarization." It was aimed at educating and indeed creating readers with good general knowledge.³⁰ UNESCO specialists warned that "some works, if fully translated, could be difficult to access for readers of many different cultures"³¹ and therefore suggested adding anthologies and collections of poetry.

²⁹ Few studies deal with the question. However, among those that do, there has been an enormous effort to demonstrate the initial conflicts over UNESCO's publishing project, between the so-called old and young nations, and despite the undeniable success that can be seen in its catalogs at the end of the twentieth century in relation to the number of translated titles, languages, and member states. The first central debate focused on the understandings that existed of works whose established assessments and length of life in print meant that they were read as part of a pantheon of classics of world literature. In relation to this, the essential study is Susanne Klengel, "El derecho a la literatura (mundial y traducida). Sobre el sueño translatólogo de la UNESCO," in *Re-Mapping World Literature: Writing, Book Markets and Epistemologies between Latin America and the Global South*, eds. Gesine Müller, Jorge Locane and Benjamin Loy (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

³⁰ *Archives de l'UNESCO*, 1947, 7.

³¹ *Archives de l'UNESCO*, 8.

Initially, a form was sent out to member states to map works to be translated. A number of criteria were set: 1) “classics” were defined as all works, from any area, which were sufficiently expressive of a culture or nation and which had the status of a monument in the history of human genius and civilization; 2) selected works could contain national particularities but must also have international appeal; 3) preference was to be given to books for a broad audience; 4) books had to be timeless and 5) promote mutual comprehension among societies and respect for unique national identities. The document further emphasized that the “German classics”³² should not be neglected and that this should be negotiated with the allies occupying German territory: even in the literary, philosophical, and scientific spheres, the choices reflected the new geopolitics.

Even the victorious allied nations were not free to choose their authors and titles. UNESCO’s precise definition of literary classics foregrounded classical Greek and Roman culture and their European legacy. International copyright law meant no works published after 1900 could be considered.³³ Books dating from 1901 to 1939 were classified as great modern works, while those published after 1940 were classed as important contemporary works.³⁴

The first steps in organizing the collection took account of the clashes between member states over the name of the project – *Traduction des classiques mondiaux* (*Translation of World Classics*) – and the classifications established based on it. This immediately created a series of problems since the term “classics” implies a value scale and processes of reception, reading, and the attribution of relevance.³⁵

³² *Archives de l’UNESCO*, 3.

³³ Parallel to the discussion of the collection, the theme of author copyright was also discussed at the UNESCO conferences. The fifth General Conference, held in Florence in 1950, debated a “Report and proposition about the procedures to be adopted in the convocation of an inter-governmental conference responsible for preparing a universal convention on author’s copyright,” *Actes de la Conférence Générale*, fifth session (Florence, 1950), *Archives de l’UNESCO*.

³⁴ Plan de Traductions – Questionnaire. PHS / 5. Paris, July 5, 1948, 1. *Archives de l’UNESCO*.

³⁵ Alain Viala, “Qu’est-ce qu’un classique?,” *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France* 37, no. 1 (1992), 6-15.

National literature from various countries was excluded from the project. Literature from some Latin American countries and elsewhere, such as Australia, was excluded by the UNESCO definition of a literary classic, since the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century were considered by these countries as their most fertile literary periods. Works published in revolutionary Russia after 1905 were also excluded. Certain states sought to argue that these periods saw the publication of many legitimate classics with universal aesthetic appeal³⁶ Some nations called into question UNESCO's time-bound definition of literary classics in the questionnaire sent to member states.

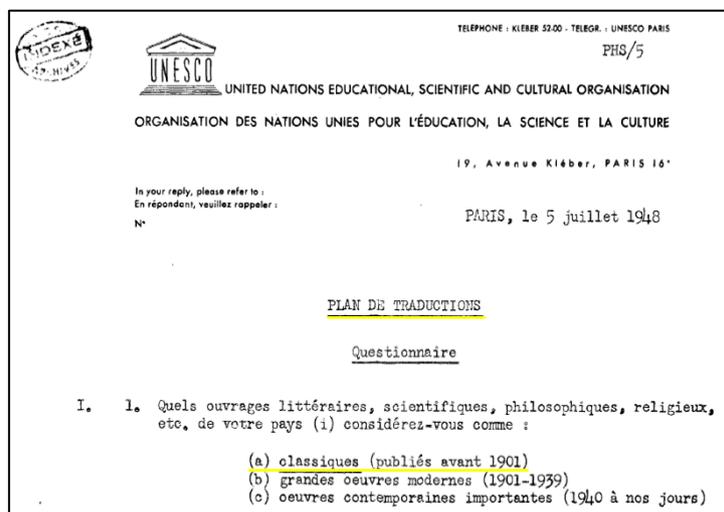


Image 3. Questionnaire for the *Classiques Mondiaux* translation program

The problems and asymmetries among countries were considerable. An order of priority had to be drawn up for the hundreds of works to be translated or retranslated and under-represented languages identified, not only for member states, but also on occasion for specific ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups.³⁷ As a result, the project got off to a slow start, only really gaining ground when the Mexican Jaime Torres Bodet (1902-1974) was elected Director of UNESCO at the Third General Conference in Beirut in 1948.³⁸

³⁶ Cf. Klengel, "El derecho a la literatura (mundial y traducida)."

