

### Contextualized editorial practices: Carlos Augusto Monteiro and the journal *Revista de Saúde Pública*

Práctica editorial contextualizada: Carlos Augusto Monteiro y la *Revista de Saúde Pública* 

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**ABSTRACT** This text is part of a series of interviews that seek to explore diverse editing and publication experiences and the similar difficulties Latin America journals face, in order to begin to encounter contextualized solutions that articulate previously isolated efforts. In this interview, carried out in July 2015 in the Instituto de Salud Colectiva [Institute of Collective Health] of the Universidad Nacional de Lanús, Carlos Augusto Monteiro speaks to us about funding, work processes, technological innovations, and establishing teams and roles. He analyzes the importance of Latin American journals as a platform for spreading research relevant to national agendas, and the connection between journal performance, the quality of graduate training programs and research quality.

**KEY WORDS** Electronic Journals; Editorial Policies; Publishing; Researcher Performance Evaluation Systems; Systems for Evaluation of Publications; Brazil.

**RESUMEN** Este texto es parte de una serie de entrevistas cuyo propósito es relevar diversas experiencias editoriales y las dificultades similares por las que atraviesan las revistas latinoamericanas, de manera de comenzar a encontrar soluciones contextualizadas que permitan articular esfuerzos aislados. En esta entrevista realizada en julio de 2015, en el Instituto de Salud Colectiva de la Universidad Nacional de Lanús, Carlos Augusto Monteiro nos habla del modelo de financiamiento, el proceso de trabajo, las innovaciones técnicas, la conformación de equipos y sus roles. Asimismo, analiza la relevancia de las revistas latinoamericanas para la difusión de investigaciones de interés de la agenda nacional, y el vínculo entre el desempeño de las revistas, la calidad de los posgrados y las investigaciones.

**PALABRAS CLAVES** Revistas Electrónicas; Políticas Editoriales; Edición; Sistemas de Créditos y Evaluación de Investigadores; Sistemas de Evaluación de las Publicaciones; Brasil.

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### INTRODUCTION

Carlos Augusto Monteiro is a physician with a Master's Degree in Preventive Medicine, a PhD in Public Health from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), and postdoctoral studies from the Institute of Human Nutrition at Columbia University. He is a tenured professor of the Departamento de Nutrição of the Faculdade de Saúde Pública of the USP and, since 1992, has been the scientific coordinator of the Núcleo de Pesquisas Epidemiológicas em Nutrição e Saúde. His most prominent scientific production includes studies regarding health conditions and nutrition in the Brazilian population, eating and health patterns in Brazil, and the nutrition and food transition in developing countries. For over ten years he has been the scientific editor of Revista de Saúde Pública, one of the most important scientific journals in the field of public health.

In July 2015, Monteiro offered a seminar at the Instituto de Salud Colectiva (ISCo) at the Universidad Nacional de Lanús, within the framework of the project "Multilevel and Lifecourse Approaches to Non-Communicable Disease Prevention (2012-2017)." The project is carried out in cooperation with the University of Michigan, Drexel University and the Instituto de Nutrición de Centro América y Panamá (INCAP) in Guatemala and is financed by Fogarty International Center and the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the US.

At the conclusion of his seminar, we meet in the ISCo to discuss the emergence of *Revista de Saúde Pública*, its mode of production, its editorial policy, and the influence Brazil's science and technology policies have on editorial production.

### DIALOGUE

Emergence of the journal *Revista de Saúde Pública* 

**Viviana Martinovich**: Revista de Saúde Pública *emerged at the end of the 1960s...* 

**Carlos Augusto Monteiro**: The journal had its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016 and that in part explains its success. It is not easy for something to last 50 years in Brazil, and the journal keeps improving. If you analyze the performance indicators you can see a growth process, and behind that process are people.

The founder of the journal was the professor Oswaldo Forattini, a medical entomologist, a very competent professional is his area and a visionary in the sense of saying, "I don't want to do something halfway, I want this to be one of the best journals; it might take time to become so, but that is the goal." He had that drive and was very hardworking. His companion in this work was Maria Teresinha de Andrade, director of the library and professor at the Faculdade de Saúde Pública, who to this day is the managing editor of the journal. He was the scientific editor for four decades, until the year 2000, when he passed away. I had the honor and the great responsibility of replacing him. Forattini and Teresinha shared the same idea of always doing things the best way. That search for excellence relates to the project of the USP itself, which was born of a group of San Pablo intellectuals, especially from the area of philosophy, who had a lot of French influence and even brought professors from France. The USP was always a university of excellence, and the journal follows that lead.

