

# From the President

by **Jo-Marie Burt** | LASA President

As I sit at my desk to write this, the two countries I have engaged with most intensively over the course of my academic career, Peru and Guatemala, are traversing incredibly challenging moments. Antidemocratic and corrupt right-wing forces are using the tools of democracy, especially the judicial system, to concentrate power, eviscerate basic human rights, and install authoritarian regimes that guarantee their own impunity and perpetuate class, gender, and racial hierarchies. These authoritarian coalitions are being challenged in different ways by social movements and ordinary citizens demanding their rights, more representative democracies, and more just socioeconomic systems.

In Guatemala, an authoritarian coalition of conservative politicians, business elites, military officials, and organized crime groups joined forces to restore themselves to power after a decade-long, unprecedented experiment in democratic accountability. Their seemingly tight hold on power was thrown into disarray after the surprising results of the June 25 elections, with Bernardo Arévalo, a reformer from the center-left Semilla party, coming in second place and earning the right to contest the presidency in second-round elections. In an effort to stop Arévalo's candidacy, legal authorities closely allied to these elites have tried to suspend Semilla. But these efforts are being challenged in the courts and on the streets, generating hope for a new chance to rescue Guatemala's withering democracy. In Peru, meanwhile, the right-wing power grab that followed the failed self-coup of former president Pedro Castillo provoked a mass uprising, led primarily by indigenous communities. State security forces brutally repressed protesters, killing dozens of civilians. As a new round of anti-government protests nears, elites are red-baiting protesters and have announced a series of repressive measures

to dissuade and intimidate people from participating. But the effervescence in rural and urban communities across the country suggests that deeper changes may be underway in Peruvian politics and society. Still, the outcome in both scenarios remains uncertain, which has triggered anxiety and fear, even as the possibility of progressive social change—of building more inclusive and just democracies that guarantee a comprehensive understanding of rights—generates hope in the possibility of new futures.

The countervailing forces at play in Peru and Guatemala, and that are evident in many other parts of the Americas, including the United States, is the thematic focus that LASA2024 program chairs María Eugenia Ulfe and Desmond Arias and I chose for next year's congress: *Reaction and Resistance: Imagining New Futures in the Americas*, which will take place June 12–15, 2024, at Javeriana University in Bogotá, Colombia. Latin America today is beset by an onslaught of antidemocratic forces that challenge the basis of democratic coexistence, reject human rights, and propose instead a narrow view of political and social life based on chauvinistic nationalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and racialized hierarchies. Existential threats including climate change and COVID-19 contribute to our sense of unease about the future. In the face of these challenges, social movements, new political parties, historically marginalized communities, and ordinary citizens are envisioning new ways to defy antidemocratic forces; to develop grassroots,



participatory, and green alternatives to some of the region's most challenging problems; and to construct new, progressive futures based on notions of public service and the common good.

In this context of heightened anxiety about the state of our world and heightened expectations for progressive change, we invite proposals from academics, practitioners and activists that reflect on these questions. We invite you to submit proposals to the four special program tracks we developed for LASA2024, which are directly linked to the overarching theme of the program:

- *Despojos y desplazamientos: violencias extractivismo y economías ilegales en zonas rurales e indígenas*
- *La extrema derecha en América Latina y el mundo*
- *Impunidades: pasados y presentes*
- *Resistencias colectivas, futuros imaginados en las Américas*

A fifth special program theme, *Colombia: desafíos actuales y futuros posibles*, seeks to encourage debate about our host country and the promises and challenges faces this unique historical moment. Members may also submit proposals to any of the 36 permanent program tracks. A few of these are new, as mandated by the LASA Executive Committee. Given the popularity of the special program track for LASA2023 on Biopolitics, the EC established a new permanent program track, Biopolitics and Biopower. Also, given the large number of proposals submitted to the track on Literature Studies, the EC created more specialized program tracks for literature studies, including: Literature Studies: Colonial/19<sup>th</sup> Century; Literature Studies: 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> centuries; Literature and Culture; and Indigenous Languages and Literature.

We are extremely pleased that LASA2024, just the second in-person congress since the pandemic hit in 2020, will take place in Latin America. We're especially gratified that it will be in Bogotá, where a progressive government is making herculean efforts to bring an end to a decades-long war and address the multiple legacies of the conflict

while also serving as a model for inclusivity and the acknowledgment of past oppression based on race, class, gender, and sexual preference. It is our hope that holding the LASA Congress in the region makes it more accessible for our members even while we remain committed to making a virtual option available to those who are unable to attend in person. Despite the challenges and inconveniences of hybrid events, the virtual option makes participation in vital academic discussions possible for all our members, and the LASA staff is committed to working to ensure smoother operations for next year's congress. As in previous years, LASA remains committed to providing travel grants to members, especially students and junior scholars based in Latin America. (LASA offered 394 travel grants to facilitate member participation in the 2023 congress). Members who are awarded travel grant will also receive a waiver of the all-access fee, which covers LASA membership and registration for the congress. We encourage eligible members to apply for a travel grant when they submit their proposals by the deadline of September 15, 2023, at 5:00 pm ET.

It is an honor to serve as LASA president for this coming year. I would like to express gratitude to the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University for granting me course release time to be able to take on the duties associated with the job. I am thankful to my colleagues María Eugenia Ulfe and Desmond Arias for agreeing to serve as program co-chairs, and to our graduate student assistant, Luz Mueller, for keeping us on task. We recognize and appreciate the work of the dozens of LASA members who are serving as section chairs, as well as those who have accepted our invitation to serve as program track chairs and as members of LASA's numerous award committees. We look forward to working with all of you, along with the EC and the LASA Secretariat, to make LASA2024 a space for the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and meaningful academic exchange and to acknowledge, learn from, and encourage different forms of knowledge production. We are especially eager to ensure that next year's congress is a space for dialogue between North and South; between academics, practitioners, and

activists; and between the diverse communities that make Latin America one of the most socially and culturally rich regions on the planet. We hope that LASA2024 will be an opportunity to reflect on what brings us together even in times of heightened anxiety and on how we can use our knowledge, our skills, and our energy to work toward brighter, more inclusive futures for the region we love and live and work in. //



LASA2024

Reaction and  
Resistance:  
Imagining  
Possible Futures  
in the Americas

JUNE 12 - 15, 2024 • BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

Photo by Sergio Ortiz Borbolla

The Maya Achi women's collective, Rabinal, Guatemala. In 2021, they won a conviction against paramilitaries linked to the Guatemala army for wartime sexual violence.