³⁷ Plan de Traductions – Questionnaire. PHS / 5. Paris, July 5, 1948, 1-2. *Archives de l'UNESCO*.

³⁸ *Actes de la Conférence Générale*, third session (Beirut, 1948). *Archives de l'UNESCO*.

Initially, it was decided that less common languages would be included. Public and/or international funding was vital for such languages, since commercial publishers could not bear the financial risk of translation. As M. Arrhe stated in the *UNESCO Courier* in 1957, “one of the tasks of UNESCO, within the framework of the Organization's larger aim of helping to make the culture of its various member states better known in all other countries, is to attempt to break through the ‘translation curtain’ which makes the literature of so many countries almost entirely unknown outside their national boundaries.”³⁹

The first subgroup considered the translation of Arabic books into languages with a wider circulation and *vice versa*. It was decided that a commission of experts would prepare a list of authors and titles in collaboration with the Lebanese government. An International Commission for the Translation of Great Books, based in Beirut, was tasked with translating the books from Arabic to English, French, and Spanish, and translating Western works into Arabic. All were later published in cooperation with the Gibb Memorial Trust in the United Kingdom, and the Association Guillaume Budé in France.⁴⁰

In the following years, the project expanded to other languages. In 1949, the process of translating Latin American literature began.⁴¹ In 1950, Persian and Italian works were included, while two years later, it was the turn of books from India, China, and Japan.⁴² In 1956, the focus turned to a series of anthologies from Africa as well as works from the USSR, which had only joined UNESCO around two years previously. Translating material from and to the less common European languages was envisaged at this time, as were selected titles from major Western European languages: they had had

³⁹ M. Arrhe, “Great Literature of East and West. A Unesco Collection,” *UNESCO Courier* 6 (June 1957), 6.

⁴⁰ Arrhe, “Great Literature of East and West,” 6.

⁴¹ In the immediate post-war period, a strong interest in Latin America developed, especially in France, as demonstrated by the opening of the Maison de l’Amérique Latine in Paris in 1946, the creation of the Union Latine, in 1954, and the foundation of the Institut des Hautes Études de l’Amérique Latine (IHEAL) at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in 1954. See Giselle Venancio and André Furtado, *Mestiça cientifidade. Três leitores franceses de Gilberto Freyre e sua máxima consagração no exterior* (Niterói: EDUFF, 2020), 34.

⁴² Programme de Traduction de l’UNESCO – A) Collection d’Œuvres Représentatives. ALT / 865. (Paris, July 1, 1956), 1. *Archives de l’UNESCO*.

to wait a while since UNESCO considered them better known than many other languages, especially Asian ones. The 1950s also saw the expression *Œuvres représentatives* become established as the name of the collection, abandoning the word “classics,” with its heavily European connotations.⁴³

The venture aimed to encourage the translation, publication, and dissemination not only of literary works, but also philosophical and scientific writings of intellectuals from the largest possible number of member states, in widely read languages such as French, English, and Spanish.⁴⁴ The centrality of these languages was due not only to political or economic factors and the number of speakers, but above all the urgent need to curb nationalism. New languages such as German, Russian, and Japanese were also chosen, albeit initially on a smaller scale since it was harder to find suitable translators.

To be selected for the literature catalog, works had to be considered culturally significant, even if little known within their original country or linguistic environment. Candidates could be put forward in a range of ways, including recommendations by national commissions, extant in the cultural or educational sector or established for the purpose, specific UNESCO resolutions made at the general conferences, surveys in universities and research centers, and lists of publishers, translators, experts, critics, specialists, etc.

The profile of each author put forward was then assessed by means of dossiers analyzing their life and work, with an emphasis on the book to be translated. The basic criteria were the cultural representativity of the writing, its originality and literary worth, and complying with UNESCO guidelines on respect for different societies: texts that incited violence or racism were rejected.⁴⁵ The works formed a corpus celebrating universal literary heritage while highlighting the exemplarity of each culture of origin.