There was always great concern regarding meeting the journal periodicity, the publication punctuality, sustaining a standard, a pattern of quality, it was always like that. For example, today all of the articles are published in English, people can submit articles in Spanish, Portuguese or English, and if the submission isn't in English, it will be translated and published electronically in two languages. In fact, we only have an electronic version, we don't have a paper version anymore.

The decision to leave behind the print version produced some disagreement, but the issue was the funding of the journal. How is a journal funded? The technological question is increasingly interesting, but it doesn't reduce costs, it actually increases them, because the process becomes more complex. The truth is that the only cost we were able to economize was that of paper.

All of the advances that emerged and became accessible, the journal was the first to adopt them and make the necessary effort to accompany each new process. For example, regarding translation, I think it is the only journal in the area that has all articles translated into English, and of course this increases the visibility of the article, it's obvious, the language of science today is English.

### MODE OF PRODUCTION

VM: After 2012 you changed your funding model and began to charge authors. What was that shift like?

**CAM**: That was a very difficult step to take, fundamentally related to the journal's functioning. It is a journal of the USP and the university supplies workers, in our case, only one employee, and the rest of the work is voluntary. The associate editors, scientific editors, editors-in-chief, no one earns anything. Some are professionals of the School of Public Health but many are not, and all do voluntary work. But in order to produce the journal, in addition to the layout costs – which we outsource to a company – the most expensive is style correction, which is carried out after the article has been approved. Authors don't always write clearly.

Style correction is a step after the work carried out by the scientific reviewers, who look at the more technical questions. It's important to say that, although sometimes the review process can be long, an article is never approved that doesn't have the number of opinions we deem necessary. Nevertheless, the associate editors and reviewers don't always keep in mind the questions of language, expositional clarity, standards for presenting tables, etc., so we have two people who work doing that, and now the work has doubled because it has to be done in both Portuguese and English.

When we began to translate the articles into English, the production cost of the journal greatly increased. At first it was the author who paid the translation, if he or she decided to do so. But that model did not guarantee that all the contents would be in English, so we changed the model and what is charged to authors now almost exclusively goes to cover the cost of translation.

VM: On the journal's website you mention that the amount charged goes fundamentally towards three aspects: the maintenance of the electronic system of submission and evaluation of articles, the correction of scientific writing and the English translation. Nevertheless, it would appear that it only covers the English translation.

**CAM**: The truth is that the cost of the journal is very high. Every issue costs more or less 100,000 reales (around 30,000 dollars). It's a lot of money.

VM: That amount, without printing...

**CAM**: No longer publishing a print version reduced the cost very little, it reduced it somewhat, but very little. So how do we obtain funding? Where do the resources come from? The USP, aside from paying one employee's salary, also has a program to support all of the university's scientific journals, and in these last years has created a journal ranking with five groups; we are in the first group, so we receive funds accordingly.

Another source of income is the Ministry of Health, without that money we would not be able to publish the journal. We have to sign annual agreements, every year we have to negotiate a new agreement, and they have difficulties too because Brazil has a large number of journals.

VM: For the work of correcting and editing the articles you have just one employee funded by the USP and you outsource the rest of the processes?

**CAM**: It's always a sacrifice to bring the money together, a little from here, a little more from there. The Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP) is another organization that provides funds, but only for articles with authorship from São Paulo. And so we keep on pulling funds together. We had people with precarious contracts who would leave after a few months of work, and since this is specialized work that requires people specialized in the tasks, Professor Teresinha would train them and a little while later they would leave and once again she'd have to train new people. So, to avoid this, she trained two people and we formally contracted them. This process started with the Health Secretariat of São Paulo, when we were able to sign a five-year agreement, and the Secretariat paid their salaries. But when that period was over, the new Secretary didn't want to renew the agreement, and so how were we going to pay these two employees? With money from the Ministry you can't pay staff, it's not allowed. And that's when we started charging authors. We charge 1,500 reales, which is around 500 dollars. If the person can't pay, we still publish the article. But the amount isn't that high, if there are five authors they have to contribute 100 dollars each.

