

President's Report to SLAS AGM, Leicester, 5 April 2019

Welcome. I'd like to start by thanking you all for attending the Society's Annual General Meeting. The AGM marks an important opportunity for the Society's officers and the BLAR editorial team to provide an account of our activities over the last 12 months, as well as a forum for any questions arising from those activities.

It's been an honour to have served as the SLAS President, and as I end my term I am pleased to offer my final report as President, before handing over to Patience Schell as my extremely able successor. I step down in absolute confidence that the Society is in very good hands.

The annual conference is always the high point in SLAS's calendar, providing an event that is as refreshing intellectually as it is rewarding socially. Memories of last year's conference in Winchester remain very much alive, and I take this opportunity to thank again Ana Margheritis and her team for a hugely successful event.

It is a pleasure to be here, as the SLAS conference returns to the University of Leicester for the first time since 1976, when geographer Colin Crossley was SLAS President, though the early days also saw SLAS here in 1969, the first annual conference we've been able to place.

This year's conference showcases a terrific range of activities, bringing together an impressive array of over 140 speakers organised into 45 panels that span anthropology, literary and visual culture, economics, ecology and the environment, politics, history, geography, international relations, development studies and digital media. Others take a national focus to concentrate on single countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba as well as Patagonia, while others explore Latin American identities. Still others provide interdisciplinary, international approaches, such as the panels exploring indigeneity and feminisms. We are delighted to welcome Dr María Pía López as our keynote speaker: her combination of academic work as a leading Argentinean sociologist, novelist and activist, notably with the Ni una menos campaign, fits snugly with the conference theme of 'The Politics of Identity' and with the events that will take place as part of the conference.

The plenary presidential panel also seeks to provide a point for international collaboration and discussion as we welcome leading figures from key European partner societies and institutions, with whom we can seek to overcome the potential negative impact of Brexit. Of course, none of this happens on its own, and we are all indebted to the efforts of Clara Garavelli, Emma Staniland and their helpers for bringing everything – and all of us – together. This is also an opportunity to acknowledge the institutional support provided by the University of Leicester, whose research in Latin American Studies will be showcased in the following panel session, as well as Santander and the long-standing support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Wiley. Thank you all.

I am pleased to announce that next year's conference will be held at the University of Amsterdam, as SLAS takes to Europe for only the second time. It is a pleasure to have

Professor Barbara Hogenboom here with us again after she also joined us in Winchester last year. We very much look forward to working with her to organise a 2020 vision for the next SLAS conference. Beyond 2020, we are very pleased that colleagues from Bath, Belfast and Swansea have offered to host our conference in the years ahead.

No doubt all of you will have used the SLAS website in the run-up to the conference, and you'll have noticed just a couple of weeks ago the move to a new website, the result of many months of discussion, planning and work. We're particularly indebted to The Pitman and our web mistress Christy Palmer for this major overhaul of our web presence, which we feel much better reflects the dynamism of SLAS and the range of our activities. We also developed a GDPR policy to bring us into line with the new requirements on that front. In the same vein, the SLAS Twitter account was launched last summer by Marieke Riethof with support from Katy Jenkins and Karen Siegel. With now just over 3,000 followers and almost 5,000 likes, this has undoubtedly been a major step in raising the Society's profile and reach, as well as ensuring a steady flow of information to the global Latin Americanist community. Indeed, our followers are testimony to this, with 34.5% from Latin America, 29% from the UK and 21% from the US. Great work by all involved with these initiatives! As the Twitter account has taken off and the website has been overhauled, the monthly SLAS newsletter became superseded, but to ensure the continued circulation of SLAS material via e-mail, we're delighted to say that Rory Miller and Pat Noble have agreed that we can work with the LATAM-info list to that end, and we're grateful to them for this collaboration.

You will all be well 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, who joined us for a committee meeting in Sheffield, has been busy working with us to explore and mitigate the impact of such changes, as well as developing campaigns to boost the profile of BLAR. Perhaps the most obvious example of these initiatives is the BLAR app, via which members can access articles across a range of interfaces. 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. Jasmine will give a separate report on BLAR, but some highlights from my perspective over the last year were: BLAR being available in 5,555 institutions worldwide and article downloads totalling 180,000, with Brazil, Mexico and Chile among the top 10 downloading countries. There were just over 100 submissions to BLAR, with Brazil equalling the UK as the home for authors, and Chile just one behind; Ecuador, Colombia and Argentina also featured in the top 9 countries from which submissions were received. 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 here.

The Treasurer's report will provide the details for the past year, but suffice to say that SLAS is in a healthy financial position. In light of that, we have increased both the number of awards made and the amounts accompanying them in various categories of the grants we offer, and we introduced two new Postdoctoral Research Awards in recognition of the challenges facing those who have recently completed their doctoral studies. One of these awards is the Blakemore Prize for the best essay by a post-graduate student, which received more entries than in recent years, no doubt the result of it being announced on our Twitter page. I'm delighted to be able to announce that the winner is Jennifer Chisholm (Cambridge) for her excellent essay on 'The Favela Housing Movement in Rio de Janeiro'. As part of the award Jennifer will be invited to submit her essay as an article to BLAR.

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 Jessica Wax-Edwards with us through the year to ensure that the perspectives of our post-graduate community inform our decisions. The 2018 PILAS conference at the University of Liverpool over two days in June focused around 'Contested Narratives: Engagement with Latin America within and beyond Academia' and was a great success in terms of quantity and quality of speakers. Other PILAS events have included a workday at the British Library to explore Latin American archives and materials and a fieldwork workshop at Warwick University, with the next annual conference scheduled in June at the University of York. PILAS has also proved adept at using social media: their excellent twitter feed has almost 1,800 followers. We congratulate the current PILAS committee on their ongoing success and look forward to their 2019 conference.

As President of SLAS I have represented us in the context of national organisations and associations, notably the UK Conference of Area Studies Associations and the Arts and Humanities Alliance, as well as working with Professor Claire Taylor, president of the AHGBI, on various initiatives over the last year. On behalf of SLAS I have fed into consultations on future strategy of the AHRC, REF criteria and guidelines, the likely impact of Brexit on language and area studies, and Open Access and Plan S via the British Academy. I have also written letters of support to University senior managers in response to threats to the positions of Latin Americanist colleagues at Hull and Reading. As past-president of SLAS, Jens Hentschke has chaired the Standing Conference for Centres of Latin American Studies and has done a great job in that role, bringing a series of high-profile speakers to address members and provide a forum to share experiences.

I will close by paying tribute to my colleagues on the SLAS committee, whose commitment over the last year has ensured the smooth running of the Society and its activities. And thanks finally to Tony Kacpia for his work as the Society's auditor.

Thank you all for attending the AGM and for your attention. Enjoy the rest of the conference.