⁴³ Programme de Traduction de l'UNESCO, ALT / 1474 (Paris, July 30, 1959), 2-3. *Archives de l'UNESCO*.

⁴⁴ Comité d'experts sur la traduction des grandes œuvres – Rapport complémentaire sur les traductions, PHS / Conf. 1 / 2. Paris, May 12, 1948, 2. *Archives de l'UNESCO*.

⁴⁵ *Collection UNESCO d'Œuvres Représentatives* (Paris, 1994). *Archives de l'UNESCO*.

The selection criteria helped to form a collection promoting tolerance and peace while maintaining a careful geographic and linguistic balance.

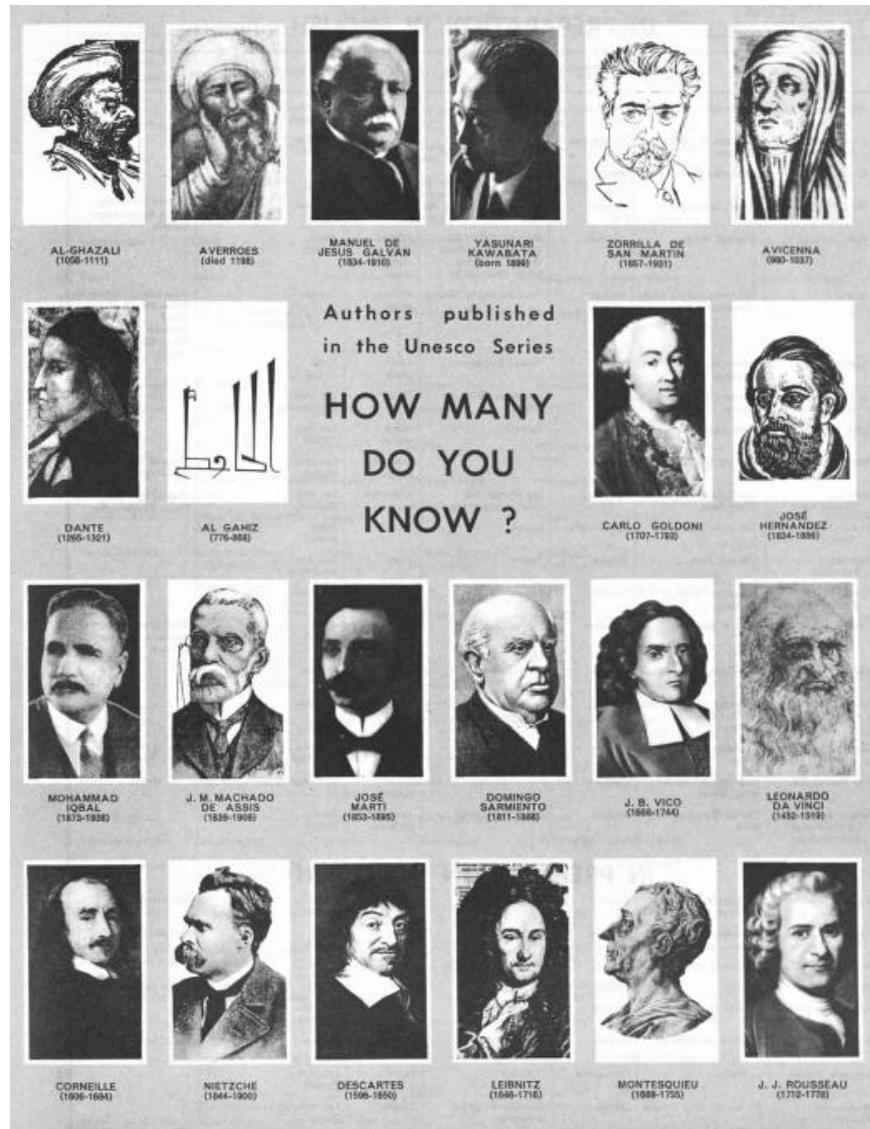


Image 4. Names and images of some authors published in the *Œuvres représentatives* collection. *The UNESCO Courier* 6 (1957), 33

Œuvres représentatives made an important intellectual contribution by facilitating access to certain books. It also provided financial support for translations and the acquisition of significant numbers of copies for widespread distribution. The titles were co-published by renowned publishers such as Flammarion, Penguin and Alfred A. Knopf, although they did not always carry UNESCO's name.

By 1993, around 900 titles had been published, by authors from more than eighty member states, written in around 100 languages.⁴⁶ Of the total, approximately 250 books were republished or re-edited. Among the authors whose international profiles were boosted by the collection were Yasunari Kawabata and Ivo Andrić, both awarded the Nobel prize after being translated with the help of UNESCO. Albert Camus and Octavio Paz were similarly honored, though their work was already widely known internationally.

