

Letters from your editor

**Should tropical researchers enter
the racist “Millionaire’s Club”?**

One of my entomology professors, a world-renowned authority, told me a few years ago that as soon as he graduated from a University in the United States and his institutional address became “University of Costa Rica”, some leading journals closed the doors for him, not because the reviewers found any problems with his manuscripts, but because the editors rejected them *ad portas* if they came from Latin America.

In my personal experience, I felt well treated by the editors of European and American journals until a couple years ago, when I experienced the prejudice of what some consider the most prestigious scientific journal. The three reviewers were very favorable to the manuscript, but the editor sent me a hostile response; I felt he published it because he had no alternative in view of the referees’ evaluations, and I suspect that the reason for his hostility was that most co-authors were from Latin American.

Some scientists and editors from powerful countries believe that science from tropical regions must be viewed with distrust. Take a look at the science news section of major media and you will get the impression that important science is only made in the US and Western Europe, and also that it is mainly made by white men (this has not changed for decades, see: Monge- Nájera, 2002). The prejudice can be absolute: in the words of an editor of the renowned *New England Journal of Medicine*, “in the Third World there is no science” (Gibbs, 1995).

A couple colleagues recently told me that, after trying in an important British malacological journal, they felt doubly discriminated, for being “third-world authors” and for being women. Their impression was that submitting there was a waste of time and a blow to the self-confidence of those who believe that article quality is the only thing that will affect an editorial decision.

The president of one of the Royal Societies shared the same bad impression of Latin American science. I told him that the tropics in general, and Latin America in particular, has some of the best scientists in the world, and that it is unfair when we are all judged as a homogeneous group. He agreed but insisted that much low quality work is produced in the tropics (and on that I had to agree with him).

The same prejudice affected Australian science, long considered inferior to British science, but over time it achieved international recognition, a phenomenon that has been studied in detail by Newland (1991). The same will happen with countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, but until then, tropical scientists have

two basic options. One is trying to become members of “the Millionaire’s Club” (a concept I remember from a cartoon in an old *New Scientist*); but my warning to them is this: in many of these journals there is a justified and natural disinterest in tropical subjects, so foreign to London, Washington or Berlin.

The other option is to support the development of good quality journals in tropical countries, an option that has ethical and practical advantages. On the one hand, ethical, because you will be supporting conservation of the spectacular tropical biodiversity and the welfare of the people who live among it. On the other hand, practical advantages, because it is among ourselves that we will find the most interested readers. Furthermore, there is an accelerated improvement in the quantity and quality of local science in the tropics (e.g. Monge-Nájera and Ho, 2017a, 2017b).

We must recognize and value the efforts of organizations such as SCIELO, REDALYC and Latindex, which are helping raise the quality of many journals in the region. It is essential that our journals keep the highest standards, not only in the content of the articles themselves, but also in manuscript processing and service to authors and readers.

Maybe scientific racism will take a long time to disappear, but soon it will not matter if the great European and American journals discriminate against tropical authors: the day will come when our journals will be as prestigious as theirs, and our science will be as independent and good as the best in the world. We are already travelling along that path, and although we will not arrive, our students, or their students, certainly will: it is only a matter of time.

I thank José Vargas Z. and Francisco Hernández Ch. for their suggestions to improve this letter.

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