

From the President

by **Jo-Marie Burt**, George Mason University | LASA President

The world around us seems to embody in increasingly violent ways the reactionary elements highlighted in the program theme of the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá, Colombia, *Reaction and Resistance: Imagining Possible Futures in the Americas*. The war in Ukraine, the unfolding genocide in Gaza, and the descent into violent chaos in Haiti elicit despair as the international community seems unable or unwilling to stop the carnage and find a path toward an equitable and lasting peace. In the Latin American context, reactionary movements and politicians such as Nayib Bukele and Javier Milei project an image of authoritarianism as “fashionable” and “cool.” “*Mano dura*” security policies such as those championed by Bukele undermine democracy and threaten fundamental human rights, while Milei’s libertarian fantasies of a minimalist state threaten to weaken critical public services, from healthcare to education. Elsewhere, Latin American governments are openly flouting international law, as Ecuador did when it raided the Mexican Embassy to arrest former vice-president Jorge Glas, or as Peru did when it defied an order by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to refrain from pardoning Alberto Fujimori, who was serving a 25-year prison term for crimes against humanity committed during his presidency in the 1990s. Around the region, migrants fleeing violence, insecurity, and economic chaos are preyed upon by nefarious criminal networks while systems to provide a safe-haven are collapsing. Authoritarians of diverging political tendencies continue their assault on fundamental rights, including the rights to peaceful protest, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press. Far-right movements and leaders are also leading an all-out assault on the rights of women and LGBTQIA people, reproductive rights, and indigenous and

Afro-descendant Latin Americans. Economic insecurity, aggravated by the pandemic, is on the rise across the region.

The program theme for LASA2024 calls attention to these reactionary trends, but also to the countervailing forces of collective resistance that are mobilizing to challenge violence, racism, and other forms of institutionalized oppression, to defend fundamental rights, and even to expand our very notion of rights. Battles won across the region, large and small, offer rays of hope that help us imagine new, more inclusive, and just futures for Latin America. In Guatemala, anti-corruption champion Bernardo Arévalo was finally inaugurated president in January, defeating a corrupt coalition that deployed all manner of dirty tricks to prevent his presidency, buoyed by the massive demonstration of support by indigenous communities who rallied behind him to demand respect for the electoral outcome. It remains to be seen how successful he will be in stemming corruption and restoring the rule of law, given the continued presence of corrupt actors in key government positions, though perhaps an even bigger challenge will be addressing poverty and inequality in one of the poorest countries in the region. In Peru, defenders of indigenous and environmental rights won a major victory when a court ruled that the Marañón River and its tributaries are rights-bearing entities, following similar legal decisions or constitutional provisions in places such as Colombia and Ecuador, and recognizing the indigenous communities and organizations of the region as guardians,



defenders and representatives of the Marañón. This expanding understanding of the rights of nature and non-humans and its enshrinement in law is a fundamental tool for imagining new futures untethered by the logic of neoliberal capitalism, which views natural resources as commodities to be used and exploited, and instead viewing humankind, non-human species, and nature as interconnected and mutually interdependent for survival. In Brazil and Colombia, policies implemented by the progressive governments have helped reduce deforestation levels in the Amazon, showing how concerted efforts to combat climate change can be effective when there is political will.

These topics will be at the forefront of debate at the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá, especially at the 25 presidential and invited panels the Program Team (myself and Program co-chairs María Eugenia Ulfe and Enrique Desmond Arias) have organized. Thanks to generous grants from the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations, we were able to invite scholars, activists, and practitioners, including many from rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, as well as from the LGBTQIA community, to participate in these panels, helping ensure a more diverse, inclusive conference that centers and values knowledge production inside and outside the academy. Below I highlight some of the most exciting panels scheduled for LASA2024.