In the case of Latin America, a list was drawn up of key works from the national literatures of the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies, most of which achieved independence in the nineteenth century. A specific Ibero-American series was created for these works.⁴⁷

The Place of Iberian America in the *Œuvres représentatives*

Between 1952 and 1993, the cut-off point for the catalog released the following year,⁴⁸ the Ibero-American series published fifty-four volumes by individual authors. Added to the eleven anthologies of Latin American texts, they represented 7.22% of the 900 texts published, reflecting a degree of imbalance and inequality of the presence of literature from the former colonies of Portugal and Spain within the overall collection.

Ibero-American texts were translated above all into French and English. There were also four titles in bilingual editions, two in French and Spanish and two in English and Spanish. Fifty of the authors were male, four female.⁴⁹ The publications came from twelve countries, opening with the Dominican Republic:

⁴⁶ *Collection UNESCO*.

⁴⁷ The collection also had series for Africa, Italy, Europe, Persia, and two for the Orient. In the case of the the Italian and European and Oriental and the Orient series, older publications were categorized separately from current works.

⁴⁸ *Collection UNESCO*.

⁴⁹ This statistic excludes anthologies of texts and poetry.

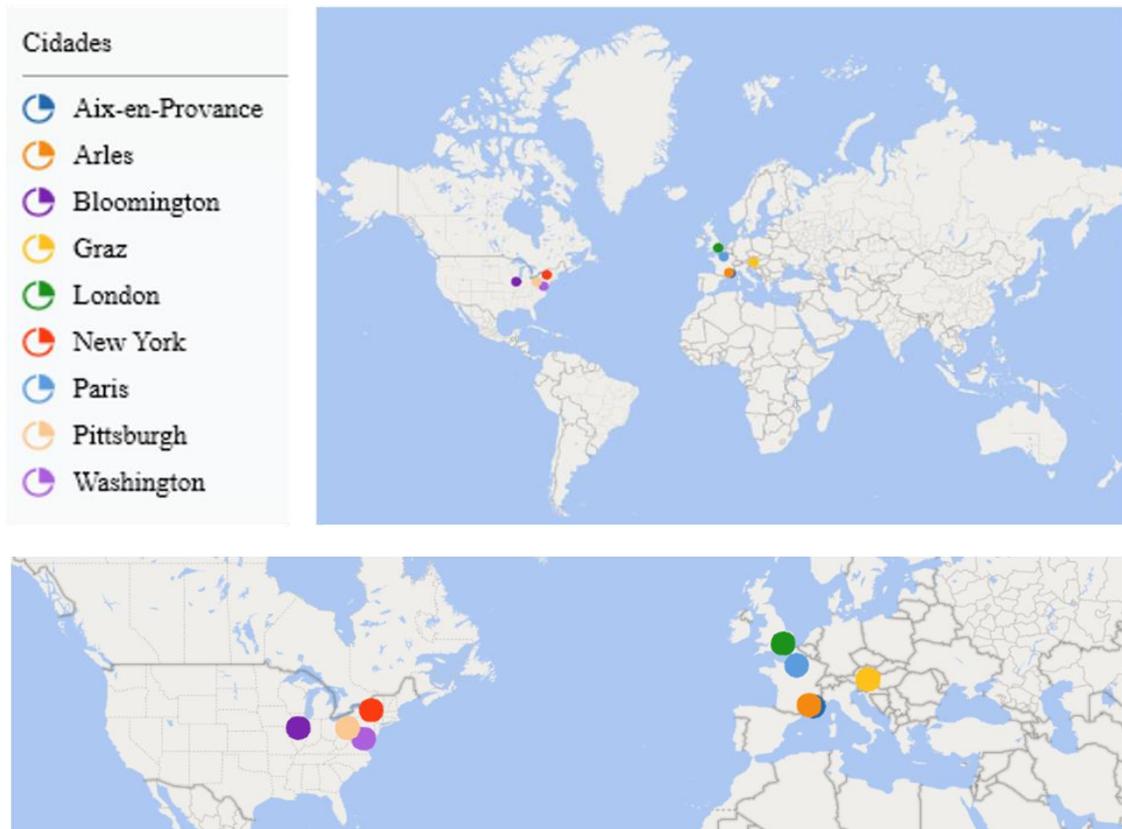
Country	Number of titles	Percentage of total
Dominican Republic	2	3.7%
Cuba	1	1.85%
Bolivia	2	3.7%
Uruguay	5	9.3%
Argentina	8	14.8%
Brazil	18	33.3%
Chile	1	1.85%
Colombia	3	5.55%
Venezuela	4	7.4%
Peru	4	7.4%
Mexico	5	9.3%
Nicaragua	1	1.85%

