

# From the President

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The turn to the right of governments in Argentina, Brazil, and the United States, the economic and social chaos of Venezuela, the challenges that the government of Ecuador has posed to the continuing operation of major universities, and the unrelenting corruption and contempt for human rights in Mexico are propelling scholarly organizations and universities to rethink our missions and our methods. The politics of austerity and restrictions on social spending in Argentina and Brazil is complemented by Donald Trump's objectives of shredding the social safety net and bulldozing the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, and Rafael Correa's threats to cut funding to the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales and the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. Trump's recent Muslim ban, barring travelers from seven majority-Muslim countries and all refugees from entering the United States, coupled with his quixotic call for the erection of a barrier wall between Mexico and the United States and the increasingly vicious immigration raids that are now taking place, are replicated in Latin America. Argentina has recently restricted immigration, while in other countries, Central American and Haitian refugees struggling to make their way to an ever more unwelcoming United States face increasing violations of their rights as human beings. A 2016 *NACLA Report on the Americas* analyzes these trends across the region, as will "Return of the Right," a presidential session at our Lima Congress.

Many of us have sought ways to resist these trends as individual citizens or as members of grassroots organizations. I won't reflect on that here. Instead, I want to think about what these developments mean for LASA as an organization and for all of us as Latin Americanists. The Social Science Research Council has graciously consented to a republication in this

issue of the *LASA Forum* of a statement by its president, Ira Katznelson. In it, Katznelson reflects on how the SSRC, as a funding institution based in the United States dedicated to fostering international intellectual exchange, is confronting the nationalism and xenophobia of the Trump administration.

LASA encounters itself in a unique position at this moment. While the founders of our Association were for the most part based in U.S. institutions, and our membership was once largely North American, LASA is increasingly international, with approximately 40 percent of our members based in Latin America, and a growing roster of European members. Thus, we are becoming a truly international organization in terms of our membership, but our administrative apparatus and the periodicals published by our Association (such as the *Latin American Research Review* or *LARR*) still follow North American models. The Secretariat, based in Pittsburgh, does an excellent job of making our Congresses a reality, but the intellectual content is determined by LASA officers and appointees working on a purely volunteer basis. We have striven, given these conditions, to expand Latin American engagement in the organization of our Congresses, but we still have a long way to go. And in the midst of our growing pains, political forces have emerged across the hemisphere intent on the closing of borders, both physical and intellectual.

There are several institutions within LASA through which we can intensify international dialogue and the sharing of ideas and experiences. *LARR* has been with us since before the formal founding of our Association. As I mentioned in my first column, during its first ten years *LARR* dedicated its pages to interdisciplinary surveys of research conducted on various



problem areas—agrarian reform, a central preoccupation of scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, comes to mind. In recent decades, *LARR* has hosted an increasingly disciplinary set of articles, contributions that do not necessarily attract the attention of scholars outside of the areas in which they were written, and sometimes so specialized that not even scholars in the authors' home disciplines are moved to read them. I urge LASA members to begin to refocus our contributions to *LARR* so that they take on broader social and intellectual issues of interest to our diverse membership, and so that *LARR* truly becomes a space of intellectual debate in which we can bring both disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, theory and methodology originating in both the global South and the North, to bear on the pressing issues that we are confronting as scholars and as citizens.

Some of your concerns may not yet be ready for a peer-reviewed article. *LASA Forum*, in contrast to *LARR*, provides a space in which LASA members can share briefer contributions that may be more informative than analytical, or may take the form of an essay rather than an academic article. Over the past year, we have published dossiers focusing on political, social, and academic developments in various parts of Latin America—Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela—as well as a Mexican analysis of U.S. foreign policy. We hosted an excellent dossier on climate change in Latin America. We have remembered the intellectual and social contributions of one of our founding members and Kalman Silvert awardee,

Rodolfo Stavenhagen. The current issue of the *Forum* includes a dossier on race in the Americas, the preliminary product of two of the teams awarded LASA-Ford Special Projects grants in 2015. *LASA Forum* is a space in which we can connect our academic activities to our broader social sentiments, engage in wide-ranging conversations with our colleagues, and more quickly respond to the cascade of developments taking place in the region.

One of our major challenges is the circulation and support of students in an increasingly xenophobic and anti-intellectual world. During the past year, the LASA Executive Council has been working to promote a variety of activities aimed at making students a more vital part of our membership. We have fostered the founding of a Student Section, with access to a funding stream based on its membership numbers, the right to organize Congress panels, and a mailing list to enable deeper communication. On the Friday before the Lima Congress begins, we will be hosting a meet-and-greet breakfast for students and potential mentors, as well as a workshop on seeking academic positions in Latin America and the global North; all LASA members are invited to sign up for these activities when you register for the Congress, particularly for the breakfast. In the medium term, we are setting up a mentoring network that will connect graduate students to scholars across the globe who are members of LASA. And in the long term, we have begun fund-raising for a series of short-term mobility grants that will award students and young faculty based in Latin American institutions of higher education with the wherewithal to pursue a month of research beyond their national borders; I invite you to the benefit concert that will inaugurate this campaign, which will take place on the Saturday evening of the Congress, and for which

you can obtain tickets at a range of prices through the Congress registration page. As it becomes increasingly difficult for students to circulate between North and South, we hope that LASA can provide conditions for their scholarly development.

The theme of our upcoming Congress, “Diálogos de saberes,” was formulated well before the U.S. elections, the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, and the many other developments that are hindering the movement of people and threatening academic freedom across the region. The dialogue we are seeking moves across academic disciplines, simultaneously bridging national and regional intellectual traditions. We hope to place different sites of knowledge production in conversation—linking academics, practitioners, journalists, artists, and grassroots knowledge producers. This objective is all the more urgent given the current conditions in which we find ourselves. Last year, I listened to an Argentine colleague speak at a seminar on collaborative research about how imperative it has become to place scholars in dialogue with nonacademics—in the case of her project, with provincial legislators—so that scholarly knowledge would have a greater impact on society, beyond the usual policy papers that academics write to inform policy makers. For her, socially committed research is not only an attractive option but a means of engagement as a citizen. Those of us in the global North have a great deal to learn in this respect from our colleagues in Latin American, who over the past 40 years have made significant contributions, both theoretical and methodological, to socially engaged strategies of knowledge production. We hope you find our *diálogo de saberes* in Lima to be an inspiration and a tool for continuing as researchers in the coming years. ■