# VM: In Brazil, research grants have specified line items with funds for publication costs...

**CAM:** Exactly, but there are also cases in which the authors don't have funds, like students who don't have scholarships, and in those cases we wave the fee. The money we receive from authors comes in as "industrial income" through a support foundation of the Faculdade de Saúde Pública, so the money comes in and it's the foundation that contracts these two people.

VM: In the USP more than 130 journals are published. Is there a centralized system of editorial production or does every journal organize its own editorial process?

CAM: They wanted to have a centralized process and I had some meetings with people from the Integrated Library System of the USP that coordinates that area. It would be interesting, I don't know about concentrating everything, but it the case of the translations they could contract a high quality company and arrange a package deal with all of the journals that want to translate their contents - negotiate saying "we are going to have 500 articles per year and we want your best price." So, instead of giving us the money and us individually contracting the companies, which is very complicated, they could do an international contract, even for other things like the electronic management of articles.

# VM: Do you use an electronic management system?

**CAM**: When the management platforms began to appear, we wanted to incorporate that innovation and started to develop our own system, just for us, which is a problem because any time we want to make a change or improve the system it's very costly, so we are going to migrate to ScholarOne. The idea is to migrate little by little, start with a few articles to see how it works and then slowly start deactivating the previous system.

VM: The journal is available in PubMed Central (PMC), which requires a special technical processing of articles. Is that work outsourced to a company?

**CAM**: That was one of our latest innovations, which increased a little more the amount we spend [laughs] but we were able to do it. We fought to enter PubMed Central because they are very rigorous. We send a processed issue, they evaluate it and approve it. Professor Teresinha does that. When something new appears, she says "we have to do it," and then we see where we get the money from [laughs].

**VM**: What is the role of the associate editors in the revision process?

CAM: When we began to receive a large number articles, they would come in and be re-sent to the associate editors. In that scheme, the scientific editor was just another associate editor, assigned to oversee a part of the articles. But the time came in which we couldn't handle the volume. We publish six issues a year, with 20-25 articles per issue, making around 130 articles total, and we reject more or less 80 or 85%, which means we receive almost 1,000 articles per year. It's a lot, that's why we created what we call "pre-analysis." Among the scientific editors at first it was just me, then Rita Barradas was incorporated, and now there are three of us - we divide up those 1,000 articles according to the subject area of each and we look at the abstract and the topic, and the first thing we notice is that many articles aren't related to public health. Since the journal has impact, people from clinical medicine or other areas send articles, and it's a shame but we have to tell them "your article isn't about public health." We have certain criteria, for example, regarding the validation of instruments, something used in a lot of graduate theses, which generates a certain quantity of contributions. If it is the validation of a public health instrument, we consider it, but if it is an instrument to measure the quality of life of a diabetic, it is a clinical instrument, not a public health instrument, and should be published in a journal on diabetes. In the pre-analysis we therefore reject all articles that aren't related to public health and all articles that are insufficiently innovative. For example, a study on obesity in two schools in Sao Paulo would be work accepted in a master's program, but it doesn't make sense to keep publishing articles on the same topic. So, we take into account the conclusions, because if the conclusion is that malnutrition is more common in poor families, that is, if it's just a confirmation of reality...

If the question is interesting it goes on to the review process, if the question is not that interesting but the results are interesting it also goes on, but the rest is rejected. So, the role of the scientific editor at present in the journal is that: to send to the associate editors the articles that passed this first stage of pre-analysis. Right now we have around 15 or 20 associate editors from very specific areas. And what is it they do?