The books were published by twenty-eight different publishers in Paris, London, Washington, Bloomington, Graz, New York, Aix-en-Provence, Arles, and Pittsburgh, a total of nine cities, at times in co-editions.⁵⁰

Capitals were important, especially Paris, which reaffirmed its centrality, producing 62.59% of the translations, followed at some distance by London with 12.59% of translations and Washington with 11.12%. In total, the three cities accounted for 86.30% of all the books published between 1952 and 1993, becoming the most important sites of legitimation for writers from Ibero-America, whose writing achieved international acclaim in French and English translations. Yet due to the various constraints involved selecting books for the collection, not all countries in the Americas were represented. Among those overlooked were the Francophone countries, excluded *de facto* by the series title, as well as Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama,

⁵⁰ In order of numerical importance: Nagel (7), Peter Owen (5), Indiana University Press (4), A. M. Métailié (4), Pan American Union (3), Gallimard (3), Organization of American States – OAS (3), Plon (3), Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique latine – IHEAL (3), Éditions Caribéennes (2), Flammarion (2), University of Pittsburgh Press (2), Colección Archivos (2), UNESCO Publishing (2), Gollancz (1), La Table Ronde (1), Seghers (1), Éditions Universitaires (1), Jonathan Cape (1), Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt (1), State University of New York Press (1), Albin Michel (1), François Maspéro (1), Alinéa (1), L'Harmattan (1), Granit (1), Actes Sud (1), and Belfond (1). The numerical difference between 54 books and 59 publishers in the catalog is due to five co-editions.

Paraguay, and Puerto Rico, although some authors from these countries were included in anthologies.



Map 1. Dispersal of Ibero-American references in the world and details of the regions which translated them.

In 1957, as the collection was being developed, UNESCO devoted an entire issue of its journal *The UNESCO Courier* to the program, giving “an insight into some of UNESCO’s achievements so far in furthering mutual appreciation of the literatures of East and West.”⁵¹ Of the eight books summarized in the journal, three were from the Ibero-American series, *Martin Fierro*, *Quincas Borba* and *Enriquillo*,⁵² which shows the importance of Latin American literature for the UNESCO project at that point. In later years, its significance declined in relation to literature from other regions of the globe – Latin American authors and books accounted for less than 8% of the total, according to

⁵¹ *UNESCO Courier* 6 (June 1957), 3.

⁵² José Hernández (Argentina), *Martin Fierro*, trans. Paul Verdevoya (Paris: Nagel, 1955); Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (Brazil), *Quincas Borba*, trans. Alain de Acevedo (Paris: Nagel, 1955); Manuel de Jesús Galván (Dominican Republic), *Enriquillo*, trans. Marcelle Auclair (Paris: Nagel, 1952).

the 1994 catalog⁵³ – during the first phase of publication of the collection in the 1950s, titles from Ibero-America stood out. By 1957, twenty-three works from around the world had been published in French and seven in English, translated from Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese, amongst others. Of those translated into French, nine were Latin American, representing 40% of the volumes published. Of the eight titles published in English, two came from Latin America. 35% of all books in the *Œuvres représentatives* collection by 1957, were in the Ibero-American series, clearly reflecting its importance for the project in the 1950s.

Ibero-America in the Mirror and Machado through the Lenses of Gilberto

The *UNESCO Courier* presented Latin American authors and books to readers with little knowledge of literature from the region. The first text reviewed from the Ibero-American series was *Martín Fierro*, under the title *An Epic of the Pampas*. Dominique Lacroix's heavily illustrated review highlights the fact that the French version was a single volume, while José Hernández's work was two separate volumes in Spanish, *El gaucho Martín Fierro*, published in Argentina in 1872, and *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879). Lacroix states that the books were extremely popular in Argentina, selling around 30,000 copies. He notes that UNESCO's aim in publishing the work was to pay homage to Argentine popular literature and allow a broader readership to get to know the character who had come to symbolize the country. Emphasizing the authenticity of Hernández's account of gaucho life, Lacroix argues that anyone who did not know the pampas might immediately think of the lasso, but the gaucho's greatest tool was in fact his guitar, which let him sing about and recount his life. In Lacroix's view the work contains elements of José Hernández's own experiences and blends oral and written culture. He further states that

⁵³ *Collection UNESCO d'Œuvres Représentatives*, 1994.

the translator Paul Verdevoya retains as much popular Argentine slang as possible, holding up unique mirror to gaucho culture and Argentine national identity.⁵⁴

