

## Precariedades, exclusiones, emergencias: Presidential Panels at LASA2015 in San Juan, Puerto Rico

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The words *precariedades*, *exclusiones*, *emergencias* invite us to envision a broad range of debates at LASA2015, engaging issues across fields and approaches. These words have already inspired many LASA members to propose panels, workshops, and presentations that speak to the wide scope of these terms. In order to contribute to this discussion, we program co-chairs, together with the LASA president, have organized three presidential panels. One panel will address the current state of education, the university, and academic labor; another the impact of and possible responses to the academic dominance of certain forms of disciplinary hierarchization of knowledges to the detriment of alternative, local forms and agents of knowledge production; and a third panel will bring together prominent indigenous scholars from both North and South America to engage in a hemispheric dialogue on indigenous intellectual agency and the role of scholarship by native scholars.

When we chose the terms *precariedades*, *exclusiones*, and *emergencias* to give a thematic focus and identity to this LASA Congress in Puerto Rico, we thought of the paradox of Latin American studies as a field that is overpopulated by books, articles, research projects, teaching initiatives, and institutional arrangements that aim to foster reflection and discussion on social and economic crises, the marginalization of vast popular sectors in the region, and the cyclical eruption of social and political unrest in disparate geographical scenarios. But we hardly study or pay much-needed attention to the very precariousness of our humanistic profession, the present and future of doctoral students in the face of a shrinking job market across disciplines, and the

situation of many colleagues facing an environment of budget cuts, depletion of research funds, and uncertain prospects of institutional stability vis-à-vis increasing pressure for “productivity” at all levels, not to mention the realities of librarians and staff members in schools who undergo even more deteriorated labor conditions and higher pressure for job performance. Considering how important this is and that it’s a part of our everyday lives, this issue paradoxically has not received nearly the attention it deserves within scholarly debates on Latin America. We believe that it is urgent to address these processes of precariousness and exclusion.

At the same time, it is equally relevant to put at the center of this discussion the extraordinary flow of ideas, knowledge, and creative actions that social agents, communities, and individuals are forging to respond to the current crisis in the humanities and social sciences. It is the at-times-unexpected *emergence* of subjects, views, and practices that offers concrete alternatives to conventional models of scholarship, teaching, and education—many of them fostering new ways to relate our academic work to communities and persons in the realm of public life.

### Precariousness in Higher Education

That the corporate model of “labor flexibilization” has become the rule in academic administration in recent decades has created a situation of vulnerability for students, teachers, and researchers. This subject requires urgent research and study in the Americas. For example, the recently released Delphi Project report confirms that approximately 70 percent of all instructors in U.S. colleges and universities are now

contingent faculty, which implies that they are divested of any labor rights or employment security. The squeeze on tenure-track positions and their replacement by short-term contracts has made the job market very challenging for many of our young colleagues, who can now look forward to little more than poverty-level income with no benefits. Even more precarious is the status of scholars and researchers in Latin America. According to reports from members of the Federación de Colegios del Personal Académico de la UNAM, approximately 70 percent of teaching at UNAM, the largest higher education institution in Latin America, is now the responsibility of professors in part-time positions and under temporary contracts. In many Latin American countries, scores of our colleagues have to teach in several schools to make a living, especially in countries where the academic field is small and fragmented; this situation is aggravated by the dominance of a few elite universities that end up hiring only their own students. Within the neoliberal regime of “flexible” academic labor, young and even senior colleagues have to teach here and there, a practice that has generated a whole new lexicon to describe it. For example, in Chile, *profesor hora* or *profesora hora* has become the idiomatic way to name this precarious academic status (or lack of status).

To address this pressing issue and critical reality for the profession, we will have a presidential panel on “Precarity in Higher Education Access,” which will feature activist academics who have played an important role in defending public education and advocating for the labor rights of university workers. They will share their experiences and reflections on

the current state of the academic professions, engaging the uneven realities of higher education in North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. In this context, educator and activist María Maisto will speak about the challenges that the U.S.-based organization New Faculty Majority faces today in its effort to advocate for academic freedom and labor rights, especially addressing the precarious situation of adjunct and contingent faculty. From Latin America, we will have voices and views of leaders of student movements in Puerto Rico and Chile who have been staging claims against the profit-oriented approach of governmental agents and private investors in education. From that perspective, this presidential panel will feature speakers who are part of a growing trend that opposes the corporate model of a Wal-Mart-like type of university and actively defends a humanistic vision of higher education in the challenging scenario of the present century.

#### Epistemic Exclusions, Emergences, and Emancipations in Latin America

Our second presidential panel will discuss epistemic modes of exclusion in academic and nonacademic spaces. In recent decades, researchers from critical areas such as feminist, indigenous, and Afro-Latino studies have begun to criticize what has been called “epistemic colonialism” (*colonialismo epistémico*), a regime of knowledge that has positioned Western trends and methods of knowledge as the sole authoritative forms of knowledge, invoking universal perspectives and values. In our panel, entitled “Epistemic Exclusions, Emergences and Emancipations in Latin America,” we will approach the epistemic exclusions of the Global South in Latin American academic and political spaces through a dialogue between the

Maya K’iche’ sociologist Gladys Tzul Tzul and the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. De Sousa Santos is a professor at the University of Coimbra in Portugal and Distinguished Scholar at the University of Wisconsin Law School; he has published important work focusing on what he calls *sociology of absences* and *sociology of emergences*. These terms reassess the diversity of human experiences that have been excluded from the Western canon. His most recent project, *ALICE: Strange Mirrors, Unexpected Lessons* (<http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/index.php/about/>), explores the epistemologies of the South in a search for new theoretical paradigms that could contribute to social justice, with the participation of prominent intellectuals from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. Although de Sousa Santos has written extensively about Latin America and has been an inspiration for generations of Latin American scholars, this will be our first opportunity to share in his experience at a LASA Congress.

