

## **President's Report to SLAS Virtual AGM, 17 April 2020**

Thank you for taking the time to read this report to the virtual SLAS AGM, circulated in this unusual manner because of the COVID-19 travel restrictions. The AGM marks an important opportunity for the Society's officers and the *BLAR* editors to provide an account of our activities over the last 12 months, as well as a forum for any questions arising from those activities, which is why we're communicating with SLAS members via email now. Please do feel free to email me, or any of the other committee members, with questions or comments. My email is at the end of this report.

The AGM usually takes place, face-to-face, during the SLAS conference and the SLAS2020 organising committee, based at CEDLA, University of Amsterdam, had been working hard for the past year to create a SLAS conference promised to be amongst largest the society had ever hosted with over three hundred people registered. Nonetheless, as the growing scale of the global pandemic became evident, the CEDLA organising committee took the difficult decision, with the full support of the SLAS committee, to cancel the SLAS2020 face-to-face conference. The committee has a whole is profoundly grateful to our colleagues at CEDLA for all their work putting together an excellent programme, dealing with a conference that promised to be larger than any of us had anticipated, and now dealing with the consequence of cancelling that same conference. Our sincere thanks to Barbara Hogenboom, Christien Klaufus, Fábio de Castro, Gaya Nikolsky and Julienne Weegels for their terrific effort this past year. This year's conference, 'Mind the Gap: Strengthening Connections in Latin American Studies' promised a terrific range of activities, bringing together an impressive array of 58 panels and seven round tables that span activism, art, fieldwork ethics, history, literary and visual culture, economics, ecology and the environment, politics, anthropology, urban studies, geography, migration studies, international relations, development studies and digital media. Some panels took a national focus to concentrate on single countries, such as Colombia or Chile, or focus on transnational regions, such as the Andean region or the Amazon, while others offered interdisciplinary, international approaches, such as the panels exploring sustainable production and identity politics.

The CEDLA SLAS2020 committee is taking a few weeks to decide if they want to host the conference another year; the organising committees in Bath, Belfast and Swansea have all kindly agreed to postpone their events if there's a decision to re-schedule the SLAS Amsterdam conference. Both the SLAS committee and the SLAS2020 conference committee are so appreciative of their understanding in these difficult circumstances. We are also incredibly appreciative of the patience and understanding of those planning on attending and presenting at SLAS2020; cancelling the conference was a huge disappointment to us all, but the right decision to make in the current public health situation. I want to reiterate my thanks to both committees, the conference committee and the SLAS committee, and especially to Julianne Weegels, Marieke Riethof and SLAS's webmistress Christy Palmer, for all the work that has gone on behind the scenes to cancel the annual conference and, over the past few weeks, to create a virtual version of SLAS2020. Offering a virtual version of the conference is a new undertaking for all of us but is evidence of the committees' commitment to 'strength connections in Latin American Studies' and may also offer us more innovative and inclusive ways of doing just that.

The time of the annual conference is always the high point in SLAS's calendar, even when that conference is virtual, as it offers both exciting intellectual nourishment and a chance for the SLAS community to come together. Memories of last year's conference in Leicester remain very much alive, and I take this opportunity to thank again Clara Garavelli, Emma Staniland and their team for a hugely successful event.

No doubt all of you will have used the SLAS website (<https://www.slas.org.uk>) in the run-up to the conference, which currently welcomes visitors in Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish, and hosts a rich selection of blog pieces. If you're interested in contributing a blog piece, please get in touch with Eamon McCarthy ([Eamon.Mccarthy@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Eamon.Mccarthy@glasgow.ac.uk)). Thanks again to all those involved in the website re-design last year. The work that went into that redesign has proved well worth the effort. The SLAS Twitter account, launched the summer before last by Marieke Riethof with support from Eamon McCarthy and Jens Hentschke, has now 5,271 followers. This platform continues to be a major way to raise the Society's profile and reach, as well as ensuring a steady flow of information to the broad Latin Americanist community. With so many restrictions on movement globally, the SLAS Twitter account has also been valuable as a way to communicate news in a timely manner and advertise virtual events. Both the website and @SLASLatAm remain a collaborative effort; Christy Palmer researches and writes many of the tweets, while remaining our webmistress, with Marieke Riethof,

Eamon McCarthy and Thea Pitman all contributing tweets and website updates. Thank you to everyone involved.