The first book published in the Ibero-American series, Manuel de Jesús Galván's *Enriquillo*, is reviewed by Rodney Stewart under the title *The Cross and the Sword*.⁵⁵ The review opens by commenting on the widespread lack of knowledge about the island of Hispaniola. Stewart states that in school little is learned about this portion of the globe: all that is known is that it was colonized by France and by Spain and that it comprises two countries, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. He then outlines the plot, which takes place at the beginning of European colonization and refers to the exploitation of the Indians. Galván's hero Enrique (Enriquillo) is a young chief who escapes the slaughter of his people, manages to find protection, only to suffer the hardships to which indigenous peoples were subjected. Finally, Enriquillo manages to assemble an army and defeat his oppressors. To conclude, Stewart states that *Enriquillo* was Galván's only book, "but it was enough to place him in the front rank of nineteenth-century Latin American writers."⁵⁶

The third book reviewed in *The UNESCO Courier* in 1957 is Machado de Assis's *Quincas Borba*. The review by Louise de Berger states that the story of Rubião, who becomes rich on receiving an inheritance but is robbed by his friends and gradually goes insane, "provides an interesting sidelight on the life of the Brazilian middle classes at the end of the nineteenth century."⁵⁷ This suggests that reading Machado de Assis sheds light on the Brazilian character.

Quincas Borba was the first Portuguese title in the UNESCO collection, published in 1955. This coincides with the moment when Machado's texts began to be published

⁵⁴ The extensive bibliography on Hernández and *Martín Fierro* makes it impossible to list all relevant references.

⁵⁵ *UNESCO Courier* 6 (June 1957), 30-31.

⁵⁶ *UNESCO Courier* 6, 30-31.

⁵⁷ Louise de Berger, "Humor: An Antidote For Madness?," *UNESCO Courier* 6, (June 1957), 26.

abroad, making his work not only well known in other languages, but also identified as a classic of Brazilian literature. Although Machado de Assis had been recognized in his own country since the beginning of the twentieth century, his books were slow to be translated and published abroad.⁵⁸ Literary criticism in English and French brought him to international attention and legitimacy.

Attempts to disseminate Machado de Assis's work in France began early in the twentieth century. In 1909, the Sorbonne held a *Fête de l'Intellectualité Brésilienne*, paying tribute to the writer: Anatole France, Victor Orban, and Manuel de Oliveira Lima were known to read his poems.⁵⁹ However, the internationalization of Machado de Assis's work only gained "impulse in the 1950s, with the first translations of his novels into English."⁶⁰ The 1950s sealed Machado's international acclaim.

The review in *The UNESCO Courier* only looks at Machado de Assis's text, ignoring its paratext. The French-language edition of *Quincas Borba* published by Nagel was prefaced by Roger Bastide, a major French intellectual who had once been a professor at Universidade de São Paulo (USP). The image illustrating the review is a drawing by Gilberto Freyre for the 1951 edition of his *Sobrados e Mucambos* [*The Mansions and the Shanties*] published by Rio-based José Olympio.

⁵⁸ André Furtado highlights the personal efforts of Machado de Assis to see his books translated "[He] ran into the resistance of his publisher, Garnier, which only changed in 1902 when *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, originally published in 1891, appeared in Spanish in the Uruguayan capital, Montevideo. Following this, came *Esaú e Jacó*, published in 1904 and in Spanish in Buenos Aires, the following year. Scholars claim, however, that the French reception raised Machado de Assis to international visibility." André Furtado, "Credo ut intelligam: os escritores ibero-americanos nas vitrines do Greenwich literário pós 1945," in *Tessituras Históricas*, eds. Giselle Venancio, Mariana Tavares and Roberta Gonçalves (Curitiba: Appris Editora, 2020), 170.

⁵⁹ Lea Mara Valesi Staut, "Machado de Assis na França," in *Travessia* 16, 17 and 18 (Florianópolis 1989), 279-290.

⁶⁰ Hélio de Seixas Guimarães, *Machado de Assis, o escritor que nos lê* (São Paulo: Unesp, 2017), 20.