The first thing that an associate editor can do is reject the article, they can say: "I know this area and this is not good." It doesn't happen often, but it can happen. If the editor thinks the article is acceptable, they read it. they can say it is methodologically weak and reject it or what usually happens is that they send it to at least two reviewers and, since they know the area, they are better able to identify whom to choose. That's when the issue of obtaining good reviews comes into play, an issue you must also be familiar with. To get two reviews we have to contact ten reviewers, it's an issue we can't find a solution to, an issue that's very difficult and that often makes it necessary for the editor to speak personally with the reviewers to say to them: "I sent you an article, can you please send your comments?" We have had a better response among younger people, who recently received their PhDs. Once the associate editor obtains the two reviews, they evaluate them to decide if one should be excluded because it is of very bad quality and just use one, or if a fragment should be taken out that doesn't make sense, and so they begin to edit the evaluation that the author will receive. They then send the comments to the scientific editor that sent them the article, to see if the scientific editor agrees with the result, before sending it on to the authors. In general the opinions coincide.

We created these processes based on the reality, the need we were facing. The body of associate editors is renewed every four years, and the last renewal was interesting because we invited 20 people of reference in their respective areas, the best in Brazil, and nobody said no, nobody said to us, "I'm busy, I can't." But if these editors exist, why do we have a pre-analysis? So that they don't receive articles we already know are not going to be published. This way they receive articles from their area that are of high quality and it's more likely they will be able to obtain reviewers. The processes have to be adjusted to the reality, and the reality is that the journal increased greatly the number of articles received, but that doesn't necessarily mean an increase in the quality of the articles.

### EDITORIAL POLICY AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICIES

**VM**: You receive a high percentage of articles from Brazil...

CAM: The majority of articles are from Brazil. We also receive articles from Latin America, from Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and with some frequency, Portugal and African countries. But the largest percentage is from Brazil and from this emerges a debate regarding the difference in criteria with regards to SciELO. We are also concerned about the internationalization of science, but we see it from a different perspective: we have no expectation that Revista de Saúde Pública publish a large number of articles from foreign authors, not even from Latin America. It will publish Brazilian production, and that of Latin American countries, especially those that do not have their own journals. Authors from the United States, England, Australia, why would they publish in Revista de Saúde Pública? It's different than in other areas.

We want articles that are of good quality, we want to publish the best research in public health that takes place in Brazil. We also want to publish good articles that came from collaborations between Brazilian scientists and those of other countries, but it is likely that those articles won't be more than 15 or 20% of the total, and we aren't concerned about increasing that percentage. But the pressure from SciELO is very strong, they want 50% of articles to come from other countries. But why would a person from the US who works in a US university and has 10 high-quality journals in their country send an article to a Brazilian journal? And I think that's the difference with public health in relation to other areas. In Brazil, there are journals of physics, mathematics, chemistry and even medicine in which that idea might make sense. It could be that a physics journal is so good that a researcher from England wants to publish in it, because physics is the same all over the world.

## VM: Isn't it also a question of the research agenda?

CAM: It's exactly that. I do research regarding the impact of crack consumption in Sao Paulo that, for Brazilian public health, is fundamental, and, in terms of relevance, gains 10 points here. But if I send that same research to an English journal, they say, "well, that's interesting, but what is the difference with the article from Medellin or Buenos Aires? I published something similar last week." So, the relevance in this case is different than that of areas like physics and chemistry in which the differentiation isn't so clear. In the case of public health there are articles that will be considered relevant in Brazil and will not necessarily be considered relevant outside of the country. That's why we are always going to publish more Brazilian articles.

VM: The journals published in Latin America are relevant to each country because they allow for an internal research agenda to be valued...

**CAM**: That's right, because one could also ask, "why have journals?" My answer to that is that it is necessary to have journals exactly for that reason, because we want to have in public health people doing research relevant to Brazilian public health. And researches do that, they compete to gain funding, identify priorities, do research and send their results to a top-notch foreign journal, and what happens? The work can't be considered highly relevant because the journal is concerned with more global issues and the article isn't accepted. If there were no quality journals in Brazil, that author would have to send their article to journals that don't have good review and correction processes. And that's another important issue: the review process improves the quality of the research, the comments and modifications form part of the perfection process, and only in this way does it really work.

All countries, without exception, in the area of public health, need to have highquality journals in their own country that help to improve the quality of the material that is disseminated, and that stimulates people to do research of interest to the national agenda. Because if the country doesn't have journals the author will say "I'm going to orient my research to what is interesting to *The Lancet*, they are publishing articles on nutrigenetics," That's why every country needs to have its own journals.