For this intergenerational and intercultural dialogue, we also have invited Maya K’iche’ sociologist Gladys Tzul Tzul, one of the few scholars in Latin America specializing in the study of indigenous forms of government and communitarian democracy. Tzul Tzul is a member of the Comunidad de Estudios Mayas, a newly formed group of Maya researchers in Guatemala. She also is a visual artist and member of the organization of indigenous photographers With Our Own Voice (Con Voz Propia). As a public intellectual, Tzul Tzul has played a fundamental role in reflecting on and denouncing the genocide in Guatemala during the government of Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–1983).

This intergenerational dialogue will be about epistemic exclusions, cognitive justice, and the emergence of “other

knowledges” that are questioning the utopias of capitalist modernities in Latin America. The link between epistemic exclusions and political and social processes will be at the center of this dialogue. In our view, these themes are central to the theoretical concerns of the humanities and social science in Latin America.

#### Indigenous Intellectual Agency: A Hemispheric Dialogue from Abya Yala

Indigenous leaders, researchers, writers, and artists have been progressively gaining agency in academia in different disciplines, where they have been able to engage in public debates and forums; thus, many indigenous individuals exercise their self-representation as active interlocutors in local and international academic settings. Indigenous research collectives such as the Taller de Historia Oral Andina in Bolivia in the late 1980s, and more recently the Comunidad de Historia Mapuche in Chile, the Red Interdisciplinaria de Investigadores de los Pueblos Indios de México (Red-IINPIM, A.C.), and the Comunidad de Estudios Mayas in Guatemala, among others, have become the base for many of these indigenous scholarly interventions in local and global intellectual debates.

Our third presidential panel at LASA will engage this new conversation by bringing together prominent Native American scholar Robert Warrior and indigenous scholars from Abya Yala<sup>1</sup> to develop a discussion about what indigenous scholarship and agency might mean in today’s academic and nonacademic worlds and in the context of long colonial histories on the continent. Osage scholar Robert Warrior is a leading intellectual and scholar who has contributed not only to the establishment of the field of American

Indian studies in the United States but also to the professional organization of native scholars and researchers. In 2009–2010, he served as the founding president of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. Currently, he is the director of American Indian studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he is professor of American Indian studies, English, and history. Professor Warrior is the author of major scholarly works in Native American studies.

In order to widen the North/South scope of this dialogue, we have invited three other indigenous scholars. From Mexico, we will have Judith Bautista Pérez, a Zapotec scholar and intellectual from the community of San Juan Atepec, Ixtlán, Oaxaca. She is currently the coordinator of the Red Interdisciplinaria de Investigadores de los Pueblos Indios de México, a nationwide network of indigenous researchers and scholars in Mexico. From Chile, we will feature the participation of José Quidel, who is a Mapuche community authority (*longko*) from the province of Temuco, southern Chile. Quidel is a leading member of the indigenous research collective Comunidad de Historia Mapuche, a group initiative that was formally established in Chile between 2009 and 2011 as an intellectual space exclusively composed of Mapuche researchers. A fourth participant in this panel will be Kichwa scholar Armando Muyolema, who will bring into focus the experience of an indigenous researcher and educator from Ecuador working in the United States. In order to enrich this dialogue, our colleague Emilio del Valle Escalante, a Maya K'iche' scholar who teaches at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, has agreed to help us in the co-organization of this panel.

This will be the first panel in the history of LASA in which a Native American scholar converses with indigenous scholars based in Latin America or Abya Yala South. In this manner, our presidential panel “Indigenous Intellectual Agency” will update LASA in regard to ongoing endeavors to foster more hemispheric discussion among native researchers. Such endeavors have been taking place in settings such as the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, where one finds incipient dialogues between indigenous scholars and activists from both the North and South of Abya Yala, and even beyond the hemisphere.

### *¡San Juan nos espera!*

We envision that this LASA Congress will offer a stimulating academic program. Our presidential panels aim to make a small contribution to the larger intellectual and academic debates that will be fostered and staged in panels and workshops by individual participants, sections, and tracks. We hope that these discussions lead us to travel back to our home institutions and our own local environments with some refreshing ideas to challenge existing exclusions, exercise new horizons of knowledge, and contribute to emerging processes that are reshaping our broader social world.

### *Endnote*

<sup>1</sup> *Abya Yala* is a native term that Aymara leader Takir Mamani proposed in the late 1980s to represent what was colonized as the New World. Many indigenous organizations and leaders since then have adopted it in order to provide an alternative to the colonial naming of the continent as “America” or “the Americas.” In the Kuna language (Panama), *Abya Yala* means “land in its full ripeness or maturity.” ■