The Many Faces of Reactionary Politics in Latin America Today

Several presidential and invited panels will explore some of the most significant trends in the politics of reaction we see on the rise in the Americas. A panel on *“La ‘nueva’ extrema derecha en las Américas”* will explore some of the most visible right-wing governments in the region today. Award-winning journalist Oscar Martínez of *El Faro* will analyze the so-called “Bukele model” and what it means for the rest of the region, and Verónica Gago of the University of Buenos Aires will analyze the newest of the far-right leaders to win national elections, Javier Milei in Argentina, with a special emphasis on his deployment of

so-called “gender ideology” on his path to the presidency. Anthony Pereira of Tulane University will examine the transnational linkages of the far right with the United States and Europe and Leigh Payne of Oxford University will examine the right’s attack on fundamental freedoms and rights.

In the panel, *“Libertad de prensa bajo asedio en los tiempos de la posverdad,”* prize-winning journalist, editor of IDL-Reporteros, and 1998 LASA Media Awardee Gustavo Gorriti will discuss the assault on independent journalism in the region and specifically in the case of Peru under the present government of Dina Boluarte, along with other journalists from Mexico and El Salvador, where freedom of the press is most under attack. They will be joined by María Teresa Ronderos of the Centro Latinoamericano de Investigación Periodística (CLIP) and Catalina Botero, former Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

In the panel on land dispossession, Miguel de León, an Ixil Mayan leader and Indigenous Authority who served as mayor of Nebaj, Quiché, and Sergio Coronado, formerly a researcher at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular who is now working as an advisor at Colombia’s Ministry of Equality and Equity, will discuss the nexus of foreign and domestic capital linked to exploitative forms of extractivism and the resulting problem of land dispossession in Guatemala and Colombia. Another panel will focus explicitly on the role of illicit economies and the rise of dispossession and violence against rural and indigenous activists and will feature interventions by an interdisciplinary panel of scholars and activists working in Colombia, Peru, Mexico, and the Amazon.

The nefarious attack on fundamental rights and the ways different collectives are responding, including feminist movements, the LGBTQIA community, and indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, will be analyzed in another set of panels. Feminist scholars and activists will offer their reflections on the anti-gender onslaught and its implications, in the

panel, *“Feminismos ante la cruzada antigénero,”* including Rita Segato, professor emerita at the University of Brasilia and this year’s winner of the LASA/Oxfam Martin Diskin Memorial Lectureship; feminist anthropologist Gisela Zaremborg from FLACSO Mexico; and Diana Gómez Correal, an anthropologist currently serving as Vice-Minister for Women in Colombia’s Ministry of Equality and Equity. Another panel, *“Los derechos LGBTQIA+ ante la arremetida autoritaria en las Américas,”* will feature reflections by activists and scholars, including Brigitte Baptiste, biologist and chancellor of Universidad Ean in Colombia; Claudio Barrientos, a historian at the Universidad Diego Portales in Chile; and Pascha Bueno-Hansen, professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Delaware. An interdisciplinary panel of scholars will also discuss the causes and consequences of migration and forced displacement in the Americas, challenging traditional conceptions of migration as a process of movement from the Global South to the Global North to better understand the complex flows of forced movement we see in the Americas today.

The past and present practice of forced disappearance will be discussed by families of victims from Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, and Colombia, along with the former prosecutor of the Ayotzinapa case, Omar Gómez, who was forced into exile because of his investigations. Another panel will explore the challenges faced by survivors and families of victims seeking truth and justice for past human rights violations in the present context of closing civic spaces and authoritarian regression. Speakers include Gisela Ortiz, spokesperson for the Cantuta case in Peru, one of the cases for which former president Alberto Fujimori was sentenced to 25 years in prison; from Guatemala, Máxima Emiliana García Valey, representative of the Survivors of the Achi Women Case, who won a conviction against five former patrolmen for sexual violence in 2022, and Lucia Xiloj, a Mayan K’iche’ lawyer who accompanies the case; and from Colombia, Óscar Javier Parra Vera, vice president of the Chamber for the Recognition of Truth, Responsibility and Determination of Facts and Conduct of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) in Colombia. Terry Karl of Stanford University and last year’s

Guillermo O’Donnell Democracy Prize awardee will discuss her role as an expert witness in several war crimes cases in El Salvador and elsewhere. Taking into account the 60th anniversary of the 1964 coup d’état in Brazil, which gave way to a 21-year military dictatorship, an interdisciplinary panel of academics will explore the legacies of dictatorship, revived and reactivated in alarming ways during the Bolsonaro government, and how memory battles shape present-day politics.