And there another issue emerges: in order to have journals, resources are required. Is it worth it to have just any journal? I don't think so. There are those who say "it's good to have them, because if I can't publish in this one, I can publish in another." But that second journal shouldn't be of poor quality, because if that journal publishes the article just as it was submitted, it produces the opposite effect and the author thinks that they are doing things right and don't need to improve anything: "I have 30 articles published, I'm riding the wind!" [laughs] I don't think that should be done, I think the journal should demand more from the author.

The same happens with relevance, which generates a complicated question. Graduate programs expanded greatly in Brazil, and courses were created in all the universities, and some universities should have undergraduate programs but not graduate programs, because they don't have the conditions for graduate programs. Maybe in the future they could have the conditions, but they don't now and so they don't want to open graduate programs. But if they don't have graduate programs, they don't enter into the national system of researcher evaluation and so they open graduate programs precociously and end up having students who accept going to that school although it doesn't

have experience in constructing a master's program. They open the master's program and they want to publish, because if they don't the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) doesn't evaluate the program, and they send articles to our journal. And what is it they send? What the student did. And what did the students to? What it's possible to do in the conditions they were in. And there are people who say, where will they publish? They got a master's degree, the function of the journal is to publish the production of the graduate programs, but if the production of the graduate programs is carrying out exercises... What has to be taught in graduate programs is how to research, and the first thing is to teach what is and isn't research. Research can't be done about anything at all, it's not any result at all, if the question isn't relevant it's not research. So, in many graduate programs, research is a ritual, the professor says "this is the instrument, there's the group, go out and apply it." So the student applies it, they make their tables and say "I found such and such a thing, exactly the same as what everyone else is finding..." But the student didn't have a question, their results are going to have zero citations. Why would someone cite that? And what's worse is that they are being told that that's what researching is and it's likely that they will teach other students the same. So I think all graduate programs need to teach how to research and that means having a relevant question, producing something relevant, it can't just be an exercise. And we pay the price of that in the journal, because a large part of the articles submitted aren't research, they don't have a question.

VM: The Revista de Saúde Pública has an impact factor of 1.219 and with the new Qualis-Capes criteria it was categorized as Qualis A2 in the area of Collective Health. How is it seen in Brazil that the evaluation criteria developed by the country itself made it so that its best journals could not be categorized as A1?

**CAM**: I don't see any problem with that, I think researchers should be stimulated to

publish articles in the journals considered A1, because it's part of their scientific training. It's necessary to have groups of excellence and in Brazil we have them. When the descent of Brazilian journals came about I didn't worry because I know what it is to publish an article in a journal like *Lancet* and what it is to publish an article in *Revista de Saúde Pública*. When you publish an article in *Lancet* or a journal like that it's because you were able to have an original idea, you were able to answer all the questions you asked, etc., etc., and that is a stimuli for people to evolve.

On the other hand, I don't think it should be required for graduate programs to publish only in A1. To the contrary, it would be odd for them to only publish in those journals, normally that doesn't happen. The most common scenario is that only some articles are published in those journals.

We don't want to compete with top-notch foreign journals, not even those just below; we want to compete with those that have an impact factor of 2 or 3 and that generally take a long time to publish articles. And that is something else we try to do, our goal is to reduce to six months the average publication time. At present we have an average of one year, maybe nine months, but we have no hope of reducing that average to less than six months. So how is it that we are going to compete with journals that have an impact factor a little higher than ours? We offer fasttracking, that is, it's the way we've found to do that. In the meetings that we carry out with all the associated editors, we ask them to be attentive to the research being carried out in their area, to approach those presenting in conferences and offer them the option of publishing in the journal in this way: "We are very interested in publishing your research. What is it we offer? As soon as you submit your article, I will personally oversee the process, I will communicate daily with the reviewers to get a guick response and probably we will be able to publish the article in three months. If you send it to another journal, it will take at least a year to publish." And we've achieved some things, although we can tell by type of article they are doing if it's for our journal or another.

For example, in the Pelotas cohort study they found a relationship between breastfeeding and intelligence quotients, they're not going to send that to the *Revista de Saúde Pública*, they ae going to publish in *Lancet*, we don't even want to try to compete with that.