You will all be aware of the very productive relationship that SLAS enjoys with Wiley, who publish *BLAR* and manage our memberships. As the Treasurer's report shows, this relationship with Wiley is of fundamental significance to the Society's financial wellbeing, and we look forward to continuing that relationship in the years ahead as Open Access throws up some uncertainties and potential challenges to the academic publication landscape. Our liaison team at Wiley, led by Lizzie Brophy, has been busy working with us to explore and mitigate the impact of these changes, as well as developing campaigns to boost the profile of *BLAR*. This is a chance, too, to thank Jasmine Gideon for her sterling work as *BLAR* coordinating editor, to the indefatigable Ken Lestrangle and to the rest of the *BLAR* editorial team. Some *BLAR* highlights from my perspective over the last year were: *BLAR* rising to 1.00 in the impact factor, giving *BLAR* the highest impact factor of any Latin American studies journal in the Social Science Index (2018); a 22% increase over 2018 in terms of full text downloads, to over 200,000, and the introduction of a new translation prize, seeking to increase the accessibility of publishing in *BLAR*. The journal is now available at 6,609 institutions worldwide and submissions increased by 3.9%, remaining at over 100, with significant submissions from Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Colombia. This speaks to our goal of Latin America being a subject central to the creation of its own knowledge, evident also in the number of Latin American scholars and post-graduates who SLAS seeks to support, as well as the introduction of the *BLAR* translation prize as just noted.

The Treasurer's report will provide the financial details for the past year but suffice to say that SLAS remains in a good financial position. The conference cancellation this year will nonetheless impact on our finances, as SLAS underwrites all its annual conferences. Moreover, the committee agreed that we had a duty to ensure that the full cost of registration was reimbursed to all SLAS2020 participants, despite the increased financial losses that this decision will mean for SLAS. Years of careful stewardship of SLAS resources by our long-time treasurer John Fisher, however, and judicious decisions by previous SLAS committees mean that the organisation is in a position to cope with the financial repercussions of the conference cancellation.

SLAS is rightly proud of its association with PILAS, our post-graduate wing, which we support in financial and logistical terms. At the same time, the President of PILAS is a full

member of the SLAS committee and it's been great to have Armandina Maldonado Deller, representing the PILAS 2020 committee, with us through the year to ensure that the perspectives of our post-graduate community inform our decisions. The 2019 PILAS conference, 'Communities of Knowledge, Communities of Action', was very successful, hosting 13 panels and 4 keynotes at the University of York. Other PILAS events have included an annual workday at the British Library to explore Latin American archives and materials and a fieldwork workshop. We congratulate the current PILAS committee on their ongoing success and look forward to their 2020 conference, 'I, We, They, the Other: Deconstructing Identity in Latin America' scheduled for the University of Nottingham, in early July. The call for papers is currently open and more information is available at: <https://pilasconference19.wordpress.com>. We do not yet know what impact, if any, travel restrictions will have on PILAS2020 but the SLAS committee will support the PILAS committee in their decisions.

As President of SLAS I have represented the organisation in the context of national organisations and associations, notably the UK Conference of Area Studies Associations and the Arts and Humanities Alliance. On behalf of SLAS I have organised a successful call, with sibling organisations in the AHA, to postpone a UKRI consultation on Open Access, due to the challenges many colleagues currently face working from home. I am also organising SLAS's response to the REF panel's calls for panel nominations, which has extended its deadline due to the current situation. As past-president of SLAS, David Wood has organised the Standing Conference for Centres of Latin American Studies and has done a great job in that role, bringing in as a guest speaker, Gary Grubb, one of the AHRC's programme directors, to share news of developments on the research front, specifically in relation to GCRF and interdisciplinary research. I am sure that David would join me in thanking Thea Pitman, who stepped in to chair the Standing Conference meeting so that it could run as scheduled in December.

As this report testifies, the SLAS committee has been busy. I want to pay tribute to my colleagues on the committee, whose commitment over the last year has ensured the smooth running of the Society and its activities. And many thanks, as well, to Tony Kapcia for his work as the Society's auditor. Finally, in 2019 the SLAS community was saddened to learn of the deaths of two former SLAS presidents, Caroline Williams, who died in August, and Silvia Chant, who died in December. The SLAS committee had representation at both

funerals and shared our condolences with their families, friends, students and colleagues.

They will be continued to be missed and remembered as scholars and friends.

Thank you all for reading this report. I look forward to seeing you next year at SLAS2021.

Until then, I wish you, your families and your wider communities all the best in a challenging time.

Patience Schell

SLAS president, [p.schell@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:p.schell@abdn.ac.uk)