Collective Resistance, Collaborative Research, and the Creation of New Futures in the Americas

Other panels will explore different forms of collective resistance and mobilization that generate hope that new futures are possible in the Americas, including community-based efforts to combat climate change, challenge racial inequality, promote the rights of indigenous communities, and protect the environment and the rights of nature and non-humans. In the panel, *“La justicia racial en las Américas: Perspectivas interseccionales,”* activists and scholars from Colombia, Perú, México, and Brazil will talk about local strategies to challenge racism as a system of oppression and build new futures of equality and inclusion in the Americas. Another panel will feature a discussion by local community leaders and their civil society allies on strategies to combat climate change, *“Estrategias locales y comunales para combatir el cambio climático.”* Doris Cristancho, U’wa leader, will speak about her people’s struggle to defend the communal territory against the promotion and implementation of extractive projects without their consent, including the present case against the State of Colombia before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Ketty Marcelo, president of the National Organization of Indigenous Women of Peru (ONAMIAP), will speak about the struggle for the right to ancestral lands and women’s equality in local and national decision-making. From Guatemala, Elodia Castillo Vásquez, Coordinator of Communities and Associations for the Integral Development of the Ch’orti’ People (COMUNDICH), will speak about community efforts to recover their ancestral lands, demand recognition of their culture, and defend the

environment. Anthropologist Arturo Escobar of the University of North Carolina will serve as commentator .

In the panel, “*Los derechos de la naturaleza y los no humanos*,” community activists from around the region will discuss efforts to enshrine the rights of nature and non-human species, a fundamental challenge to the understanding of nature as resources to be owned, used, and exploited that underlies neoliberal capitalism. Alexander Rodríguez of the Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato (COCOMACIA) and Gilda Fasabi Saavedra of the Huaynakana Kamatahuarakana Indigenous Federation of Kukama Women will discuss the successful campaigns to demand state recognition of the rights of the Atrato River in Colombia and the Marañon River in Peru. Antonella Calle of Acción Ecológica and OilWatch will discuss the efforts to enshrine the rights of nature in the Ecuadorian constitution, and Leydy Pech, member of the Mayan Communities Collective of Los Chenes in Yucatan and 2020 winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize, will discuss a successful lawsuit against Monsanto to preserve the environment, indigenous rights, and local land management in Mexico.

2024 marks another anniversary: 80 years since the 1944 Revolution that birthed into existence Guatemala’s “democratic spring,” which was crushed a decade later with a CIA-sponsored coup in 1954. The panel, “*Guatemala, 1944 a 2024. ¿La segunda primavera democrática?*”, will explore the significance of the election of the anti-corruption crusader Bernardo Arévalo, who was inaugurated in January 2024 after overcoming numerous obstacles by the so-called “Pact of the Corrupt” to prevent him from taking power. Key to his victory was the sustained mobilization of the indigenous population, which refused to succumb to the efforts to overturn the election results, sparking renewed hope across the region that sustained popular mobilization and honest leadership can make a difference at a time of increasing cynicism, cronyism, and corruption. This panel will feature indigenous and youth activists who participated in popular resistance against corruption and in

favor of democracy in Guatemala, together with practitioners, academics, and artists, including Luz Emilia Ulario, former mayor of Santa Lucía Utatlán and a leader of the indigenous resistance that mobilized to defend the results of the 2023 elections; Álvaro Montenegro, co-founder of Justicia Ya, which led anti-corruption protests in 2015; Miguel Ángel Gálvez, a former judge who handled major human rights and corruption cases and who is currently in exile; Kaqchikel Mayan singer-songwriter, composer and activist Sara Curruchich; and Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, a Guatemalan sociologist at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.

