

From the President

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As I wrap up my time as President of LASA, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the significance of this community that has been my intellectual home since I was a graduate student many moons ago. LASA has been central to my personal and professional growth. I know it has been for many of you as well, and I hope it will continue to be so for a long time to come. Before I get to my goodbyes, let me talk briefly about this issue of *LASA Forum*.

LASA Forum

LASA Forum has served as a space for the LASA2024 Program Team, comprised of myself, María Eugenia Ulfe of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, and Enrique Desmond Arias of Baruch College, to further explore the ideas we outlined in the theme for this year's Congress, *Reaction and Resistance: Imagining Possible Futures in the Americas*. In this fourth and final issue, which I co-edited with Enrique Desmond Arias, we invited scholars, activists, and practitioners to reflect upon the enduring problem of impunity and violence in Latin America. Impunity is central to the politics of reaction that has dominated the region in the past, and today is engaged in a new campaign to undermine freedoms gained and rights won through appeals to chauvinistic, nationalistic, and heteronormative norms. Resistance to impunity, and the design of creative strategies to overcome it, are also explored in this dossier. Previous issues of *LASA Forum* have included dossiers engaging other topics related to the LASA2024 Congress theme: the first highlighted different forms of collective resistance to violence, oppression, and discrimination; the second examined the "new" far-right in the Americas; and one reporting on the ongoing dispossession and forced displacement of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural communities throughout the region

at the hands of extractive industries and illicit economic actors, among others.

This issue of *LASA Forum* also includes three articles related to the exciting initiative of the LASA Continental Congresses, focusing on the second and

most recent one which took place in November 2023 at the University of Ghana in Accra. I invited Mara Viveros Vigolla, professor at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and former LASA President, to reflect upon the LASA/Africa Continental Congress, which she helped organize. I also invited the team of scholars from Africa who participated in organizing the Congress to offer their reflections on the experience of the first LASA Congress in Africa. Finally, Mwalimu Victorien Lavou Zougbo, who delivered one of the keynotes at LASA/Africa, offers his reflections about the political and philosophical trajectory of Pan-Africanism as a concept and a way of thinking about the African diaspora and the relations between the African and Latin American continents.

The issue wraps up with a preview of the Film Festival at the 42nd International Congress of LASA in Bogotá, prepared by Director Claudia Ferman. This year, the festival will feature 63 films across many genres from 23 countries. The Film Festival is a critical element of LASA2024 and is in dialogue with the Congress' theme, *Reaction and Resistance: Imagining Possible Future in the Americas* and with the presidency's overall goal of creating space at LASA for intellectuals inside and outside the academy as well as to



facilitate the participation of scholars, students, and activists from historically underrepresented communities. The films on display present voices and languages that add to and deepen the discussion from local communities, organizations, artists, and activists across the region. There is also a report by Maestro Meetings, an initiative of LASA founded in 2014 as a separate 501 (c)(3) that serves as an alternative source of income for the Association and is a vital part of its sustainability efforts.

Gratitude

LASA has enriched my academic life, created space for meaningful collaboration, and given me a lifetime of friendships that I treasure and rely on in many ways. I've endeavored to ensure that LASA2024 was a space for intellectuals inside and outside the academy as well as a more diverse and inclusive Congress, while also obtaining external funding that made it possible to expand LASA's ability to facilitate the participation of academics, students, and activists from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in large academic congresses. A fuller report of my activities, including my fundraising efforts and strategies to make the 2024 Congress more inclusive and diverse, can be found in my letter in the last issue of *LASA Forum* and in the program book of the LASA2024 Congress.

I want to thank the LASA membership for giving me the opportunity to serve as its President. It is not an easy time to take on a leadership role in an organization as large as LASA, which faces many challenges for its future. LASA continues to face demands for greater transparency in governance. In this era of growing economic and climate insecurity, LASA is also challenged to rethink the ways it envisions and implements its mission.

Service is also central to the sustainability of LASA. The Secretariat takes on a tremendous amount of the work organizing the congress that we enjoy each year, but it is us—the members of LASA—who are its lifeblood and its *raison d'être* and who perform critical tasks each year, evaluating proposals for each year's Congress as

program track chairs, leading sections as section chairs, sitting on prize committees, participating in nominations committees, on the Executive Council, and on different ad hoc committees (Academic Freedom and Human Rights Committee, the Anti-Harassment Committee), among other roles. Cultivating a culture of service is a core part of academic life as well as for academic associations such as LASA, and our members turn up, year after year, to volunteer there for critical tasks. I am grateful to all of you who performed such roles this year for LASA2024.

I am also grateful to Mark Rozell, dean at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University, who supported my decision to serve as LASA's President by granting me course releases and providing me with a graduate research assistant, Luz Giraldo Mueller, a PhD History Student at George Mason who has been a joy to work with and to whom I owe a great deal. This made it viable for me to take on the work of organizing LASA and participating in its key governance structures. After serving LASA in other capacities over the years, I look back with gratitude on the past two years for the opportunity to serve the Association in its key leadership roles and, above all, you, the LASA membership, who make this the most vibrant and interesting academic association around.

I would like to express my gratitude once more to the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations for their support of LASA2024; to LASA Executive Director, Milagros Pereyra-Rojas and the entire staff of the Secretariat for their hard work and support; to fellow Ways and Means members, Vice President Javier Guerrero, Jenny Pribble, Treasurer, and Margarita Maya-López, Past President; and the dozens of LASA members who labored as program track chairs and section chairs, and to those who served on the prize committees as well as LASA's standing committees. Gracias; you all made LASA2024 possible.

I'll conclude by saying that my commitment, shared by many of my LASA colleagues, to elevate alternative modes of knowledge production and to develop and promote research

that incorporates collaborative processes of knowledge production, has been a driving force behind these efforts. I will continue to champion such efforts as past presidents have done. In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you all in Bogotá, whether in person or online. //