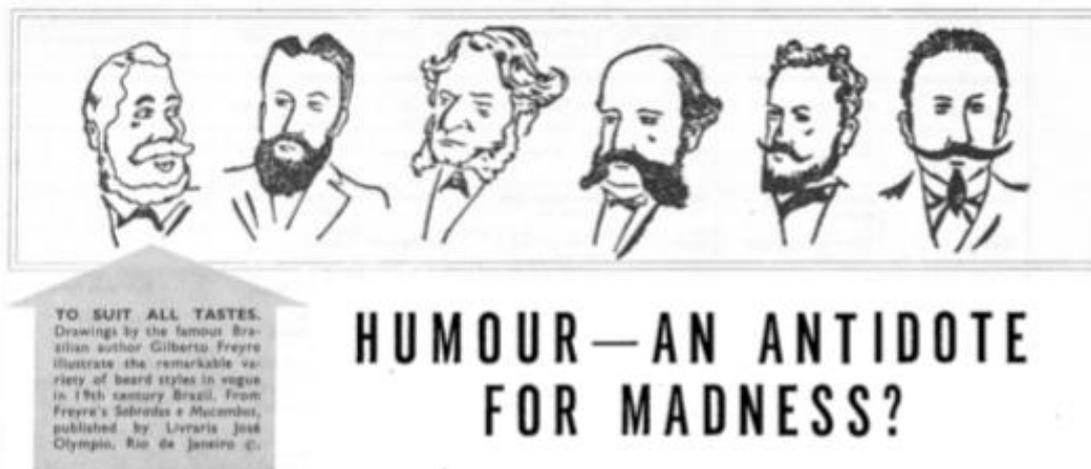


Image 5. Title and image of the page with the review of *Quincas Borba* by Machado de Assis. *The UNESCO Courier* 6 (1957), 26

The journal's association of Gilberto Freyre and Machado de Assis may at first seem surprising. But it is important to consider that Roger Bastide, author of the preface to the French Machado de Assis translation, had himself translated Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* [*The Masters and the Slaves* in English] as *Maîtres et esclaves* for Gallimard a few years previously, in 1952.⁶¹ Bastide's preface returns to an assessment of Machado's books published in *Revista do Brasil* in 1940. In the earlier text, Bastide broke with previous readings of Machado's work to affirm his vocation as "one of the greatest Brazilian landscapists."⁶² Bastide claimed that Machado made descriptions of the landscape with a light touch, in "three brushstrokes," due to "causes of a sociological order, at the historical moment which [Machado] wrote his work."⁶³ Bastide's argument drew on Gilberto Freyre's *Sobrados e Mucambos*.⁶⁴ Bastide states that Brazilian lives changed considerably in the imperial period and that "the art of Machado de Assis clearly corresponded to the blooming of this urban society,"⁶⁵ described by Freyre.

⁶¹ See Venancio and Furtado, *Mestiça cientificidade*.

⁶² Roger Bastide, "Machado de Assis paisagista," *Teresa - Revista de Literatura Brasileira* 6, no. 7 (São Paulo, 1940), 418.

⁶³ Bastide, "Machado de Assis paisagista," 419.

⁶⁴ Gilberto Freyre, *Sobrados e mucambos* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1936).

⁶⁵ Bastide, "Machado de Assis paisagista," 419.

Bastide's preface to the French version of *Quincas Borba* similarly drew a parallel between Machado de Assis and Freyre.⁶⁶ The 1955 preface demonstrates that Machado de Assis's narrative is set in the decadence of patriarchal Brazilian imperial society in the nineteenth century and argues that Machado de Assis' work should be seen as a symbol of Brazilian nationality. Bastide again draws on Freyre's writings to compare the work of Machado de Assis with the transition from agrarian to urban society in Brazil. This sets Machado de Assis apart from other nineteenth-century writers. Bastide ends his preface with the claim that while Brazilian literary history did not have a classic period *per se*, it did have one classic author: Machado de Assis.

While Louise de Berger's review largely overlooks Bastide's preface, the illustration draws attention to the implicit relationship between Bastide, Machado de Assis, and Freyre. The reference to Freyre, then recognized in France as a leading Brazilian intellectual, served to legitimize Machado de Assis.

Writing Ibero-America

Why did UNESCO choose to call the series Ibero-American, instead of Latin American or Hispano-American? First, had the series been called Hispano-American, it would have excluded books from Brazil, which, as seen above, ended up with the most translated works in the collection. The Latin American label seems to have been avoided over the question of the region's complex identity.

Defining the identity of the Americas is a highly fraught endeavor, sparking vast debates since the mid-nineteenth century. As the former Iberian colonies fought for independence, the aim of constructing an overarching identity for Latin America came into opposition with nationalist or regionalist projects. Under constant threat from European countries and later the United States, Latin American unity was expressed in

⁶⁶ For a detailed analysis of Bastide's texts in *Revista do Brasil* and *Quincas Borba's* preface, published by Nagel, see Furtado, "Credo ut intelligam," 157-182.

terms corresponding to the political and cultural disputes in play during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶⁷

The foundation of UNESCO brought these debates to the fore once again, with fresh connotations. Anabela Cutroni has identified an initial dispute between “the Anglo-Saxon countries, led by the United States, and the Latin countries, led by France. Both the US and France sought to impose their own international interests and notions of education, science and culture on UNESCO.”⁶⁸ Although the documents consulted in the UNESCO archives have not explicitly shown the reasons for the choice of Ibero-American, some hypotheses can be considered.