Another panel will feature organizers and participants in the 2023 LASA/Africa Continental Congress in Accra, Ghana, who will share some of the highlights of the rich discussions that took place there. Topics of discussion will include efforts to reclaim power and agency through political mobilization, cultural production, and local survival and resistance practices in both regions; ways of reconceptualizing our roles as teachers, researchers, students, activists, and practitioners to promote more just and inclusive futures in both regions; and how to support efforts to decolonize knowledge production. A panel on participation-action research will also contribute to these important discussions, with powerful examples from Colombia, Argentina, and elsewhere.

Focus on Colombia

We’ve also dedicated a number of panels to Colombia, our host country, and have endeavored to include perspectives from Colombia on many of the presidential and invited panels. One presidential panel, “*Colombia: Los retos de implementar la paz*,” will explore the challenges of implementing the 2016 peace accords, with the participation of activists and practitioners in the peace process, including Patricia Tobón Yagari, lawyer and indigenous Embera leader who was part of the team that drafted the ethnic section of the 2016 Peace Accords, was a former commissioner of the Truth Commission, and currently is head of the Unit for Attention and Integral Reparation to Victims; Richard

Moreno, a community leader from Chocó and Coordinating member of the Afro-Colombian National Peace Council; Albenis Ferreira Tique, a Pijao activist who participated in the negotiation of the Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Accord and currently a member of the Ethnic Commission for Peace and Territorial Rights; lawyer and former commissioner of the Colombian Truth Commission Alejandro Valencia Villa; and Ariel Palacios, a member of the Afro-Colombian National Peace Council.

Practitioners and activists directly involved in the Petro government's "total peace" efforts will address the question: "*¿De qué se trata la Paz Total en Colombia?*" Speakers include Senator Iván Cepeda Castro, member of the government delegation negotiating with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN); Vera Grabe, current head of the negotiating commission with the ELN; Camilo Gonzales Posso, president of the Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (INDEPAZ) and current chief negotiator of the Colombian government with the FARC dissident group known as Estado Mayor Central. Also participating will be Rosalba Velasco, Elder Councilor of the Nasa People and member of the Peace Team of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC); and Carlos Rosero, co-founder of the Black Communities Process and member of the negotiating commission with the ELN. Additional invited panels on Colombia will explore local peace and reconciliation efforts in rural areas led by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and the intersection of art and politics in Colombia.

Looking Forward to Bogotá

My goal as LASA president has been to create a more inclusive LASA, one that embraces a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and experiences, and that centers and values the production of knowledge by intellectuals inside and outside the academy. The rich tradition of Otros Saberes, which was founded by a core group of LASA members two decades ago, helped enshrine this understanding of the value of different forms of knowledge production and the need for our academic congresses to be deliberate in creating space for the participation

of activists and practitioners (as well as individuals from communities that have been historically underrepresented in such spaces) in meaningful ways that can contribute to broader forms of understanding, while also encouraging important forms of connection, network building, and future collaboration. Ensuring diversity at this year's LASA, facilitating the participation of intellectuals from outside the academy and from historically underrepresented groups, and encouraging transversal intellectual communities provides a foundation for more compelling analysis of critical issues and policy responses while creating new opportunities for networking beyond the confines of the academy and encouraging the formation of collaborative research networks that are critical hubs of decolonized knowledge production.

I look forward to seeing you all in person in Bogotá or online. We hope that you are excited to share your research and to learn about the research of the diverse and exciting group of scholars, activists, practitioners, and policymakers who will be joining us for the LASA2024 Congress. //