

Associate Editor's Report

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Just prior to the convening of LASA's XXVII International Congress in Montréal, Canada, we decided to feature in this edition of the *Forum* two issues of major import for LASA's ongoing internal debate. Some of the articles in the *Debates* section are part of the ongoing research concern "*Otros Saberes*," led by President Charles R. Hale. *Otros Saberes* seeks to strengthen existing networks of civil society-based knowledge producers by allowing them to formulate research topics crucial to their work, recruit university-based researchers to work with them on these topics, and enhance their capacity to use research to advance their organizational goals. This initiative refocuses LASA's traditional political approach, which in the past had centered more on the dynamics of the political governing structure of Latin American nation-states and the social forces opposing it, to one highlighting civil society-based knowledge production, an initiative that attempts to bring alternative knowledge producers more centrally to university-based research agendas, and deepens LASA's capacity to participate in and influence contemporary policy and political debates. This effort also provides research grants to teams comprised of both indigenous- and/or Afro-Latin- and university based- knowledge producers.

Linked to *Otros Saberes*, and to the mandate of LASA's Strategic Plan, the *On the Profession* section explores the possibility of measuring racial and ethnic categories in Latin America. We were interested in exploring in this edition the fact that the Plan commits LASA to be more representative of the racial-ethnic diversity of the Latin American region. While these categories are fairly well established in the United States (although far from uncontested), in Latin America the practice of categorizing peoples according to racial-ethnic identity is much more fluid. As a

result, LASA keeps data on nationality and discipline, but none on identity. In this respect, our basic question would be, what categories should be used to define Latin American racial-ethnic identity if any should/could be used at all, and, if none, why not?

As with past issue-areas, questions are raised here about the boundaries of traditional fields of study, their premises and methods, their knowledge systems, and their values. Disciplines are challenged to rethink their roles in the context of the fluid transformations of the times, and continually reposition themselves vis-à-vis the many complex issues they face instead of retrenching to safer, more traditional boundaries that only address the past.

The first essay in the *Debates* section, "Develamos el mito de la democracia racial puertorriqueña" is by Jocelyn A. Géliga Vargas, Associate Professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. The second article, "Investigadores comunales de Tuara guían la elaboración de diagnóstico para la demarcación y titulación de su territorio" is by Edwin Taylor and Mark Everingham. Edwin Taylor is the director of the Instituto de Estudio y Promoción de la Autonomía of the Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua (URACCAN). Mark Everingham is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Social Change at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay. The third article in this section is written by Edizon León Castro, Director of the Fondo Documental Afro-Andino of the Universidad Andina Simon Bolívar. It is titled "Produciendo saberes desde la religiosidad y la memoria." The fourth article, "Um inventário da tradição Wajãpi, articulando 'dois caminhos,'" is written by Dominique Tilkin Gallois, professor of Anthropology at the University of São Paulo and Director of

the Núcleo de História Indígena e do Indigenismo. Odilia Romero Hernández, member of the Central Committee of the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB) Los Angeles, California and Coordinator of Women's Issues wrote the fifth article, "Maintaining a Healthy Organization in the Face of Political Repression." The sixth and last article is "Territorios de vida, alegría, y libertad...Un diálogo de saberes por la defensa del territorio". This article is co-authored by Libia Grueso Castelblanco, a member of the national coordinating committee of Proceso de Comunidades Negras of Colombia and Arturo Escobar, Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute for Latin American Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Vivian Newdick, a doctoral candidate in Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, compiled and edited these articles for the *Debates* section and wrote the introduction, "Desde Otros Saberes". The authors of the articles have received grants from the *Otros Saberes* initiative and will participate in an intensive workshop prior to the Montréal Congress. All have committed to work toward publication of their findings in both the United States and in Latin American venues. The first phase of *Otros Saberes* was focused on indigenous and Afro-Latin issues and future rounds will involve other civil society-based knowledge producers in such areas as gender, environment, worker and peasant rights, and youth cultures.

The *On the Profession* section begins with Judith Maxwell's "What's your eth?" Professor Maxwell begins by stating that people classify criteria on many scales, mobilizing them to structure countless interactions. In many instances these are deployed to differentiate otherness from a community or group to which a subject belongs. Though race as a classification has been debunked, Professor Maxwell points

out how it still is an active cultural construct in many places. This leads her to ask, “What hinges on ethnic or racial identity?” She points out a variety of issues, from deep-rooted social benefits that allow groups to maintain their cohesion, to assimilation to the colonizers’ cultures. All this leads her to conclude that ethnic identity matters, but that deciding what classifications to employ is challenging. After all, she claims, identities are strategically deployed and ethnic and racial terms do not connote the same things throughout Latin America—an idea that will reappear in all articles on this section. The author concludes that the only alternative is for LASA members to self-classify. Professor Judith Maxwell is chair of the Department of Anthropology, Tulane University.

Professor Javier Sanjinés makes a similar argument in “¿Usar o no categorías étnico-raciales? Ambigüedades y auto-reconocimiento.” He sees all classifications as “dudosamente objetivas y, por ende, criticables.” To his understanding, whatever classifications are indeed employed should have at least three traits: “a) el de las normas jurídicas vigentes; b) el de las categorías sociales, y, c) el de los indicadores operativos.” Professor Sanjinés then proceeds to explore each of these, before drawing conclusions similar to those of Professor Maxwell, namely that “la mejor forma (to classify) es a través de dos o más preguntas que respondan a más de una dimensión del concepto, incorporando la pregunta en base al auto-reconocimiento.” Professor Sanjinés is Associate Professor of Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan.

George Reid Andrews’s “Race Counts” questions whether LASA should gather data on its membership in the first place. He states that “the main argument against

gathering such data is that all racial identities, and many (perhaps most) ethnic identities, are the creation of post-1500 Western imperialism.” Social realities, however, force us to live with classifications and, in any case, “societies that gather census or survey data on race are in a far better position to identify, and try to remedy, patterns of inequality than societies that do not.” For all these reasons, international organizations have added racial data to censuses and surveys, and the resulting data have proven to be an indispensable resource. As Professor Andrews states, LASA’s increasing international standing complicates the process of gathering racial and ethnic data, given that “they prove to be highly variable by time and place, so that the same word can have quite different meanings and applications in different moments and settings.” Professor Andrews notes that in an organization such as LASA, there is a high potential for “miscommunication and misunderstanding” but that there is reasonable agreement on the use of certain categories listed in his article. He concludes by stating that “I am a firm believer in the value and importance of racial data; but like racial labels themselves, that value varies in different settings.” Professor George Reid Andrews is UCIS Research Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh.

In the fourth article in this section, “The Problems of Measuring Race and Ethnicity,” Pauline Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof open with a cautionary note. They are concerned about the bureaucratization of racial and ethnic categories that mean so many different things in the various countries of Latin America. They write that “the question of whether and how to count race in an organization like LASA, based in the United States but composed largely of Latin Americans, is made even more complicated by the history of U.S.-Latin American relations.” Inside the United States

itself, where “counting race for purely repressive purposes” shifted to “counting for purposes of addressing historical inequalities,” is seen as valid precedent. The authors recognize the legacy of colonialism as leaving an imprint on race, even as they caution LASA about “any system that would assign fixed identities that members would carry with them beyond the initial survey.” Pauline Alberto is Assistant Professor of History and Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof is Assistant Professor of History and American Culture at Michigan. ■