The first relates to disputes for leadership in UNESCO’s internal debates, as cited by Cutroni. Using the term “Latin American” in the *Œuvres représentatives* collection could signify the growing strength of the French bloc in opposition to the US bloc, since France was considered leader of the Latin countries.

The second hypothesis relates to the question of the Latin languages in circulation in the Americas and the publishing productions associated with them. Since it was a collection of translated texts published in the “less common” languages spoken in the region, Spanish and Portuguese fit the definition better than French. This doubtless explains why the series was eventually named Ibero-American rather than Latin American.

Although the number of titles in the Ibero-American series grew in absolute terms from the 1960s onwards, in relative terms it lost ground within the collection: as has

⁶⁷ On the debate about the terms which defined the southern and central parts of the Americas, see Eliana de Freitas Dutra, “‘Se existo não sou um outro’. Os desafios de ser América Latina,” in *Continente por definir. As ideias de América no século XX*, eds. Eliana de Freitas Dutra and Jorge Myers (Belo Horizonte: Editora da UFMG), in press.

⁶⁸ Anabela Abarzúa Cutroni, “The first UNESCO experts in Latin America (1946-1958),” in *The Politics of Academic Autonomy in Latin America*, ed. Fernanda Beigel (New York: Routledge, 2013), 47-64.

been shown, in the 1990s the region accounted for less than 8% of the total published works.⁶⁹

One important aspect which can perhaps explain the decline of the Ibero-American series and UNESCO's interest in constructing a unified identity for the Americas lies in changes to the humanist ideas which shaped the institution's actions from the 1950s onwards. Universalist ideas, based on Huxley's 1940s humanism, lost ground within UNESCO and in the collection itself in later years. A document entitled "The humanism of tomorrow and the diversity of cultures,"⁷⁰ prepared by a panel of experts and published by UNESCO in 1953,⁷¹ sheds light on the new terms of the debate. It asserts that "any international action runs the risk of being sterile and even harmful if it does not take into account the diversity and originality of cultures and the relations established over history."⁷² Attentive to the debates on African and Asian decolonization, the committee warned that attention must be paid to "the ideas and ideals" of nations with whom there had been little connection previously and stated that "the efforts made to resolve economic, social, or political problems recognized as of common interest have generated tensions which threaten the fundamental values of civilization."⁷³ The specialists then proposed a plan of action which had to take into account the basis of UNESCO's actions.

Since technological progress and economic and material changes had substantially altered way of life and culture in certain countries, it was believed necessary to guarantee that the populations affected had the means to construct values comparable

⁶⁹ *Collection UNESCO*, 1994.

⁷⁰ UNESCO, "L'humanisme de demain et la diversité de cultures (déclaration commune du groupe d'experts réuni par l'UNESCO)," in UNESCO, *L'originalité des cultures. Son rôle dans la compréhension internationale* (Paris, July 1953).

⁷¹ The committee members were C. C. Berg (Netherlands), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (Brazil), M. Castro Leal (Mexico), Lucien Febvre (France), M. Griaule (France), Richard McKeon (United States), Mei Yi Chi (China), Mostafa Amer Bey (Egypt), J.M. Romein (Netherlands), and N.K. Sidamtha (India).

⁷² UNESCO, "L'humanisme de demain et la diversité de cultures," 8.

⁷³ UNESCO, 402.

to those formed previously. The societies had to master new knowledge, technology, and material conditions, while preserving the unique features of their cultures, such as languages, customs, crafts, folklore, and beliefs. UNESCO's mission was to help preserve their major monuments and to spread knowledge of their culture and respect for their values worldwide. The committee ended its document by stating that "nations should acquire and disseminate, with the help of UNESCO, knowledge of different systems of values prepared by various civilizations, the means they used to reach these values and the diversity of material circumstances which condition the conception and scope of these values."⁷⁴

The committee concluded that the greatest challenge for international understanding was the relationship between cultures. A global society rooted in mutual respect and comprehension required a new form of humanism in which universality was achieved by the recognition of common values "under the banner of the diversity of cultures." This target could only be achieved with the support of an international body attentive to contemporary questions.

UNESCO was responsible for getting countries to work on this new humanism, seeking shared values and meanings in specific cultural expressions. Although the *Œuvres représentatives* collection and its Ibero-American series continued to be published throughout the second half of the twentieth century, other criteria came to be used to select authors and titles for translation, particularly the growing debate on cultural diversity. The universalist humanism which shaped the collection's initial output was gradually replaced by the "new humanism" which would become established in the following decades.

⁷⁴ UNESCO, 403.