Another issue is that our impact factor varies because fluctuations are produced. The citation period for our articles is long. People take time to publish, then they take time to cite, research projects take time too. If you want to cite an article, you can't because they haven't finished it. We pay that price because the numerator of that indicator, in our case is made up of a large number of citations in Brazilian journals, and experiences a delay. Also, if we publish a supplement the denominator increases a lot.

We aren't going to go from an impact factor of 1 to 2 in one or two years. It will take time because the impact factor - and this is what we say to the people at SciELO – isn't about visibility, it's about the quality of the research being done in Brazil. If the quality of the research improves, the journal will increase its impact factor, to the contrary the growth is artificial. Real growth depends on the quality of the article research. For example, in Brazil there is a cohort study that began 30 years ago and now is one of the largest cohort studies in the country, so this generates a type of production that will be more cited. The same happens if there are large centers or research teams interested in current issues. For example, we did a special issue regarding scientific production in Brazil, and one of the articles carried out an analysis by research area and identified that certain areas, like entomology, have very cited articles. Looking at the area of nutritional epidemiology the author showed that there was a group that had begun to do work on obesity with groups from other countries, then a person who had done an internship in Sao Paulo with us went to Río de Janeiro and created another group there on nutritional epidemiology. The group at Pelotas also began to do more nutritional epidemiology, and that's what's made the area have a certain level of growth.

What we hope is that these thematic areas of excellence increase. For example, in the case of AIDS no one was researching in Brazil and now there are lots of people researching, so that group has the conditions to do work that generates impact. That's what's going to increase the impact indicators of the Brazilian journals, you can't ask a journal for a performance that's dissociated from the quality of research. That's why I think it's necessary to think in terms of "how do I improve the quality of research" and not only "how do I improve journal impact?" Journals have to give the best of themselves, they have to do everything that is necessary, but those indexes will only go up, or will only have a sustained increase, when the research has impact.

### **VM**: What is your opinion of the new internationalization requirements proposed by SciELO Brazil?

CAM: Through the implementation of the idea of internationalization, SciELO began to propose that the journals have a percentage of associate editors from non-Brazilian institutions. We are going to achieve that because we have lots of Brazilians working abroad and we can solve it that way. Now, let's think about a professor of Johns Hopkins University. A part of the work of any professor is to be a scientific editor or associate editor of a journal, but there they have the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Journal of Nutrition, Public Health Nutrition, etc., and the professor wants to be part of these journals. Why would they accept my invitation to be associate editor and work for our journal? Because when they fight to be promoted - which is a very big issue in the US - and they say "I am associate editor of Revista de Saúde Pública" - with the name in Portuguese like that - they'll be told: "Oh, yeah? What happened, no one else invited you?" [laughs] Who's going to accept that? No one is going to accept that.

Now, in the area of physics, for example, internationalization makes more sense: if I have a journal that publishes universal articles

and I am publishing articles from Australia, then in makes sense to invite someone from there, because they might not even know that the journal is published in Brazil because the name is in English; they are international journals. And this is complicating things, because SciELO wants to translate this same idea to other areas. They are also demanding other things, like the professionalization of editors, which requires additional resources that we don't have. If we were to pay a scientific editor, how could we invite an associate editor who is going to do similar work without paying them? So we established that all the technical-scientific work of researchers is not paid because if it were paid, the cost would be absurd.

The journal is from the Faculdade de Saúde Pública of the USP, and it is the authorities of the school who must ratify the seven members of the editorial council. In general, we take the proposal to them and they approve it. The scientific editor is chosen by these seven members. Recently, Rita and I were reelected and we've already said that it's our last period, so Leopoldo [José Leopoldo Ferreira Antunes] will be our successor. He has much more patience for debating and contemplating SciELO's requirements.

VM: What is your personal reflection regarding your experience as editor of the Revista de Saúde Pública?

**CAM:** I like research, that's what I do, and when I took on the tasks of the journal it was because at that moment there wasn't anyone else. When Professor Forattini fell ill, he said to me, "there's no choice, you are going to have to take over, there's no one else." And I resisted it a little [laughs]. But I've been scientific editor for over 15 years, the first five I was I was vice-editor, while he was still the scientific editor, then he became honorary editor and I continued in his place.

#### VM: Well, it's been a great pleasure...

**CAM**: I wish you all the best with your journal.

#### CITATION

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